Violent Sexualization of Women in Video Games

The Role of Video Games in Promoting Violent Extremism Against Women

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Abstract

The aim of this Research Paper is to identify and understand how certain video games promote violent extremism against women. Research work in this paper on how extremism is promoted against women through video games has been divided into three main categories – women as sexual objects, women who are scantily clad and women as background decoration. Two-three games have been chosen under each of these categories that show how through various scenarios and situations in these games' extremism is promoted against women. After these results of a survey has been given to show how these games might affect the mentality of the people playing these. Results also show how sexism and tendencies to promote extremism against women is more in males. Also results show how the mental health of teenagers and adolescents might get affected by getting exposure to these games. Finally, a list of measures has been provided that would help people especially the younger generation from getting exposure to these games and thus help in reducing violent extremism against women.

Keywords: Women, video games, sexual objects, scantily clad, background decoration, survey, teenagers, adolescents

INTRODUCTION

When we come to the topic of video games, games like Grand Theft Auto, Street Fighter, Bayonetta etc. are known to all. While all these games have a common thrill factor to them and are equally popular but what is also common among these games is the sexualized representation of women in these games. What makes video games more dangerous and an instrument to promote extremism against women is that the users and players of these games can personalize the depicted characters. These features make it more likely for the users to feel immersed in the virtual environment and to identify with their character leading to much stronger effects compared to passively watching media characters.

The main aim of this research paper is to identify how through various simulations and situations in various video games, extremism is promoted against women. The three main categories in which study in this research paper has been divided are –

- The portrayal of women as sex objects
- The portrayal of women who are scantily clad
- The portrayal of women for background decoration

PORTRAYAL OF WOMEN AS SEX OBJECTS

Sexualization is the characteristic of measuring a person's value only from his or her sexual appeal while ignoring other characteristics. When a person is treated as a sexual object or when sexuality is

inappropriately imposed and/or when a person's physical attractiveness equates to his or her sexiness. It is often seen that female characters are strongly underrepresented in video games, but they often appear heavily sexualized.

The following is a list of games where female characters are mostly non-playable and are portrayed as sex objects. Almost all these games are characterized by the presence of strip clubs and the presence of female characters who are characterized by prude looking sexualized behaviour dialogues, etc. The games are –

- Most GTA Games
- The Witcher 2 (2011)
- Yakuza 4
- Mafia 2 Joe's Adventures (2010)
- The Darkness 2 (2012)

In games like Max Payne 3 (2012) the protagonist who is a male explores shanty towns populated by prostituted women. Some games like Fallout: New Vegas (2010), and Sleeping Dogs (2012) have gone to the extent of providing in-game missions were performing sexual acts with women enhances the male characters and makes them capable of performing better in other missions.

All these games are the essence of what sexual objectification means and how women are portrayed as Sex Objects.

In an analysis of twenty US top-selling games in 2003, Downs and Smith (2010) found that only 14% of all characters were female. Of these, 41% appeared in sexually revealing clothing, and 43% were depicted partially or fully nude, compared to 11% and 4% of the male characters, respectively. Females were also more likely than males to be shown unrealistic body proportions (25% vs. 2%). The pattern is also consistent with several content analyses that have documented the sexualization of female video game characters, particularly in top-selling games. These are –

- Beasley & Collins Standley, 2002[1]
- Burgess, Stermer, & Burgess, 2007[2]
- Dill & Thill, 2007[3]
- Lynch, Tompkins
- van Driel, & Fritz, 2016
- Williams, Martins, Consalvo, and Ivory 2006.[4]

All these analyses have argued that games and gender work as a cycle, with women being less attracted by games that do not represent them, thus being less likely to become game makers and changing the status quo.

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[1].Berrin Beasley and Tracy Collins Standley, 'Shirts Vs. Skins: Clothing As An Indicator Of Gender Role Stereotyping In Video Games' (2002) 5 Mass Communication and Society.

[2] Melinda C. R. Burgess, Steven Paul Stermer and Stephen R. Burgess, 'Sex, Lies, And Video Games: The Portrayal Of Male And Female Characters On Video Game Covers' (2007) 57 Sex Roles.

[3] Karen E. Dill and Kathryn P. Thill, 'Video Game Characters And The Socialization Of Gender Roles: Young People'S Perceptions Mirror Sexist Media Depictions' (2007) 57 Sex Roles.

[4] Dmitri Williams and others, 'The Virtual Census: Representations Of Gender, Race And Age In Video Games' (2009) 11 New Media & Society.

PORTRAYAL OF WOMEN WHO ARE SCANTILY CLAD

The portrayal of women as scantily clad has been an increasing feature in video games today. Women as partially or scantily dressed are increasingly a feature of Racing games where they are shown as the Race Starter, as a reward for the winning racer, etc. Some of these games are-

- Rave Racer (1995)
- Need for Speed Underground (2003)
- Ridge Racer 2 (2006), etc.

Numerous games show women as scantily clad. Some of these would be –

- Hitman Blood Money (2006) – In this game women can be seen posing for photoshoots in revealing clothing and dialogues from the photographer are as follows

"Show me those Lucious pink lips"

- Dishonoured 2012 – While doing missions, the protagonist can zoom into the body parts of women who are non-playable characters.
- Darkness 2 (2012) – The Protagonist must walk through women's changing rooms to proceed with the mission
- Saboteur (2009) – Here again the protagonist must walk through a women's changing room to proceed with the mission.
- Hitman Absolution (2012) – In a particular mission, the protagonist throws the body of an exotic female dancer who is partially dressed to create a diversion.

Content Analysis of various reports shows that in many video games, women are portrayed as attractive beings and partially nude. They are scantily clad, mostly non-playable and for providing an extra bit of spice to the games. These reports are of –

- Beasley and Collins Standley, 2002[5]
- Miller and Summers, 2007[6]
- Downs and Smith 2010[7]
- Scharrer, 2004[8]

The reason why this is more dangerous and can provoke extremism against women is that the players are involved in an active looking environment. In other forms of media, viewers are mostly passive looking.

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[5] Dmitri Williams and others, 'The Virtual Census: Representations Of Gender, Race And Age In Video Games' (2009) 11 New Media & Society.

[6] Monica K. Miller and Alicia Summers, 'Gender Differences In Video Game Characters' Roles, Appearances, And Attire As Portrayed In Video Game Magazines' (2007) 57 Sex Roles.

[7] Edward Downs and Stacy L. Smith, 'Keeping Abreast Of Hypersexuality: A Video Game Character Content Analysis' (2009) 62 Sex Roles.

[8] Erica Scharrer, 'Virtual Violence: Gender And Aggression In Video Game Advertisements' (2004) 7 Mass Communication and Society.

PORTRAYAL OF WOMEN FOR BACKGROUND DECORATION

Another instrument that provokes extremism against women is the use of attractive women for background decoration, on covers of games etc. This has been an age-old strategy for increasing the sales of video games.

- In November 1971, a fibreglass video game cabinet appeared in the USA. The name of this game was Computer Space, and this was the first-ever commercial video game ever made and was a coin-operated machine. In advertisements and promotions of this game, a woman in a see-through nightgown with her underwear visible can be seen standing next to the machine.

Ever since this, this strategy has been used for the promotion of various games. Women in many cases have been seen placed alongside arcade games. Some of these games would be –

- Space Race
- Jungle King
- Konami GT
- Contra

In many contemporary games such as GTA and others, images of in-game female characters have been excessively used for the advertisement and promotion of these games. This is another example of how women are used for the promotion and selling of these games. In these promotional materials, it is to be seen that advertisers are not just selling a product bey are also selling gaming as a lifestyle in which women predominantly exist as passive objects of heterosexual male desire.

These ads have contributed to an emergent culture. Women are thought of as ornamental and peripheral to a male gaming experience. And since women are already seen as incidental eye candy, it's not surprising that when female characters started being introduced to more games worldwide, roles also tended to follow similar patterns.

SURVEY

- The Sampling Procedure and Participants

This sample has included participants aged 11–25 who were selected at school and college through stratified random sampling. The participation rate was slightly above 95%. The sample has included both public and private schools and colleges, and all curricula, professional as well as general.

- Sample of the Questionnaire:
1. Name
2. Age
3. Educational Qualification
4. Do you play video games?
5. Have you played any games which involve content promoting violence towards women?
6. If yes, what were your feelings during that period?
7. How many hours per day did you spend on average last week, Monday to Friday playing computer or on the video game console?"
8. Do you think it has played any role in your behaviour in real life?

- Ethics Statement:

This survey took into consideration the psychological processes involved when a person's mind is exposed to a certain sort of media for a particular period, and the questions were set in a manner to assess the

psychological framework of the participant with their prior consent on the same. All the data that has been collected has been used to formulate the analysis of this research paper.

- Exposure to Media

Media exposure has been assessed by the following question: "How many hours per day did you spend on average last week, Monday to Friday playing computer or on the video game console?", "How many hours per day did you spend on average last week, Monday to Friday watching TV, DVDs, films (including on the internet)." To ensure an appropriate distribution of the variables. 10 categories, from 1 hour per day to 4 hours or more per day. According to their estimations, participants spent 2 hours per day watching TV and 3 hours per day playing video games.

Although this measure cannot accurately estimate the number of sexist content adolescents had been exposed to in video games and on television, it is seen that women are frequently portrayed in sexist ways (e.g., Dietz, 1998; Beasley and Collins Standley, 2002; Burgess et al., 2007; Jansz and Martis, 2007; Downs and Smith, 2010), and this is the case in French media (Matthes et al., 2016). Time exposure to TV and video games thus may be considered an acceptable proxy for general exposure to sexist content.

- Sexism

Sexism had been measured with a single-item question. Participants were asked the following question: "A woman is made mainly for making and raising children"

RESULTS OF THE SURVEY AND ANALYSIS

Preliminary analyses showed that sexism was higher among males (and decreased as socioeconomic status increased. Video game exposure is related to sexism at a bivariate level. Video games exposure was related to sexism. Sexism had been more endorsed by males. Moreover, higher socioeconomic level had predicted lower sexism. No interaction effects had been observed.

General video game exposure was significantly related to sexism, irrespective of gender, age, socioeconomic status, and religion. Experimental studies have shown that playing sexualized video games for a few minutes promoted gender stereotypes (Behm-Morawitz and Mastro, 2009;[9] Yao et al., 2010[10]), increased hostile sexism and men's acceptance of sexual harassment (Dill et al., 2008[11]). It was also noted that individuals with sexist orientations spend more time playing video games (Fox and Tang, 2016[12]).

CONCLUSION

The results imply that the human mind does get affected by the media they are exposed to and over the years, these ideas develop into stigma and stereotypes that they associate with a particular sex. These stereotypes are extremely harmful, not just for the person in question, but the society at large if we look

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[9] Elizabeth Behm-Morawitz and Dana Mastro, 'The Effects Of The Sexualization Of Female Video Game Characters On Gender Stereotyping And Female Self-Concept' (2009) 61 Sex Roles.

[10] Mike Z. Yao, Chad Mahood and Daniel Linz, 'Sexual Priming, Gender Stereotyping, And Likelihood To Sexually Harass: Examining The Cognitive Effects Of Playing A Sexually-Explicit Video Game' (2009) 62 Sex Roles.

[11]Karen E. Dill, Brian P. Brown and Michael A. Collins, 'Effects Of Exposure To Sex-Stereotyped Video Game Characters On Tolerance Of Sexual Harassment' (2008) 44 Journal of Experimental Social Psychology.

[12] Jesse Fox and Wai Yen Tang, 'Women'S Experiences With General And Sexual Harassment In Online Video Games: Rumination, Organizational Responsiveness, Withdrawal, And Coping Strategies' (2016) 19 New Media & Society.

at it from a broader perspective. Thus, this calls for better policies regarding media exposure, and videogames too, must have proper rating systems and be devised in a manner that they do not promote violence. The rating system in question must be devised after a proper discussion by all member states on the issue so that its implementation can be done on a larger scale.