Video Games and their users: A study of evolving media

Submitted by

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Abstract

As gaming has changed over time, we will see how video games have evolved from a male-oriented media form to one that anyone can enjoy. Societal influences and the state of the engineering and computer fields at the time of the earliest games impacted the target audience of the first games. Game design has slowly changed over the years to aim a larger audience by providing more accessible difficulty levels and more inclusive stories. Additionally, recent technological advancements have caused a shift in the way games are played and consequently have also expanded their player base. Statistics help to reinforce these claims by showing that a more diverse audience than ever before is now playing video games.

Video game culture has evolved in recent years to become more inclusive than in the past. As expected, along with technological advances, conventions surrounding this culture shift as well. As such, tropes and stereotypes developed during the infancy of video gaming have slowly begun to dwindle. Despite this fact, myriad factors still prevalent within the gaming industry and community lead people to believe that gaming is reserved primarily for young men. This may hold true to a degree, but the dynamic of gaming has also changed through social media and smartphones.

In this paper, we will begin by analyzing the history of video games. We will observe some of the earliest video games, their target audience, accessibility, and more as we attempt to show the limited market appeal. The male-dominated state of the computer engineering field caused some of the earliest video games to be targeted towards a heteronormative male audience. Misogynistic themes polluted some of the earliest games due to a lack of female input. From this, we can see how the male-focused target demographic shaped the way the industry grew, as women were often alienated due to various factors of early game design.

In contrast to the relatively niche audience that early games provided, we will see how video games in the past ten to fifteen years have been marketed towards a larger audience of gamers. While many of the negative tropes introduced during the infancy of gaming still exist, a great number have been challenged which has helped to diversify the player populace. Aspects such as player customization and stories with diverse, fleshed-out characters have aided gaming to become more realistic, pulling in consumers of all backgrounds. Gameplay in countless games has also been streamlined in order to entice a larger audience which may have been alienated due to difficulty in the past. New genres have also been developed which cater to

players of all ages and gender. Technological developments have also shaped the way gaming performs and is viewed by the public.

With the vast number of technological improvements, the definition of gaming itself has also changed immensely, granting a larger audience through this change. With new technologies such as smartphones, people are now able to play video games anywhere at any time, increasing their accessibility. We will also see how social media websites have also made use of games, bringing in players who may have not planned to utilize the website's gaming services initially. Both smartphones and social media have completely revamped the concept of contemporary gaming, as they have granted accessibility to games to everyone. The shift in the use of gaming consoles has also changed along with their users, as they are no longer purchased solely for gaming, but to browse the internet, watch videos, and more.

Despite the countless examples we will show that gaming is more inclusive than before, some current issues in the gaming industry and community may lead people to believe the false claim that gaming is still focused solely on young men. We will show how women in particular have dealt with enormous amounts of harassment from men when playing online games or discussing video games in online videos. Professional gaming tournaments remain primarily male-dominated, which may be in part due to the aforementioned harassment from men. However, there also exist statistics that show that women are participating in playing more console games now than ever before.

By viewing the niche culture of early video games, we can observe trends in the market and community of the time. The rather segregated culture of early games can be contrasted with the more inclusive gaming culture in recent years due to a variety of changes in games themselves. Technology has also advanced, bringing games to a far larger audience than before.

Some problems remain in the video game industry and community today which give the assumption that gaming still targets an isolated young male audience. However, statistics also help to show that gaming has become a media form that people of all backgrounds enjoy.

The Beginnings of Video Games

Video games began with a single college student named who envisioned two spacecrafts in combat with one another, and implemented this idea into a game that two people could play together on a computer. Known as *Spacewar*, it was created solely by college student Steve Russell at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology in 1962. It took him "nearly six months and 200 hours to complete the first version of the game: a simple duel between rocket ships" (Kent, 2001, pg. 18). The game had no artificial intelligence and thus required that two players compete against each other. Additionally, it was only capable of running on the PDP-1 computer graphical interface. As time progressed, others adapted this idea of playing games on screens, which eventually led to the concept of "home console gaming." Alongside home console gaming, arcade cabinets were introduced in public spaces with exclusive games on the highest technology available at the time. This solidified the three earliest mediums of video games: computers, home consoles, and arcade cabinets.

In the early days of *Pong* and *Space Invaders*, video gaming was a primarily male-oriented hobby. Arcades were filled with young teenage boys, older men played video games at bars, and young boys frequently asked for video games consoles, all of which allude to this assumption. While men played many video games, little is known of women playing them. As it is difficult to find any proof that most girls did *not* play video games when they were first released, we must look to other sources of information. In terms of video game developers, as
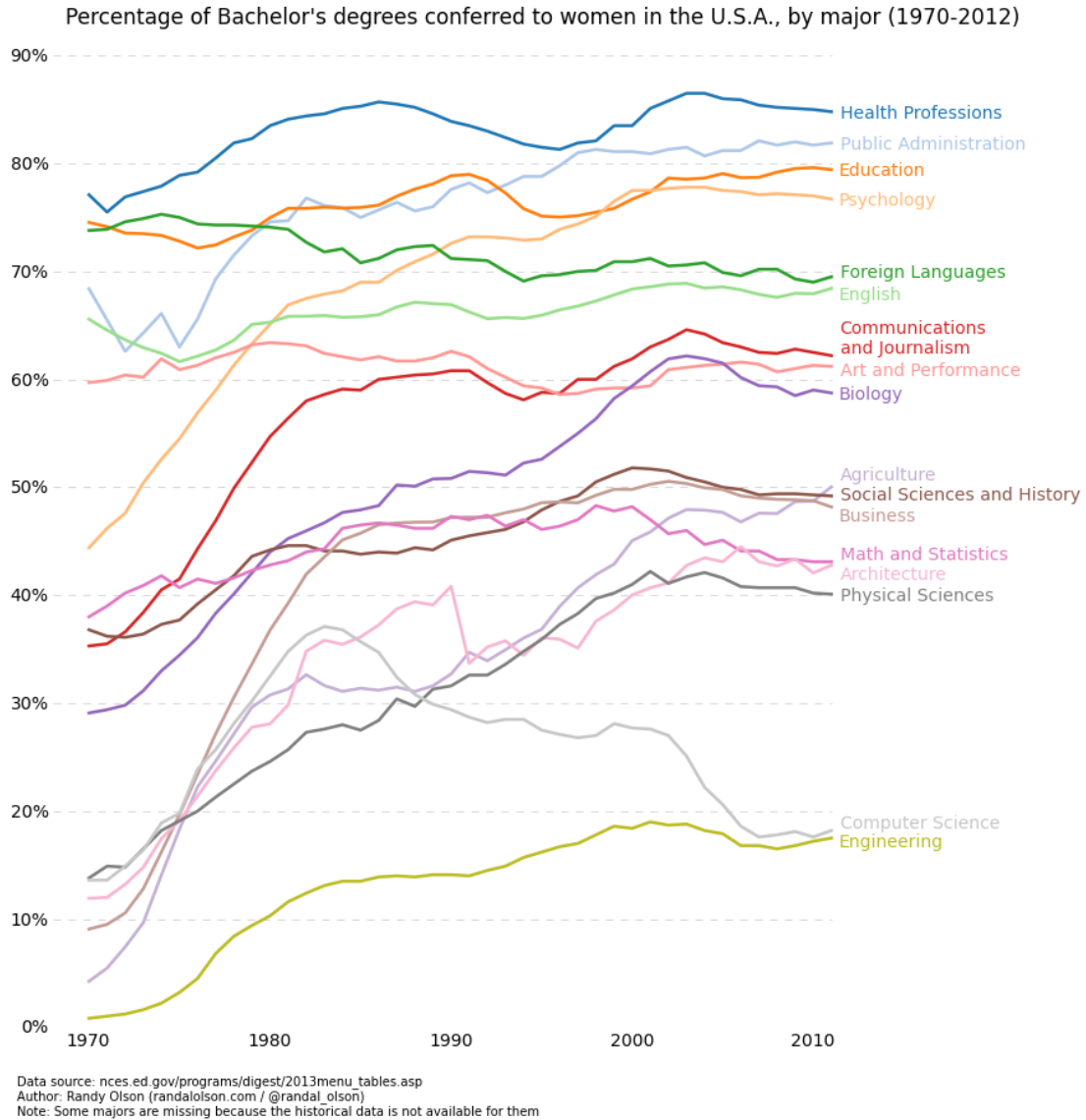
can be seen from the entire history, there lack many prominent female game developers. While there a few early notable female game designers such as Roberta Williams, co-founder of Sierra On-Line, and Carol Shaw, one of Activision's finest designers, they are greatly outnumbered by the number of males in the industry. As for whether early games appealed to most women, this is likely a "no" response, garnered by one woman's intuition when developing a video game. Dona Bailey, co-creator of smash-hit *Centipede* in 1980, used a special color palette to attract women to the game. In fact, the game truly did appeal to women. As Kent states, "Nobody knows precisely why *Centipede* appealed to women, but several people believe that Bailey's pastel colors were part of the attraction" (Kent, 2001, pg. 162). Despite her contribution to *Centipede*, Bailey's position at Atari was just as expected—"the only female programmer in the coin-op division" (Kent, 2001, pg. 161). The beginnings of video games and the industry may have been rough on women in part due to the themes presented in the games themselves.

Many of the first video games contained misogynistic and heteronormative themes catered towards men, likely steering away many women. While not all games were guilty of such themes (*Pac-Man* for example was fairly neutral), many did alienate the female player base. Due to arcade machines often being located in bars and pubs, their target audience was men. A large number of games featured male protagonists, shooting, military vehicles, sports cars, science fiction, sporting events, and more—themes which are often enjoyed by men. These games did not aim to disinterest women, but were instead created with the mindset that men would be playing them. Some of the most popular games of the time fit these themes—*Space Invaders* shot down aliens, *Death Race* involved running over skeletons in a racecar, and *Football* represented a real match of American football. Even other innocent titles such as *Donkey Kong* portrayed a male plumber on his way to rescue a helpless woman in distress. Far

more controversial than any of the aforementioned games were certain "adults only" games which depicted characters in sexual acts with one another[1]. The worst offender of them all was *Custer's Revenge*, a game in which the player plays as an erect naked man whose goal is to rape a Native American woman. While games such as *Custer's Revenge* were uncommon in the video game industry, many of these misogynistic themes would continue to reoccur for years before being challenged. One potential reason for these stagnant themes could be in part due to the male-dominated nature of computer science and engineering during the inception of video games.

Both computer science and engineering are fields that were occupied mostly by men during the creation of the first video games, leading to a male target audience. If we look at the graph below which shows the percentage of many degrees conferred to women, computer science and engineering are the lowest on the list. In 1970, a mere 5% of all computer science degrees were obtained by women, and only about 1% of all engineering degrees were achieved by women. Since these degrees are involved in the creation of video games along with the fact that such a small percentage of these degrees were obtained by women, it is easy to see that men were mostly in charge of creating the first video games. If we look ahead in years, computer science gains popularity with women, but it peaks around 1983 with over 35% women obtaining the degrees. Afterwards, it spirals downwards and continues to do so for unexplained reasons. This constant domination of males in the fields that create video games helps to show that video games were created by men, for men. Although games were created primarily for men, they shifted in the 1980's towards younger men.

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[1] Due to the pixelated nature of games at the time, these sexual acts were not nearly as clear as those in the games released today. However, they were still depicting the acts, leading to controversy in the media.

Percentage of Bachelor's degrees conferred to women in the U.S.A., by major (1970-2012)

Data source: nces.ed.gov/programs/digest/2013menu_tables.asp
Author: Randy Olson (randalolson.com / @randal_olson)
Note: Some majors are missing because the historical data is not available for them

In the 1980's, video games began to target young men more than ever before. After a multitude of low-quality games entered the market, people began to lose interest in gaming. This led to the Great Video Game Crash of 1983, where games suddenly had great difficulty selling (Kent, 2001). Until Nintendo managed to convince retailers to sell their Nintendo Entertainment System (NES) in 1985, video games were thought to have been a dying fad in the United States. However, Nintendo marketed the NES as a toy by packaging R.O.B. (short for Robot Operating Buddy) with each console, a small robot which simultaneously acted as a toy and a tool for

playing games such as *Gyromite*. By marketing the revival of American video games as a toy, young boys all over the country desired video games. Even later consoles, such as Sega's Genesis, would target the young male audience by giving their games an "edgy" appearance. Video games released after the Great Video Game Crash of 1983 would continue to primarily target young men for years until developers began to challenge many of the themes presented in these games.

Recent History and Evolution of Video Games

In order to understand the changes in the gaming industry, we must first observe the changes in trends in recent years. From before, we know that gaming has always been primarily male-focused, but the graph below shows that gaming has shifted in the past decade to include a greater number of women. As of 2014, the Entertainment Software Association (ESA) reports that males account for 52% of the gaming market while conclusively females account for the other 48%. This is a stark contrast to 2003, where 71.5% of console gamers were men and 28.5% were women. Interestingly, this may be due to an alteration in data collection. Prior to 2004, information on users was segregated based on whether one identified as a console video game player or a computer game player. For reference, data in 2003 suggested that 58.1% of computer game players were males while 41.9% were women. As shown here, this suggests that women had naturally been more inclined to computer games than console video games. In the years following 2004, however, the ESA merged the two categories together, causing a lack in differentiation between console video gamers and computer gamers. Nevertheless, each consecutive year saw more females finding enjoyment in video games, due to a few potential reasons.
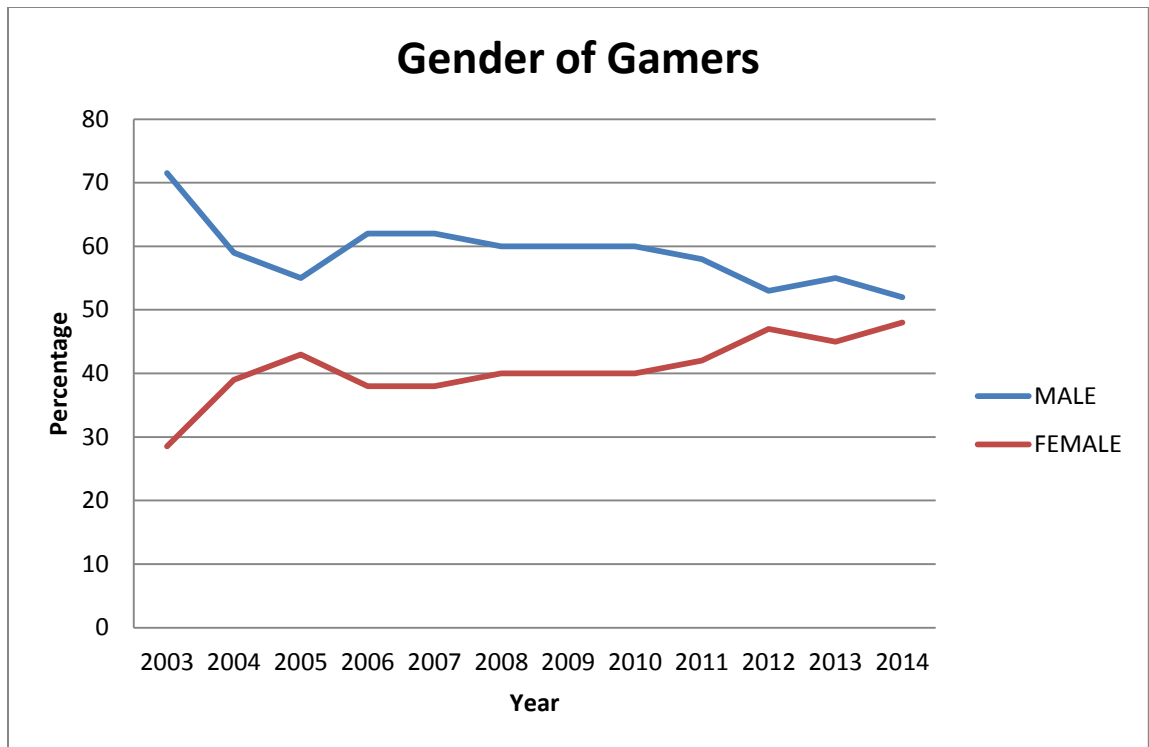
Gender of Gamers

"Essential Facts about the Computer and Video Game Industry. 2004-2014 Sales, Demographic, and Usage Data"

In the world of gaming, many storylines follow a male protagonist who must save or protect a woman in distress. As discussed earlier, innocent titles such as the *Mario* series, the *Legend of Zelda* series, and countless more follow this theme. While the developers mean no harm with these stories, they subtly show the prowess of men while delegating female roles to characters who are rarely able to take care of themselves. In the early days of gaming, this was essentially a trope; however, in 1996, the release of a PlayStation game titled *Tomb Raider* portrayed a female protagonist named Lara Croft who was capable of solving puzzles, exploring a foreign landscape, and taking down dinosaurs. Lara Croft quickly rose to iconic status in the video game industry, representing a female who was on par with males on all fronts[2]. Women

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[2] Other female characters such as Chun-Li from the *Street Fighter* series and Samus from the *Metroid* series were strong representations of women; however, none reached the pinnacle of success that Lara Croft and the *Tomb Raider* series did.

were finally granted the option to play a game with a female protagonist, one to whom they could aspire.

Games released in the early 2000's still targeted a heteronormative male audience, but many began to bridge the gap with more diverse playable characters. *Super Smash Bros. Melee*, a fighting game on Nintendo's Gamecube platform, allowed players to fight as galactic spacehero Samus, a powerful Princess Peach, and Princess Zelda whose alter ego was a speedy and cloaked fighter named Sheik. *Final Fantasy X-2* starred three heroines as the main protagonists who set out on a quest while bringing peace to the world. Bioware released many games, particularly the *Mass Effect* and *Dragon Age* series, which allowed the player to fully customize his or her hero in terms of gender, background, and design. The games also featured romance plotlines which allowed the player's character to fall in love with in-game characters. While not the first developer or series to do so, the majority of the games also allowed homosexual romance options, delivering a more complete representation of player choice. Bioware has continued to release games with diverse characters and romance options to entice players regardless of background and to stand in for contemporary social issues.

Interestingly, as can be seen by the gender gap between console video game players and computer game players in 2003, this may be attributed to the games available on the PC. MMORPGs (Massively Multiplayer Online Role Playing Games) represent a large portion of the computer gaming market. Unlike other genres, MMORPGs allow players to role-play online in a universe with thousands to millions of other players. Players may customize their character's clothes, choose their gender, their battle style, play as casually or as hardcore as desired, and socialize with other real players across the world. Due to the role-playing nature of MMORPGs, they are more suited to players of all kinds. Regardless of race, sex, orientation, or any other

defining trait, MMORPGs allow players to express themselves as accurately or fictionally as possible without the barriers imposed upon most console video games. In fact, some MMORPGs even allow two players to marry their characters to one another. Outside of MMORPGs, computer games offer a much larger variety of games due to the ease of development for PCs when compared with console games. The larger number of titles allows anyone to find a game suited to his or her interests. In addition to the grand library of games provided on PCs, many recent console games have also been targeted towards a multitude of different users.

Games developed in the past ten years have been created with the intent to draw in as many different players as possible. In the past, games were developed with the mindset that the player would persist and tackle any challenge until it was completed. For example, many classic games such as *Contra* and *Battletoads* are known for their extreme difficulty. These games are so difficult that some levels can only be completed through vigorous memorization of enemy placement and lightning-quick reaction time. This immense level of difficulty isolated many players. Today, many games offer "casual" difficulty settings so that nearly anyone can complete them. While previously a relatively hardcore franchise, *Mass Effect 3* offered a "casual" setting which significantly lowered enemy HP, buffed the player's health, and increased player damage. In discussing the player-friendly action RPG *Kingdoms of Amalur: Reckoning*, Abbott (2012) of Kotaku claims, "It's got all the formulaic pieces in place, but offers them up with glowing "look here!" and "do this" hints, friendly AI, auto-targeting, and an accessible level-up system. *Amalur* is an action-RPG purposefully designed to welcome newcomers, but still deliver an expansive world, storyline, and dozens of sub-quests." These easier difficulty settings rarely take away advanced gameplay elements that are desired by hardcore gamers; instead, they offer a

way to play games that would have otherwise been inaccessible to many people beforehand. Alongside more accessibility in terms of difficulty, many new genres of games have been released which have a greater audience than before.

Along with traditional video games, countless new genres of video games have been introduced recently which cater to a vast audience. One such example is the "brain training puzzle exercise" genre. In 2006, Nintendo released *Brain Age: Train Your Brain in Minutes a Day!* for the handheld Nintendo DS platform. The game presents the player with a daily variety of puzzles to solve based on his or her previous performance. Aimed at people of all ages, the *Brain Age* series assists people in keeping their mind sharp. Another popular new genre includes motion controlled party games. With the release of the Nintendo Wii in 2006 and Microsoft Xbox Kinect in 2010, both of which offer unique motion control schemes, previously unimaginable games reached the market. With every Nintendo Wii sold, Nintendo bundled a copy *Wii Sports*, a game which simulated simplistic sports by waving the motion controller with appropriate gestures. The Nintendo Wii became an instant hit, leading to innumerable motion controlled games released for the console. Microsoft followed suit years later with the Kinect, a sensor placed in front of the television which captured every movement on one's entire body. This led to popular games such as *Kinect Sports*, somewhat like a controller-free version of *Wii Sports*, and *Dance Central*, a close-to-realistic dancing simulator. The Nintendo Wii and Microsoft Xbox Kinect became huge successes with people of all backgrounds, bringing about a new populace of gamers that were previously unreachable.

In concurrence with games opening up to people with different interests, the age gap between gamers has also dwindled. Looking at the graph below, if we observe the changes in gamers' ages from 2003 to 2011, we can see that the majority of gamers fall within the 18-49 age

range, leaving those above 50 in the middle along with those under 18. Clearly, the range between 18 and 49 is a grand 31 years, therefore accounting for one the largest category in this graph. Even so, the overall age range is fairly averagely distributed, representing that gamers of all ages do, in fact, play video games. If we analyze the second graph below, which has slightly altered data due to the data collection changes for the ESA, age ranges have been divided into under 18, 18-35, and 35+. While this graph only represents the previous three years, the new division in age ranges consolidates the age gaps to all be within approximately 10% of each other. In this case, the 35+ age range is the largest of the three, signifying that the older populace enjoys gaming as much as anyone else.

Ages of Gamers (2003-2011)
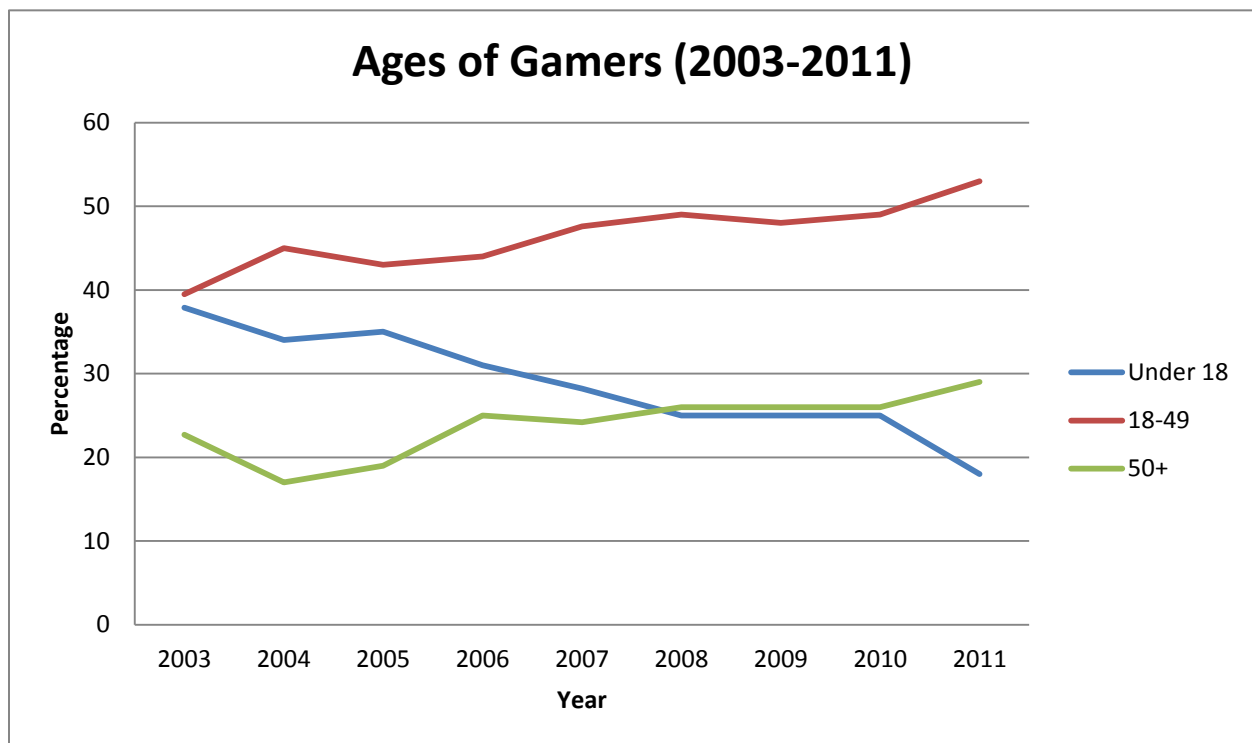
"Essential Facts about the Computer and Video Game Industry. 2003-2011 Sales, Demographic, and Usage Data"

Age of Gamers (2012-2014)

Legend: Under 18, 18-35, 35+
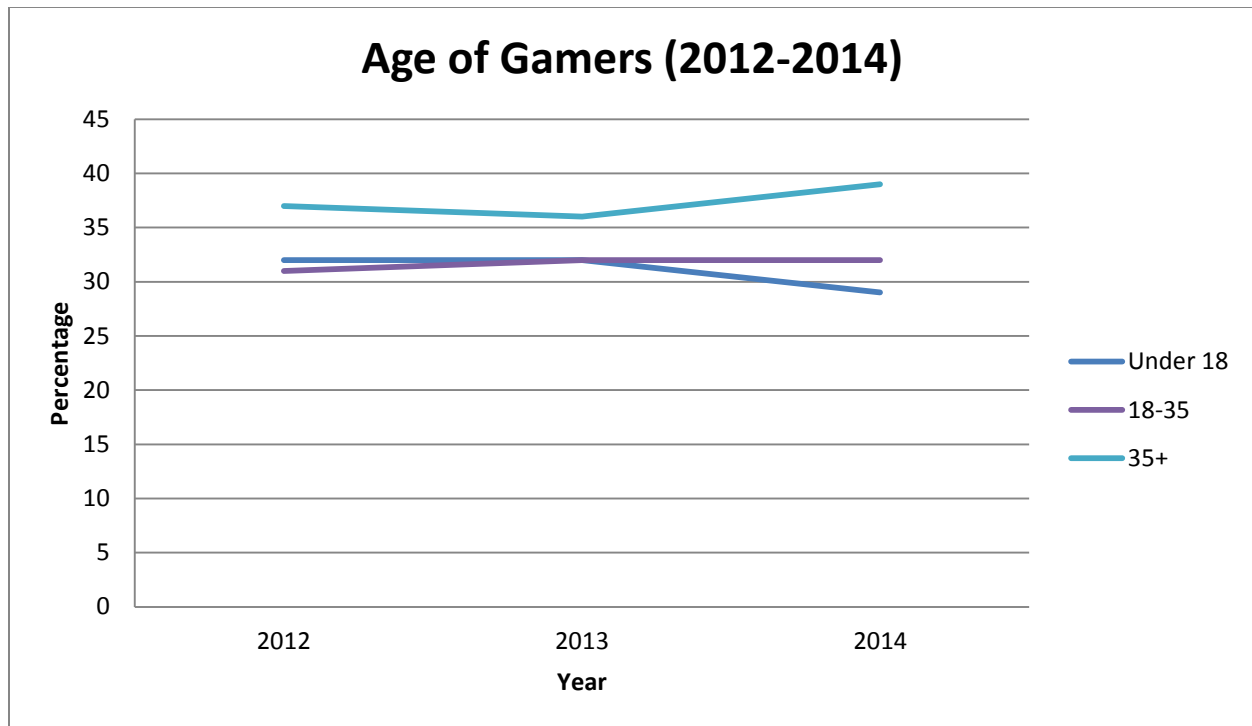
"Essential Facts about the Computer and Video Game Industry. 2011-2014 Sales, Demographic, and Usage Data"

Shift in the Dynamic of Gaming

The dynamic of gaming itself has changed immensely in the past ten years alone. Looking back to 2003, a much larger gap could be seen between the sexes and ages of video game players. As we have seen the divide slowly diminished, we have also seen changes in games that have led to greater market appeal. As discussed earlier, women may have found interest in games with female leads or where they could customize a female themselves to identify with. People of all ages have found interest in new genres of games through brain exercises and motion control technology. Game difficulty has been altered to provide a more inclusive audience. Although these factors contribute to the increased diversity in video game players, they do not account for the changes in technology that have also played a huge role in this shift.

Within the past ten years, countless technological advances have been introduced which have rendered video games available to anyone at any moment. With the introduction of smartphones, gaming is now something which is in everyone's pockets—literally. While waiting for an appointment, sitting around at home, or even ignoring a teacher's lecture in class, a simple touch on a smartphone can quickly launch a game for the user to enjoy. This ease of access combined with the contemporary necessity of smartphones procures a far more diverse populace than is possible with any traditional game console. With a variety of properties, they are used by everyone—businessmen for checking emails, by teenagers for communicating with friends, by families for paying their bills, and more. Additionally, games released for smartphones are often developed for short bursts of play, allowing players to enjoy games briefly without needing a significant time commitment. Not only this, but the majority of games developed for smartphones are either free to download or cost only a few dollars. This allows simple games to become enormously popular with the general populace.

Alongside smartphones resides another element of gaming in contemporary society—social media. Websites such as Facebook and Twitter help users to stay connected with one another regardless of their location in the world. However, many social media sites also integrate gaming into their structure which grants users the ability to play a fully-fledged game with the click of a mouse. In particular, Facebook's *Farmville* is one of the most popular social media games. In early 2013, its sequel, *Farmville 2*, was reported to have had 40 million active users per month (Sarkar). This number is notably larger than what most console games achieve; however, this may be due to the pay-to-play model utilized by many social media games (and smartphone games). With pay-to-play, games are free to play at the start, but the longer a player plays them, the more options open up. Although the game is free to play, many of these options

that can enhance the player's gameplay or change special features are locked until the player purchases them with real money. Since these extra options are not necessary, it allows these games to market to a wide audience by granting free access and leaving revenue to the most dedicated players' purchases and the occasional advertisement. This simple model has worked tremendously well in providing a diverse group of players for a variety of social media and smartphone games. Interestingly, the same market that plays social media and smartphone games has also begun to branch out towards gaming consoles.

With current gaming consoles, users are able to do more than simply play games, attracting a greater audience. With the release of the Microsoft Xbox 360 in 2005, video game consoles were changed forever. Players could not only chat with friends and play games together, but were also able to watch streamed movies, listen to music via online radios, browse the internet, and even order pizza from Pizza Hut (Corriea, 2013)! These features slowly transformed the Xbox's infrastructure into a media hub, of which the goal was to facilitate media access. Both Sony and Nintendo followed suit with their consoles, offering more media services than before. Popular movie streaming services such as Netflix and Hulu brought their brands to consoles, becoming one of the most popular mediums for watching films. In 2013, it was shown that "about 58 percent of Netflix titles are watched on a television. And of those who stream Netflix on a TV, 39 percent use a video game console" (Stenovec, 2013). Hardcore gamers and casual gamers alike are included in the group that use consoles for streaming services. This exemplifies that video game consoles have increased their market demographic by providing services outside of purely gaming. Gaming itself no longer belongs to the hardcore enthusiasts, but instead to a mixture of people from a variety of different backgrounds.

Who Plays Which Games?

As we have confirmed the diversity in gaming, we must also analyze the types of games played by different groups of gamers. To start, let us observe the social media and smartphone market. For ease of discussion, we will classify these as "casual and social" games due to their simplistic nature and frequent use of social media services. According to Newzoo (2012), 87% of the 145 million gamers in the United States play casual or social games. Newzoo also reports that casual/social and mobile games account for 51% of the total 215 million hours spent per day on gaming. Regrettably, this report fails to distinguish between players who exclusively play on consoles and those who play both console/PC games and casual/social games. However, if we observe that 87% of all gamers play casual or social games, it is therefore surprising that only 51% of daily gaming time is consumed by those games. Therefore, there must be a significant difference between gamers who primarily play casual or social games and those who focus on console and PC games.

In order to understand the divide between types of gamers, we must first define them. A person who primarily plays more simple games such as *Farmville* on social media websites or smartphones and who rarely plays console or PC games will be considered a casual gamer. On the opposite spectrum, we will define a hardcore gamer to be a person who almost exclusively plays console or PC games, is knowledgeable of different game genres, and tends to avoid casual or social games. Some gamers fall in between these two extremes, who only play games occasionally but will often choose to play console games such as the *Call of Duty* franchise; these gamers we will define as partial-core gamers. Even amongst three categories, it may still be difficult to accurately define oneself; thus, these are only meant to be seen as an overview of gamer types, and not a perfect guideline.

While 51% of daily game time is consumed by casual/social and mobile games, the other 49% is spent on more traditional games on PC/Mac and consoles (Newzoo, 2012). Although the casual/social and mobile games market account for 51% of daily game time, they only receive 31% of the total revenue for games, while PC/Mac and consoles receive the other 69% (consoles alone account for 37%)[3] (Newzoo, 2012). This represents what is likely the dedication held by each category of gamer. Considering that many PC/Mac and console gamers are hardcore or partial-core gamers, the 69% of sales revenue alongside their smaller share of gaming time is astounding. Although casual gamers do account for over half of daily gaming time, their dedication to the games they play is not as drastic. As seen earlier, 87% of all gamers in the United States play casual/social games; therefore, it is significant to note that 69% of sales revenue is occupied by PC/Mac and console games. This demonstrates that hardcore and partial-core gamers are far more likely to purchase multiple games and spend a lot of time with them.

Considering that there is a significant difference between casual gamers, partial-core gamers, and hardcore gamers, it is logical to assume that each category may not follow the same demographics as the overall gaming market. Unfortunately, analyzing specific types of gamers is extremely difficult, but a few statistics provide enough information for us to infer certain hypotheses. Newzoo reports that, in 2011, "30 million males and 18 million females played games on Sony and Microsoft's big consoles. About 1.2 million girls and women said they played five days a week or more" (Harwell, 2014). This is in contrast to the 22% of the 30 million males who played games on Xbox 360 or PlayStation 3 in 2011. While this is a fairly large gap, 2014 saw it shrink. In a mere three years, a much larger number of gamers—both male and female—began to play more console games. Again, Newzoo reports, "The number of

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[3] The 69% mentioned above also includes MMOs, which does not mention platform choice. MMOs are often PC/Mac-based (and occasionally on console), and thus I have included them in this statistic. While a few are available on web browsers and smartphones, the majority are not.

female gamers grew 70 percent (to 30.3 million), while males grew 45 percent (to 43.3 million). More than 13 million girls and women said they play five days or more a week -- 11 times as many as in 2011" (Harwell, 2014). The number of males that play video games frequently still outnumbers the number of females that do; however, there is an increase in the number of female gamers each and every year.

Problems Prevalent in the Gaming Industry and Community

Although more people from all backgrounds have begun to play video games, players who do not fall under the target heteronormative male audience may face harassment or feel excluded from games created today. Even though we have shown that there are an increasing number of women playing video games, the same is not true for those who develop games. According to International Game Developers Association research, "only 21 percent of game developers are women" (Harwell, 2014). With such an augmented amount of females playing games, one would expect more women to be part of the creative development process. However, the lack of women may be attributed to withstanding problems in the industry and community.

The hardcore community of video game players is the main source of problems surrounding video games today. While many hardcore fans bring positive comments and improve the culture of gaming, other hardcore fans do the complete opposite. A recent scandal known as #GamerGate concerns game developer Zoe Quinn's ex-boyfriend publishing a revealing article about their personal lives. This article resulted in her receiving threats, abuse, and harassment from males in the gaming community (Parkin, 2014). Sadly, Zoe Quinn is not alone in the realm of being harassed from males in the gaming community. Since 2011, feminist activist Anita Sarkeesian has received countless threats and harassment for her *Tropes vs.*

Women Youtube series (McKinney, 2015). The goal of her series is to combat sexism in games; however, it seems that it mostly results in her receiving sexist comments from angry male fans. With women in the gaming industry, it appears that their options are to stay quiet and free from abuse, or to speak up and become a public icon of harassment. Unfortunately, women who play games also have to deal with similar issues.

As is well-known to most gamers, misogynistic themes pollute online gaming. The source is not the games themselves, but instead the vulgar men who play them. Many women who have played video games online have received extremely crude and offensive messages from men, ranging from "get in the kitchen" to rape threats. For example, Nagy ("Make me a sandwich") cites vNiightStalkeRv of Xbox Live as saying, "Lets say i snuck into ur bedroom n grabbed ur ankle while u were asleep n i put ur foot against my groin n u woke up to catch me with my pants down humping ur foot n about to come?..what would u honestly do at that very moment?" If personalized messages were not horrendous enough, women also experience indirect harassment through online names. In the recently released browser-based game *Town of Salem*, players may name their character before playing each match. While most players call themselves something silly such as "Ronald McDonald" or "President Obama", many games result in one or two players with names like "RapeIsFun" or "C U N T". This naming convention is not exclusive to *Town of Salem*—it is everywhere that personalized naming can be used while anonymous. Because of this, many women remain quiet while playing online and use gender-neutral names to avoid harassment. Women also rarely appear at video game tournaments, possibly in part due to fear of real sexual harassment. Women receive sickening amounts of harassment, but they are not alone in receiving it.

Surprisingly, many hardcore members of the gaming community harass one another just as much as they would to women. In doing so, they often use derogatory terms such as "faggot" or simply call someone "gay" as an insult. Most heterosexual men shrug this off, but this could potentially alienate the homosexual audience from online gaming should they be the recipient. As an example of these hateful messages, in 2008 my brother received an angry voice message from an opposing player while playing *Gears of War* after defeating him. The opposing player claimed my brother had cheated and would lose if they had played on a more "fair" playing ground. The voice message stated, "Tell your team to fucking learn how to snipe because you guys are fucking fags who play fucking annex[4] 'cause you guys are fucking bad. Learn how to fucking snipe. 3v3 my fucking clan watch how bad you get fucking owned" (Pulis, 2008). This exemplifies the superior mentality of many hardcore gamers who wish that casual players did not play games. This mentality may have been what spawned the "Filthy Casual" mindset, where hardcore players would look down upon players who did not take the game as seriously as them. As long as some hardcore gamers continue to act this way towards women and casual gamers, non-hardcore gamers will remain quiet and appear invisible to the entirety of the gaming community.

Conclusion

Video games have evolved throughout time to become a more inclusive media form. Though the origins of video games were surrounded by heteronormative themes, this is in part due to the male-dominated field of computer science and engineering. Few games as crude as *Custer's Revenge* existed during the early years of gaming, but they may have been enough to deter women from enjoying them. Fortunately for women, video games eventually began to

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[4] Annex is a game type in Gears of War which was known for being more casual than the other game types.

target a female audience. Games such as *Tomb Raider* starred a heroic female protagonist named

Lara Croft who was capable of traversing dungeons, fighting dinosaurs, and performing

acrobatics. Lara Croft stood in for the pinnacle of female protagonists, showing girls that they

could achieve great things just as men could. Other games followed suit, providing a greater cast

of female characters. More than just women, video games began to target everyone.

Many games began to target players regardless of background. Through character

customization systems, players could experience the game world through their own eyes or from

another person's viewpoint. Difficulty systems began to be revamped, aiming to assist all

players complete their games regardless of their gaming skills. New genres of games were

introduced, particularly through motion controls, which opened up gaming to a wide new

audience through an even playing ground. The average gaming age can also be seen to be above

35, showing the growing interest in games for people of all ages. With advanced technology,

gaming itself began to change immensely as well.

Through new technology, gaming began to be viewed in a new light. With the

introduction of smartphones and social media, gaming became accessible to everyone.

Worldwide demand for smartphones and social media websites brought gaming to be a mere

click away for the player. Consoles also had to innovate to stay relevant, turning into a media

hub for users to watch streaming services like Netflix and to browse the internet. Statistics show

that casual and social games take up approximately half of the total daily gaming time. In

addition, women have started to account for nearly as much console gaming time as men, even

though it may appear otherwise.

Problems still prevalent in the gaming industry and community today cause gaming to

seem non-inclusive. Portions of the young male hardcore gaming community discourage gamers

who do not fall into their group from enjoying games. Many misogynistic gamers harass women who try to break into the gaming community or who simply speak out loud while playing online. Misogynistic views are also seen in naming conventions, where some gamers take every chance to express their dominance. Hatred towards others is also seen through some hardcore gamers as they send threatening messages which are filled with derogatory terms and vulgar speech, alienating both the homosexual and casual audiences. All of these factors influence gamers who are not hardcore heteronormative males to remain quiet in the gaming community.

While the past ten years alone have greatly improved the diversity in the gaming community, problems yet remain. Even though more women than ever before have entered the gaming populace, countless misogynistic men deter them from being able to fully enjoy the online experience. Changes in gaming accessibility have helped open the doors for people of all backgrounds to discover the joys of gaming. Ultimately, gaming has evolved into a media form to be inclusive of people of all backgrounds, hindered only by the misogynistic and hateful views of a select group of hardcore gamers.

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