

# How genders are represented in video games media essay



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This paper will discuss how genders are represented as well as perceived in today's video games. With reforming feminist and equality groups attacking every outlet of mainstream news, video games have now become the new mass media that remains the only real form of entertainment that truly represents modern day views and beliefs. Recent games have shifted the trend from the macho stereotypic male hero protagonist to a more feminine female protagonist with great success, judging by recent Portal 2 sales in which the main protagonist was a female. This also remains true with antagonists as well.

Gender can be used either in a subversive or sexist way. Females are often objectified predominantly by using powerful visual dynamics. This includes their mannerisms, roles in games but most often, the clothes they wear. Sexism has often been a talking point from as early as the 90's. In Ann Cudd and Leslie Jones' paper " Sexism," sexism is define as "... a systematic,

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pervasive, but often subtle, force that maintains the oppression of women, and that this is at work through institutional structures in interpersonal interactions and the attitudes that are expressed in them, and in the cognitive, linguistic, and emotional processes of individual minds... our very experience of the world" (105-6).

Censorship also plays a significant role on how genders are represented in video games. This greatly relates to nudity and sexual references. This could be seen as a positive as this forces game developers/publishers to think harder on the necessity that sex plays in their games. Is it really necessary and/or practical to have females represented as whores? Why should they be represented like this? Why are males represented so differently to females? You don't see many games representing males as whores. This is a good way of nailing developers into thinking harder about the characters, plot and settings.

In the end, it comes down to how profitable a game can be and games do have to be tailored in order to be released in certain countries. One could argue that this damages video games as they have to be watered down potentially harming the games story, but does it really? Considering that many games portray females as sex objects and have no place in today's society, I tend to agree. As adults, we do have the right to choose what we want to look at but we also have the moral responsibility to do what is right, and this should remain true in video games.

The games that will be looked at in this paper are:

The Witcher,

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Dragon Age 2,

Portal 2,

Bulletstorm; and

Hydrophobia: Prophecy.

This will compare and contrast two game titles of similar nature in which gender representation in both games will be thoroughly examined.

## **Game 1: The Witcher**

The Witcher is a role playing game developed by CD Projekt RED STUDIO and was released as a PC exclusive in 2007. The game is based on a series of books by the same name by Polish author Andrzej Sapkowski. The game is based on a mediaeval fantasy world of Temeria and tells the story Geralt of Rivia, a Witcher who was at some point killed or at the very least, near death but was later revived by his fellow witchers at their stronghold Kaer Morhen. Unfortunately, he loses his memory in the process. The player gains control of Geralt and lead him through a non-linear story in which the player makes moral choices that affect the overall outcome of the game.

The game was censored at release in North America, Australia and the United Kingdom. This was later resolved through a patch known as the Enhanced Edition that failed to determine the users location (source), as well as improving on gameplay, graphics, loading times among other things. The main reason that this game was censored was how the game depicted women as well as receiving sex as a reward. Players were also rewarded

what became to be known as “ sex cards”, which depicted the women that you as Geralt slept with. There were also some modifications to the dialogue for what was said to be distasteful, for example, a scene where Geralt barges into a ladies house, “ Where the hell do you think you’re going with all the dung on your boots?! Out with you!” This was cut into “ Who are you? Get out!” in the censored versions.

One of the games focal aspects, apart from the immersive atmospheric world, story and gameplay, was on Geralt’s relationship with women.

Witcher’s are generally perceived to be great sex machines but without the fantastic stereotypical looks (source). A good way to sum Geralt up is that he’s an outsider, often referred to as a mutant in the game world and has many similarities, in terms of looks, to an albino. Relationships/sex does play an integral part of the game. Geralt’s choices in who he has relationships with, greatly affects the outcome, not only at the end but throughout the entire game.

Women do have a dominant role in this game and this is evident with characters such as Shani, Abigail and Triss Merigold. All three are strong women and although highly sexualised, they do play a significant role in the game. Geralt’s relationships with all three, one as friends and the other two sexually, determines on how the game progresses in terms with the story. Prostitutes also play a significant role as the player can gain valuable information by both helping them on side quests and/or sleeping with them. A good example of this is Carmen, the madame at one of the brothels. She asks for your help on helping find a cure for a werewolf she loves in which you could either kill or save. At the end, you learn of the story on why she <https://assignbuster.com/how-genders-are-represented-in-video-games-media-essay/>

became a prostitute. A lady shunned by her father because she was raped and impregnated by the city guards. The game also implies, through dialogue, that she may have also been sexually abused by her father.

What this shows is that the team at CD Projekt put a lot of thought and meaning into the roles that gender plays in this game. While other games such as Grand Theft Auto put very little thought and reason into “it’s ok” to over sexualise women with rape, bashing and murder, The Witcher is one of those few games that stands out in terms of both character and story development. It shows that in comparison to other games, women are strong, fierce and independent, and are able to stand up for their beliefs, ideas and ideologies.

## **Game 2: Dragon Age 2**

Dragon Age 2 follows the adventure of Hawke, a refugee from the nation of Ferelden who has fled to Kirkwall. The game itself is a series of flashbacks from the captured dwarf Varric, an old companion of Hawke’s. The game was released on PC and Xbox 360 in 2011 by EA but developed in-house by Bioware. As with all traditional Bioware games, it features rich dialog, expansive worlds, deep meaningful storyline as well as strong willed women. In fact, Bioware put a lot of thought and emphasis in the roles women play in this game (as well as their other games) universe.

Five of your companions in Dragon Age 2 are female. Females are represented to be strong, decisive, intellectual, cunning and possibly evil, and do play a significant role in the outcome of the game. At the beginning of Dragon Age 2, Varric exaggerates and describes Hawke’s companions with

overly large bosoms which raises the question, why did the game developers choose to do this? This could be seen as a way of enticing male players (as well as females) into the game by over sexualising women in this fashion. It is a good marketing ploy by Bioware as it engages players, particularly males, to progress through the game. The game also introduces many relationships that the player may choose to pursue. It does contribute to the story in some way but it fails to play a significant part. Rather, players can choose to remain friends with their female companions instead of actively sleeping with them; it does not affect the progress of the game.

Compared to the original, sex scenes are “dumbed down”. This is due to several reasons, specifically censorship. Many would say, judging by the complaints on user review site Metacritic, that this potentially damaged the game by ruining parts of the story where sex does play a role. Taking out true romanticising made the game seem unrealistic and gave the appearance that adding female companions did seem as an afterthought by the game developers. Are we to believe that there were no sexual tensions between Hawke and his female companions? Compared to *The Witcher*, getting interment with your female companions was a simple task of building your friendship bar by agreeing with your companions rather than taking decisive decisions, handing over gifts and teasing/flirting with them. *The Witcher* made romance seem an integral part of the game whereas *Dragon Age 2* fails on this, adding romance seem as an afterthought and having no real consequences. Yes, females did play an overly important role in *Dragon Age 2* but the romancing seemed unnecessary and could have been left out as it plays very little, if any, part of the story.

## **Game 3: Portal 2**

Perhaps one of the better titles to be released by Valve, it's a highly entertaining emotional rollercoaster ride, one that will give you high hopes and later crush them. Portal 2 features a fantastic, engaging, hilarious plot (and soundtrack) with many twists and turns. Ironically, this game forces you to think with portals as many levels will leave you shaking your head in disbelief when a puzzle that should theoretically only take 5 minutes takes you more than 15. It certainly leaves a satisfying feeling when completing a complex puzzle. Released in 2011, this game stands out from the usual crowd. Featuring a female protagonist by the name of Chell and a few helpful (or not so helpful) robot companions, GLaDOS and Wheatley, you attempt to transverse yourself out of the Aperture Science lab testing facility.

Chell is portrayed as a strong willed and intelligent woman. The game steers away from hypersexualising Chell by avoiding somewhat "traditional" Lara Croft style clothing i. e. skintight latex, overly short shorts and/or a tight hugging bikini. Instead, Chell is represented wearing a plain orange jump suit which is an unobtrusive representation of the female protagonist. Most players progress through the game unaware that they are assuming the role of a female. Players only catch a glimpse of Chell when looking through portals as well as other reflective materials such water and glass. Both GLaDOS and Wheatley are treated in a similar fashion where gender plays very little significance, mainly because they are bots although this does change in the latter part of the game. We can differentiate between the two by both voices and attitudes, but not by outside looks.



The writers at Valve provide a very interesting balance of power between the three characters. Choosing to represent female conflict by using emotional forms of abuse whilst avoiding any form of physical contact remains true with the stereotypes about women; they are cunning creatures. While in the latter half of the game, Valve took a feministic approach totally changing the dynamics of the game in which both Chell and GLaDOS form a working relationship and team against the common enemy, Wheatley. Wheatley is the only male character in the game. He transforms GLaDOS into a potato and attempts to murder Chell. This portrays both control and dominance that can be seen as subjectify women, either in reality or in the virtual world. From a feminist point of view, this form of behaviour is exactly what makes women put aside their differences (something which males can't do) and team up against the common enemy, proving once and for all that women are the stronger of the two sexes.

Chell and GLaDOS are the two perfect examples of the two sides of femininity; Chell the domestic icon whereas GLaDOs represents the progressive, intelligent working woman. By killing GLaDOS, Chell can be seen as the dutiful “ safe” woman conquering the “ dangerous” feminist” ([http://www. gamepro. com/article/features/218960/portal-s-glados-as-feminist-icon/](http://www.gamepro.com/article/features/218960/portal-s-glados-as-feminist-icon/))

## **Game 4: Bulletstorm**

This is easily one of the most fun games I've played in quite some time. The gameplay is just absolute effin amazing fun! Coupled with an engaging storyline and a hilarious script, this game is definitely a game that I'll be coming back to play just for pure entertainment. Although short, this game in <https://assignbuster.com/how-genders-are-represented-in-video-games-media-essay/>

no way becomes repetitive as your environment, enemies and weapons is ever changing.

Get it for the singleplayer as multiplayer is completely consolised, meaning that, it uses a matchmaking system which takes forever to connect. The only positive I can take from it is that you can choose to play with friends. It's another game that Microsoft has again managed to ruin with their GFWL.

## **Game 5: Hydrophobia: Prophecy**

### **Conclusion**

### **Sources**

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