FIGURE 1: Samus Aran as seen in *Metroid Dread*[1]

AT3: Issues Exploration

Gender Representation

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Since their boom in the 1980s, video games have been a prominent market in the entertainment industry and have a massive economic influence.[2] It isn't surprising that there are many concerns and issues surrounding video games, given they are such a popular service. A major ethical problem that video games face is the representation of gender stereotypes in games. 80% of women depicted in video games is sexualised, shown with scantily clad, or used as a vision of beauty to the extent that women are used as rewards and prizes in games.[3,4] This then leads to sexist behaviours in the players of games that depict women in such ways.[5]

Issues Occurring

Depiction of women in video games has become more positive since the 1980s but still has many areas to improve in. 80% of female characters are subjected to sexual behaviour, scrutiny clad, or visions of beauty, 25% are all three.[6]

A depiction that may seem harmless is the submissive nature of a damsel in distress. This remains a popular theme across video games including *Super Mario* and *The Legend of Zelda* where the fairy-tale idea that a princess is captured with no resistance and is locked away in a castle or similar scenario.[7,8] Then a male character, often shown as extensively masculine, muscular, or brave must rescue the princess. Women should not be shown as helpless or weak as they are powerful and just as strong as men.

In less fanatical games, such as *Grand Theft Auto*, women are objectified and sexualised.[9,10] Some games go to the extent that women are the rewards for achievements and others show sexual violence against women and do not show any evidence that this is ethically incorrect.[11] This is horrible as it implies that women are weak and it shows that violence against them is acceptable or, at least, not that much of a problem.[12]

The actual character design of females in games is unrealistic and sexual. The ideal female model in a video game is to have larger hips, shoulders, and chest, a thin waist, and long legs.[13] Outfits are often shown to be revealing or have a nude element to them, such as a low-cut top or bare arm.[14] 71 characters with revealing cleavage were put to independent judges: 2.82% were "flat", 56.34% were "average" and 40.85% were "voluptuous".[15] This depiction of women is simply gross and unrealistic and is a poor representation of the gender.

Effects of the Issues

Bandura's theory of social learning looks at a stimulus in the environment around a person.[16] This then triggers a response in the brain, unconsciously, and in turn, the cognitive response provides a physical response.[17] The theory looks at how a model's behaviour will be mimicked by an adolescent who follows them.[18] Video games and their characters have become the models for the behaviour in adolescents and so, many adolescents have been mimicking the behaviour in video games.[19]

Adolescent males could find models in the male characters in games.[20] They may view themselves as being the ones to be powerful and view women as weak. They may also begin to objectify women, causing issues including violence and sexual assault.[21] But also, they may simply view themselves as the betters and hence, cause a divide and difference between the two sexes.[22] Adolescent females could find models in the female characters in games.[23] They may view themselves as objects and rewards or as weak and helpless.[24] This could lead them to be completely dependent on men and they may throw life goals and dreams away because they feel useless and pointless.

Because the stereotypes are in-game, adolescents will adopt those stereotypes into their lives.[25,26] Expectations will then be thrust upon both genders which are unfair and unjust. These behaviours could lead to serious problems later in life: Men could be increasingly aggressive towards women, and they may seriously hurt women in later life.[27] Women may throw away goals and dreams because they feel they cannot achieve them due to their gender.[28] The problem needs to be stopped so that teenagers treat their peers and themselves with the respect that they deserve.

Solutions Arising

Games like the *Metroid* Series now hero women.[29] In this series, the character Samus Aran (see figure 1, cover page) is the main playable character. She is depicted as the brave main character who must save the problem. And not once in these games is there a single person to save, more of a complication that needs a resolution. This ensures that adolescents see that both males and females can be brave and strong and courageous, as it makes women the heroes and protagonists.
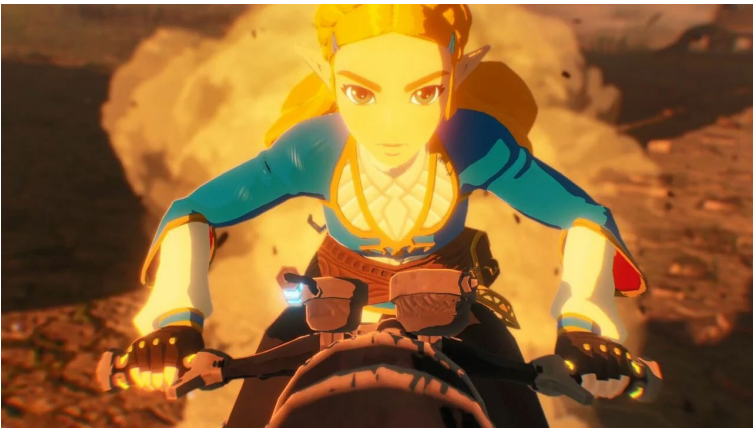

FIGURE 2:Princess Zelda as seen in *Hyrule Warriors: Age of Calamity*[35]

Game series that have portrayed sexist depictions of women in their past are now shedding light on reducing their sexist depictions. In the latest instalments of *the Legend of Zelda* series, the damsel in distress, Princess Zelda (see figure 2), is shown defending her ground and as a strong, brave character.[30,31] The game *Breath of the Wild* displays Zelda a courageous hero who is defending her people and sacrifices herself to save the kingdom rather than being helplessly abducted.[32] And in *Hyrule Warriors: Age of Calamity*, Zelda, among other females, are playable characters with just as much strength as any of their male counterparts.[33] The representation that Zelda is no longer a helpless damsel but that she is strong and independent shows that women are not submissive people, and it empowers those of that sex.

A more simplistic solution in gaming that needs more replication is to display less gender-specific designs. An example of this is pre-release footage of *Splatoon 3* where there are no clear gender differences in the designs (see figure 3).[34] But this could be a simple thing of modelling characters from a realistic variety of women. Also, clothing could be the same between male and female characters, which should include fewer revealing aspects.

These solutions are effective and need to be replicated across the industry. Further solutions can include removing any violence that is specifically aimed at women. This will reduce the male dominance in video games and hence reduce the male dominance and the female submission in the real world.

FIGURE 3: Splatoon 3 character choice with no gender-based design[36]

ENDNOTES

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