Problem and Research Question

- Problem: The gaming industry often excludes, degrades, and discourages women from actively participating and contributing to game experience and design.
- Research Questions: How can we break the hegemonic cycle of character design in video games? How can we close the gender gap, overcome sexist norms, and create opportunities for women in the gaming industry?

Background Information

- The gaming industry is a male dominated field [3, 7]
- The American video game industry reported sales of $25 billion (USD) in 2011 [4] targeting male audiences
- “Video games, like most other popular culture forms, overstress young, buxom, and beautiful women in their content” [1]
- Findings have indicated that male characters are portrayed muscular and powerful, while the majority of females are portrayed as sexy and weak [2, 6]
  - 70% of female characters in mature-rated games display abundant cleavage in contrast to 46% in teen-rated games
  - 86% of female characters were portrayed wearing clothing with low/revealing necklines and 48% of females had outfits with no sleeves
  - 22% of male characters represented in clothing with no sleeves and 14% of male characters wear clothing exposing the chest

Methodology

Research
- Focused only on console and “hardcore” games on Xbox and Playstaton systems
- Analyzed and critiqued scholarly literature and pop-culture resources (blogs, websites, magazines)

Visualized Character Analysis
- Character Stack: series of twenty-eight images of characters in console games chosen from a list of best selling games on GameInformer

Evolution of Character Design
- Timeline of characters in games throughout game life span

Conclusions

- The gaming industry is a hostile environment for the professional growth of women
- Female video game characters are under-represented and over-sexualized in comparison to male characters and often exhibit a standardized body shape
- Female gamers and women in the gaming industry are often a minority and experience sexual harassment
- The video game industry is a large profit by ignoring the female market

Recommendations

1. Create open and encouraging working environments for women in the gaming industry
   - Reducing sexism and gendered stereotypes through seminars and/or conferences
   - Allow opportunity for high management positions
2. Encourage more women to seek degrees in STEM related fields, therefore leading to interest in the gaming industry to close gender gap
   - Expose, teach, and equip women in STEM at early education stages
3. Change the portrayal of female characters
   - Diversifying character design
   - Creating primary/leading roles in game design
4. Market towards female audiences through gender friendly game advertisements for an increase in sales and interest in game experience

Credits for all sketches attributed to Anthony Mathison
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References