

Line by Line: A Journal of Beginning Student Writing

Volume 2 | Issue 2

Article 3

February 2016

Changing Princess Peach

Christian A. Matico
University of Dayton

Follow this and additional works at: <http://ecommons.udayton.edu/lxl>

 Part of the [Creative Writing Commons](#), [English Language and Literature Commons](#), and the [Rhetoric and Composition Commons](#)

Recommended Citation

Matico, Christian A. (2016) "Changing Princess Peach," *Line by Line: A Journal of Beginning Student Writing*: Vol. 2: Iss. 2, Article 3.
Available at: <http://ecommons.udayton.edu/lxl/vol2/iss2/3>

This Article is brought to you for free and open access by the Department of English at eCommons. It has been accepted for inclusion in Line by Line: A Journal of Beginning Student Writing by an authorized administrator of eCommons. For more information, please contact frice1@udayton.edu, mschlange1@udayton.edu.

Changing Princess Peach

Writing Process

The main assignment for this paper was to gather sources from academia and various news sources and create a synthesis argument on a topic dealing with women in a certain field. All of the students chose a topic they felt strongly about and that showed how women have been encompassed in my field. Due to my admiration of video games, I decided to show how specifically female characters were being portrayed in popular titled games. A lot of research came from our presentations we had to do before hand on our topic and further research was done to gather statistics on how many women played video games. After taking a look at my slides and sources, it was easy to mold the body of my paper, adding in sources to spice up my content. At best, it took around four drafts I shared with my professor to get feedback on and six revisions to get it to where my instructor said it would be ready to send in.

Course

ENG200

Semester

Fall

Instructor

Prof. Cody Lyon

Year

2015

Chris Matico

Professor Cody Lyon

ENG 200

November 16, 2015

Changing Princess Peach

Technology is arguably one of the hugest components encompassed in human day-to-day life. From touchscreen phones that act like computers to cars with Bluetooth installed in their systems, technology has undergone much development since the 1980s and prior. With such technical growth comes advancements in one of the most popular technological pastimes known today, videogames. From hitting a digital ball with a stick to defeating mushroom-men and turtles on a 2-D grid, videogames have evolved into epic tales of adventure that take people to majestic realms and far off galaxies. Characters are enriched with tragic past lives that they must overcome to solve their problems so they can accomplish their goal, which is how the player beats the game. While great advancements in the industry have brought people of all age groups into the gaming community, there remains the controversial issue of the way female characters are being portrayed. From skimpily clad armor that looks painted on the body to reinforcing general stereotypes about women, gamers, videogame magazines, various news sources, and academic scholars have stated that female characters are mostly shown as sexual objects rather than well thought characters within storylines, which could push women away from gaming culture.

One of the most popular and controversial games across all videogame platforms is the *Grand Theft Auto* (GTA) series. It comes as no surprise that a game about career criminals would

fall under some scrutiny. While it shows characters dealing and partaking in drugs and causing senseless violence, the game's cruel treatment of women has been heavily criticized. An example posed by the International Business Times is the game's treatment of prostitutes. GTA is a free world game, which means the player has total liberty to do what he or she wants. So if a player wanted to "punch a prostitute and run her over with a car" the player could do so (Elise). There are even missions where the player must drive prostitutes around to places and can also receive sexual favors from them. This spawns the question "is showing prostitutes and strippers in a game about gangsters inappropriate?" This was a question asked by the New York Times, where Rockstar Studios' head writer, Dan Houser stated, "I don't think we reveal in the mistreatment of women at all...in the world we're representing, in Grand Theft Auto, that it's appropriate" (Houser). Adding on, GTA has also received disparagement with its overall portrayal of female characters, prostitutes and strippers aside.

Women who walk the streets of Liberty City, Vice City, and San Andreas, (all different settings in the GTA games) are often depicted as "stupid, vapid, whiney, and desperate" (Elise). In none of the games has there been a female main character or a highly supporting role that includes a woman. Elise also argues that hardly any of the women, pedestrians or someone who plays a semi-role, are shown as intelligent or even having a sense of personality. One example in the game where this is demonstrated is in GTA Vice City, on the radio show K-Chat. Amy, the host of the show, is depicted often as disrespectful and ignorant, a few aspects that female GTA characters exemplify in Elise's arguments. The guests on her show, in a creative way, degrade women and mock feminism as a whole. One of her guests is a rock star, who discusses his life on tour. Activities like drinking and erotic deeds with the opposite sex are only some of the things he mentions, merely showing women as desired morsels. Another guest is a woman who has a

Ph.D. that published a book about her life dressed as a man. This falls into the “fem-nazi” label that society often labels feminists. Instead of fighting for equality in opportunity, this character claims superiority over men as a whole. This degrades the definition of feminism, which states women are equal to men. In a game where female characters are “often referred to as bitches,” are shown to have poor personality, and do sexual favors for main male characters, there is strong evidence showing women in GTA being portrayed merely as objects of bodily pleasure and having little sense of intelligence (Elise).

Another game that has had reprimand are the *Dead or Alive* games. *Dead or Alive* (DOA) is a 3-D graphical fighting game that has been well known for its anime-style art and most definitely its notorious character portrayal. According to the Examiner, a video game news website, it is the “first 3-D fighting game to feature bouncing breasts” (Mahan). Furthermore, Team Ninja, the developers of *Dead or Alive* and the *Ninja Gaiden Series*, have also developed another game from the *Dead or Alive* franchise named *Dead or Alive Xtreme*. Here, the female characters of DOA play beach sports where they wear revealing bathing suits that put emphasis on their cleavage. This game has a central target to “a very specific demographic,” which has led to criticisms of women in videogames being portrayed as items of pleasure rather than individual, story based characters (Mahan). When Team Ninja was questioned about this, they released a statement saying, “We’ve always wanted to make the girls look as attractive as possible, and that’s something that’s not going to change for us at all” (Mahan). While Team Ninja might not care what critics think of how they display female characters in their game, scholars and various news sources lay claims and polls stating that portraying women in such a way is sexist and has negative effects on the psychology of both sexes.

A study done by Elizabeth Behm Marowitz and Dana Mastro, scholars of the departments of communications at the University of Missouri-Columbia and the University of Arizona, claim that the “highly sexualized” view of videogame characters have an effect on both men and women. When it comes to the psychology of women, they state that showing hyper-sexualized female videogame characters lowers a woman’s level of self-concept. Self-concept is described as one’s general identity, such as who one is, what one likes, what someone does on their free time; these questions are generally brought up when contemplating self-concept. In videogames, Marowitz and Mastro utilize gender-role self-concept in showing “social and moral standards about gender-appropriate dress, ideal female body type, and even evaluations of female self-worth” (Marowitz and Mastro 810). The negative effects this can have is that women might not see themselves as admirable because they might not meet the standards portrayed in these games. Women could question their outer beauty and style of dress; viewing themselves as ugly when in reality, they are relatively alluring. If this were to continue, it can have an effect on the population of women in the videogame industry. As of 2014, forty-percent of all women are gamers according to the Entertainment Software Rating Board and over time it has been rising (ESRB.org). However retaining that percentage is quite fragile when there are games that exploit the abuse of prostitutes like *Grand Theft Auto*. In social cognitive theory, the media is a big influence on what the general public perceives as ideal. In a study conducted by Marowitz and Mastro, when women play a videogame with over-sexualized characters, it can “reduce confidence in their ability to succeed in the real world” (Marowitz and Mastro 819). If the constant hyper-sexualizing of female characters like the ones in *Dead or Alive* continues, it could have negative effects on a woman’s self-confidence. Yet women aren’t the only ones being

affected by the libertine presentation of women in videogames, men are also very much affected by this.

When it comes to men, the male psychology focuses on the ideal woman. What should a woman physically look like, how should a woman dress, how should a woman act? These are all questions men think of when looking for a partner. Women in the media who are shown sexually raise the standards of what a man wants out of a potential spouse. Within videogames, because men are exposed to women with “sexy” looking bodies wearing scantily clad armor, very much like the characters in the *Dead or Alive* series who wear school girl outfits in a fight, it can give men unrealistic expectations on what they want a mate because both men and women “judge self and others based upon the characters” (Marowitz and Mastro 809). Keep in mind that 70% of female characters in M-rated games and 46% of female characters in T-rated games are often depicted promiscuously (Marowitz and Mastro 809). So because of the amount of women portrayed lasciviously is high, this can start a vicious cycle that onsets with men having unreachable standards. Even if a woman is attractive and has feelings for the man, it could lead to her questioning her self-worth and self-concept because who she likes has a standard she cannot reach. This could be influenced by the women he sees while playing Xbox.

Videogames are often called out on their portrayal of women as being merely sexual objects. Marowitz and Mastro even claim that no matter how much depth a female character has, if she is portrayed sexually, she will be seen as erotic luxury. To also add that when women are shown with negative connotation, mindless and cruel-hearted for example, it reiterates that they are mere items of pleasure. National news and worldwide gaming articles question the hyper-sexualized view of women in videogames as scholars explain the effects it has on women’s self-concept. Evidently, it seems scholars, reporters, and the gaming community see this as an issue

to be addressed. If videogame companies at least take steps into making women look more realistic, not less attractive but logically accurate to what people authentically see in the real world, the demographic of gamers might widen. Hopefully, if this is done, the interest of videogames will rise, more female characters will be seen as role models, and the perception of the heroine will show her strengths as a hero, not a statue of carnal desire.

Works Cited

- Behm-Morawitz, Elizabeth, and Dana Mastro. "The Effects Of The Sexualization Of Female Video Game Characters On Gender Stereotyping And Female Self-Concept." *Sex Roles* 61.11/12 (2009): 808-823. *SocINDEX* with Full Text. Web. 27 Sept. 2015.
- Mahan, Alex. "Is 'Dead or Alive' Sexist? Is It Wrong to Give a Female Character Sex Appeal?" *Examiner.com*. Examiner.com, 1 Sept. 2012. Web. 27 Sept. 2015.
- Elise, Abigail. "After 'Gamergate': The Five Most Sexist Video Games Of All Time." *International Business Times*. International Business Times, 14 Oct. 2014. Web. 20 Nov. 2015.
- "How Much Do You Know About Video Games? Share." *Video Game Industry Statistics*. Entertainment Software Rating Board, 2010. Web. 02 Dec. 2015.
- Suellentrop, Chris. "Americana at Its Most Felonious." *The New York Times*. The New York Times, 09 Nov. 2012. Web. 20 Nov. 2015.