

# **Research on the image of Female Characters in Video Game images in the post-feminist era**

## **Draft Introduction**

The modern feminist movement has gone through four waves, and the fourth wave, which started in 2012, has taken advantage of the highly developed nature of social media and gradually swept through the cultural and entertainment industries, which has made both gamers and game developers pay attention to the image of female characters in them, and gradually break the stereotype of "supporting characters" and "tool people". The stereotype of "a tool person" is gradually broken. From games with males as the main audience at the beginning of the game, to games with female characters as the main or female players as the target audience nowadays. This shows that the game itself is improving and the status of women is increasing. On the other hand, the games themselves have also reflected on the real world, and women have more opportunities to explore their own values. However, the incomplete feminism or excessive feminism of some games still brings some problems and controversies, so I would like to explore the historical factors and reasons for the development of female characters in games, and give some construction strategies for the image of female characters in games by combining with the characteristics of the post-feminist era nowadays.

## **Key Words**

Female Character, Female Image, Post-feminist era, video game

## **Problem Statement**

In the past, female characters have often been the "watched" role in video games. But with the spread of feminism in social media for the fourth time, both game makers and gamers are paying more attention to the issue of gender equality, which is why I chose this topic for my research. I found some problems that need solutions as follows:

1. Female characters with more revealing clothes account for a higher percentage of the overall game character group, which will have a certain negative impact on players and will affect the psychological health of the youth group, and will also make some female players somewhat aggressive.
2. The economic benefits brought by revealing clothes to game manufacturers make them continue to design similar characters and ignore the quality of the game.
3. Radical feminism can cause limitations to game content, for example, the forced inclusion of a large number of female characters in war history-themed games, which is not in line with history. As well as using social media to impact game makers and resist normal naked skin, affecting the aesthetics of the characters.

## **Draft Literature review**

Le Deuxième Sexe ( The Second Sex, 1949 ) said Thousands of years of institutions have shaped women into the "second sex. One of the difficulties of modern women compared to men is that women have to face the choice of positioning themselves as the "first sex" or the "second sex" countless times during their upbringing. Gender cannot be changed, but the choice is one that you are responsible for. Maclaran (2015) suggests that we are now in the fourth wave of feminism, which is driven by social media and the internet. She thinks it's important to look at how gender roles and feminist topics are represented in movies and games. These are the contexts for studying the post-feminist era. Wu Xiaoyun counted the degree of clothing exposure of female characters at different stages by comparing a large sample.

Xiaofei Shi argues that the background of female image in video games is mainly determined by the socio-historical context, analyzes the profound influence of the long-standing patriarchal society on women's self-perception, and points out that women should not only be "vases". By analyzing the data of heroes in FPS games, it is found that players prefer to buy female characters' costumes, thus reaping higher economic benefits.

Matthews, Nicholas L., Teresa Lynch, and Nicole Martins pointed out the issues involved, namely, the ideal and super-ideal video game bodies would be male and female and the reasons behind their formation. Lindner, Danielle, Melissa Tribble, Ilana Pilato, and Christopher J Ferguson points out the body satisfaction and aggressiveness of female players towards other women in video games, and illustrates the idea of non-

independence of girls as "seen" under the male gaze.

### **Research Design Methods**

The main research methods of this study are literature review and case study. First, current industry practices and academic research are reviewed to explore the current level of feminism valued in video games and the post-feminist era context. Second, a large number of case studies were conducted to learn the level of nudity of female characters at various stages through statistical data, focusing on several games, such as World of Warcraft, which has a high level of exposure, and Zelda, a game that places great emphasis on gender equality.

### **Title and general outline of each chapter**

#### **1. Historical changes in the image of female character in video games**

The historical change of female image in video games is divided into three stages, the major turning point is the fourth wave of feminism. 2012 the fourth wave of feminism spread through social media, also influenced part of the video game development. 1996-1999 female image is mainly realistic, lack of character and ability. 1999-2011 mainly exposed appearance design, weak character and single professional ability. After 2012, female characters gradually have a fuller character and narrative, yet still face the problem of labeled character appearance. Take The Legend of Zelda: Breath of the Wild, released in 2017, for example, a pinnacle of the push for equal rights for men and women.

## 2.Reasons for the formation of female character image in video games

The reasons for the presentation are mainly cultural, video games experience male gender hegemony. Economically, sexy and exposed female images have better profitability. For example, buying decorative clothing.

## 3.The Crisis and Problems Facing the Image of female character in Video Games

However this faces a number of problems. It can be a bad guide for teenagers and the super ideal body can be misleading for male women. Another question is whether radical feminism is feminism

In this regard I propose strategies for constructing the image of women in video games. After the influence of the post-feminist movement to eliminate stereotypes, highlight the independence and autonomy of women.

### **A draft chapter**

In order to track the female character image more accurately, the paper temporarily refrained from tracing the earlier pixel-era and 2D games and chose to start the comparison from the pre-rendering era, i.e. 2.5D era. Therefore, the birth of the online game "Meridian 59" developed by Archetype in 1996 is taken as the birth mark. In this stage from 1996 to 1999, subject to certain technical level restrictions, female characters dressed closer to reality. The female soldiers of Meridian 59, for example, wore the same armor as the male soldiers, and other optional clothes were mainly long pants, long skirts, and plain tops. During this period the female character appearance design is monotonous and simple, close to reality. In addition, at this time the game also

retains the classical style, western female characters generally wearing long-sleeved long shirt, limbs exposed less. At this stage of the game did not open up gender differentiation, so female characters often have the same numerical characteristics as men, professional characteristics, the difference only lies in the clothing.

Starting in 2000, as technology advanced, John Carmack pushed the 3D era and a large number of games entered the market at this time. In order to be more competitive, female characters are wonderfully diverse and constantly break through innovation. World of Warcraft, released in 2004, for example, featured female characters with hot, sexy bodies and revealing clothing. The dress design shows as much as possible beyond the actual size of their breasts and exaggerated body curves. In terms of character, they are often given a single character trait, such as gentle, sexy, etc. The characterization lacks three-dimensionality. During this period, female characters were often designed to fit the "ideal lover" of men.

In 2012, influenced by the fourth feminist movement and social media, female characters began to diversify. 2012's Diablo 3 featured female barbarians who wore heavy armor and had thick muscles like men. In Asia, women in female-oriented games tend to be fair-skinned, thin, and possess beauty features. Although there are still games with "breast", "huge buttocks" and "bikini" selling points, the proportion is significantly reduced. In this period, the female character is no longer a single character, but has a backstory, personality causes and self-contradiction.

## **Indicative bibliography**

- [1]Lindner, Danielle, Melissa Tribble, Ilana Pilato, and Christopher J Ferguson. "Examining the Effects of Exposure to a Sexualized Female Video Game Protagonist on Women's Body Image." *Psychology of Popular Media* 9.4 (2020): 553-60. Web.
- [2]Burgess M C R, Stermer S P, Burgess S R. Sex, lies, and video games: The portrayal of male and female characters on video game covers[J]. *Sex roles*, 2007, 57: 419-433.
- [3]Fishbune S J, DeCleene M, Kim J. "Competent, Capable, and Practically Dressed": The Representation of Women in the Assassin's Creed Series[J]. *Midwest Journal of Undergraduate Research* 2018, 2018, 9: 18-36.
- [4] Chen Min-Kai. Research on the virtual female image constructed based on digital technology [D]. Central Academy of Fine Arts,2019.
- [5] Shi Xiaofei. Research on the representation of female image in video game images [D]. Henan University,2021.
- [6]Matthews, Nicholas L., Teresa Lynch, and Nicole Martins. "Real Ideal: Investigating How Ideal and Hyper-ideal Video Game Bodies Affect Men and Women." *Computers in Human Behavior* 59 (2016): 155-64. Web.
- [7] Liu Qifeng. Research on the image of women in China's "B-girl" games [D]. Xiamen University, 2020.
- [8] Qi Jiaqi. The image of women in video game texts from a semiotic perspective[J]. *Silk Road*,2022(01):60-68.
- [9] Wu Xiaoyun. Research on the image of female characters in online games [D]. Southwest University of Political Science and Law,2019

[10]Harvey, Alison, and Stephanie Fisher. "Growing Pains: Feminisms and Intergenerationality in Digital Games." *Feminist Media Studies* 16.4 (2016): 648-62. Web.

[11]Gray, Kishonna L, Gerald Voorhees, and Emma Vossen. *Feminism in Play*. Cham: Springer International, 2018. *Palgrave Games in Context*. Web.

[12]Harvey, Alison, and Stephanie Fisher. ""Everyone Can Make Games!": The Post-feminist Context of Women in Digital Game Production." *Feminist Media Studies* 15.4 (2015): 576-92. Web.

[13]Guertin, Carolyn. "From Complicity to Interactivity: Theories of Feminist Game Play." *Digital Studies* 9 (2009): *Digital Studies*, 2009 (9). Web.

[14]Kirkpatrick, Graeme. "Feminism and Technical Capital: The Case of the Computer Game." (2010). Web.

[15]Steenbakker M. A Power Shrouded in Petticoats and Lace: The Representation of Gender Roles in *Assassin's Creed III: Liberation*[J]. *New Horizons in English Studies*, 2021, 6(1): 92-110.