I Play To Beat The Machine: Masculinity And The Video Game Industry In The United States

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“I PLAY TO BEAT THE MACHINE”: MASCULINITY AND THE VIDEO GAME INDUSTRY IN THE UNITED STATES

by

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ABSTRACT

This thesis examines the video game industry within the United States from the first game that was created in 1958 until the shift to Japanese dominance of the industry in 1985, and how white, middle class masculinity was reflected through the sphere of video gaming. The first section examines the projections of white, middle class masculinity in U.S. culture and how that affected the types of video games that the developers created. The second section examines reflections of this masculine culture that surrounded video gaming in the 1970s and 1980s in the developers, gamers, and the media, while demonstrating how the masculine realm of video gaming was constructed. Lastly, a shift occurred after the 1980 release of Pac-Man, which led to a larger number of women gamers and developers, as well as an industry that embraced a broader audience. It concludes with the crash of the video game industry within the United States in 1983, which allowed Japanese video game companies to gain dominance in video gaming worldwide instead of the U.S. companies, such as Atari.
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INTRODUCTION

When Ralph Baer, the man credited with creating the first home video game console, was asked why he created video games, he responded, “The question always tantalized me, ‘What the hell can you do with a TV set besides turn it on and change channels?’ I said, ‘Jeez, let’s play games with it!’”. Baer and many others like him created the electronic video game industry in the United States through their inventive ideas on how to manipulate technologies. Although companies from other countries, such as Japan, created video games in the 1970s and 1980s, the U.S.-based companies and the culture that surrounded video gaming were the most prominent in the industry through the 1960s, 1970s, and the early 1980s.

Starting with the creation of the first video game in 1958, white, middle class masculinity shaped the video game industry in the United States until the financial crash of the industry in 1983. The video game industry and the culture that surrounded it was a projection of the masculine sphere within the U.S., and it manifested through the developers, the games that were created, and the media. This projection influenced the genres of

games, the players, and the reactions to women within the culture of video gaming.

Because this thesis examines gender, the historiography of gender is relevant to informing this work. Joan Wallach Scott, the preeminent scholar on gender, wrote her groundbreaking work, “Gender: A Useful Category of Historical Analysis” (1986) examining the need to utilize gender in historical writings. Her writings on gender were part of the larger post-modern movement that studied how categories were constructed, and Scott stated that gender is also a social construction. However, most of the early works written on gender focused only on the social construction of femininity.

The examinations of gender shifted to looking at both femininity and masculinity in the late 1990s and early 2000s. One of these scholars, Michael S. Kimmel, utilized the concept of gender as a social construction. Instead of looking at femininity, Kimmel examined gender in regards to masculinity. In his monograph Manhood in America: A Cultural History (2006), Kimmel explores the social construction of white, middle class

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masculinity, and the changes that it underwent from 1776 until the 1990s.

The concepts of gender and technology also used gender as a social construction in regards to their relationship to technologies. An edited work, Jennifer Terry and Melodie Calvert’s Processed Lives: Gender and Technology in Everyday Life (1997) had articles that examined both the masculine and feminine relationships with digital worlds and technology. Primarily, these articles looked at the perception that higher technologies are meant for men, and the argument that there was a “masculine mystique and female fear of technological change” in the 20th century. One of the most prominent of the works on gender and technology, Roger Horowitz’s edited volume Boys and Their Toys? Masculinity, Technology, Class in America (2001), included essays by prominent gender historians that looked at the changing relationship with the social construction of masculinity and gender, as well as the different classes. These essays on gender and technology show the application of the historical analysis on gender to technology, which provides framework for studying femininity and masculinity in relation to these technologies.

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In this analysis, the examination of masculinity and technology, as demonstrated through the evolution of these works on gender, can be applied to electronic video gaming. By examining the concepts of gender and masculinity as a social construction, it is possible to understand the influences of masculinity on video gaming, as well as the reflection of a masculine sphere within gaming through the video game industry in the United States.

This study will examine the video game industry in the United States from its emergence in 1958 until the shift to Japanese dominance of the industry in 1986. It will examine the sphere of video gaming in the United States and how masculinity influenced the understanding of video gaming as a leisure activity. The concept of masculinity shifted over time, and these shifts reflected within the realm of video gaming.

Various types of primary sources were analyzed in order to examine the sphere of video gaming during this time period, including newspapers, magazines, and interviews with the developers. However, one of the most important sources was the video games themselves. Video games, much like film or art, serve as a window into the culture of the time period, and they allow for a deeper understanding of masculine sphere of video gaming.
The first chapter examines the projections of masculinity, including masculine leisure activities, and how white, middle class masculinity was reflected through the video games that were created by the early video game developers. It provides an analysis of the three prominent genres of video games that were released—sports, space, and combat-based video games. This analysis is tied into the different types of masculinity that the early developers were exposed to, which makes connections regarding why some video games contained only a skill-based gameplay with only the goal to win and some had individualistic characters with a narrative-based goal.

The second chapter contains an analysis of the projections of masculinity that emerged from the video game industry in the 1970s and early 1980s. The masculine culture that surrounded video gaming was visible through the developers, the types of video games that they created, the gamers, the gaming spaces, as well as the media that covered video gaming. The masculinity that the developers were familiar with appeared in the types of games that they made, and they provided a masculine perspective on video gaming. All of these elements perpetuated the masculine culture that surrounded video games during that period.

The final chapter analyzes the shift that occurred after the 1980 release of Pac-Man, which marks the point when more
women entered the arcades and developed video games. This was also when video game developers turned their attentions to creating more innovative video games that would appeal to a broader audience. Due to this change, there was also some pushback from some men against the women that were entering arcades, such as starting myths about promiscuous women playing video games. Although the industry remained primarily masculine, the small number of women who were entering the industry made the developers and business owners take notice and try to reach these larger audiences.

The video game industry in the United States began to collapse in 1982, and by 1984, arcade and home video games were essentially considered dead due to financial difficulties and the oversaturation of the video game market. The void created by many U.S. companies abandoning the industry allowed for Japanese companies to become the prominent players in the United States and worldwide. Because of this, the projection of a white, middle class masculine sphere in the United States could no longer be applied to the video game industry after 1985, as it had shifted to a worldwide business with multicultural values.
EARLY GAME DEVELOPERS AND MASCULINITY

The early video game industry in the United States, which started in 1958 and extended into the late 1970s, had two separate types of male developers. These separate groups of developers created two very different styles of games. The first group, composed of men who were born and raised before World War II, tended to create games that were not based on a narrative and focused on purely skill to motivate the player. The other group, which was raised in the post-World War II era in the United States, created games that focused on themes such as space shooting, military conquest, and sporting games. These games had a narrative, even at the most basic level, which drove the video game along and allowed the player to have a personal connection to the game. These separate groups and the types of games that they created can be attributed to the separate cultural definitions of masculinity in the pre- and post-World War II United States and the expressions of masculine activities that emerged from those separate characterizations. These types of video games are a reflection of the types of masculinity that influenced these developers, and an examination of white, middle
class masculinity in the United States allows for an understanding of this reflection.

During this early period of the electronic game industry, most video games fell into one of three categories: sports, space-based, and combat video games. Examining some of these early video games allows us to see how white, middle class masculinity through the years influenced the types of video games that were developed, including the shift from non-narrative games to narrative-based electronic video games. The narrative-based games utilized a sense of individuality that allowed the player to become a part of the game by controlling a character. Many of the games created by the post-World War II generation of game developers used this style of narrative, which became more in-depth as the technology advanced.

**Masculinity in the United States**

In order to understand masculinity’s influence, it is important to examine gender and masculinity. According to historian Joan Wallach Scott, gender refers to the social structures regarding the relationship between the sexes, as well as the categorization of these structures as “masculine” or
“feminine.”¹ Gender is socially constructed, and the concept of masculinity in the United States changed over time. Using Michael Kimmel’s work, *Manhood In America: A Cultural History*, which studies the changes in masculinity through United States history, the differences in pre- and post-World War II white, middle class masculinity can be examined. These differences influenced the types of electronic video games that were created by the early game developers in the United States, such as games with a narrative and games that are simply skill-based.

Masculinity before World War II, particularly during the 1920s and 1930s, had changed from the previous standards of masculinity that had existed at the turn of the 20th century. With the changing of the cultural landscape during this 1920s and 1930s, particularly the Great Depression, masculinity was threatened. Men had to prove masculinity in new and different ways than men had earlier in the 20th century.²

In the 1920s, many men had recently returned from World War I, which provided them with a sense of masculinity while also allowing them to gain further security in their masculinity

1 Scott, “Gender: A Useful Category for Historical Analysis,” 1053-1054.
2 Earlier in the 20th century, masculinity was defined by activities such as men’s fraternal organizations, hard work instead of wealth, and escaping to the West to prove one’s masculinity. Michael S. Kimmel, *Manhood in America: A Cultural History* (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 2006), 70, 114, & 124.
through their financial well-being due to the upturn in the economy.\textsuperscript{3} However, the dependence on a stable income and the war effort to prove one’s masculinity was not a reliable method, and the loss of the breadwinner status with the onset of the Great Depression in the late 1920s greatly affected many men’s ability to prove masculinity.\textsuperscript{4} At a time when many white, middle class men were questioning the concept of the self-made man in the United States and their own masculine positions as the breadwinner, men turned to other types of leisure and activities to prove their masculinity.

During the Great Depression, one method of proving masculinity was to raise a masculine son. Men turned to becoming a father figure and an active parent since the workplace was no longer a viable option as an expression of masculinity during the 1930s. Psychologists in the era explained that men would need to be active parents in their sons’ lives, as too much time with their mothers would be feminizing.\textsuperscript{5} Before the Great Depression, men were not expected to actively participate in child raising. They were not prepared for the new roles thrust upon them. Their lack of parenting skills became the source of

\textsuperscript{3} Kimmel, \textit{Manhood in America}, 127.
\textsuperscript{4} Kimmel, \textit{Manhood in America}, 127.
\textsuperscript{5} Kimmel, \textit{Manhood in America}, 134-135.
many comedy comic strips and films chastising their incompetence.⁶ Despite this, men were determined to raise masculine boys who understood masculine behaviors and perspectives, and psychology provided the groundwork that would reinforce this perspective through studies and tests on masculine and feminine behaviors that they felt would emphasize masculine activities for their boys.⁷

Since masculinity could no longer be proven solely through material items or one’s performance in the workplace in the period, another popular method to prove masculinity, especially among boys, was to have the mindset of a man. In 1936, Lewis Terman and Catherine Cox created the “M-F” scale that examined the mental masculinity or femininity in a child, depending on how they answered a set of questions.⁸ The scale asked types of questions that only boys or girls exclusively would know the answers in order to gauge where the particular child fell on the scale. At this time, masculinity was not tied to standing out as an individual. Rather, it was connected with portraying masculine ideals with your personality rather than economic or

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⁶ Kimmel, Manhood in America, 136.
⁷ Kimmel, Manhood in America, 136.
⁸ Ibid, 137.
workplace success. Conformity determined masculinity in the interwar period, and it was an emphasized ideal.

Escape fantasies, either through physical training, books, radio, or film, evolved with a new tone that was not present in previous masculine fantasies earlier in the 20th century. The focus on the masculine body and strength was an important shift. Physical strength was considered an alternative way to demonstrate masculinity, and it was even advertised to promote economic success and prevent oppression as well. The turn-of-the-century men had previously focused on gyms for health, as well as partaking in tonics to gain masculine characteristics such as chest hair. However, the nature of building the masculine body changed in the 1930s. Charles Atlas’s strength campaign during the 1930s and 1940s planned to turn “weaklings into real he-men.” Charles Atlas claimed that he was a former weakling who had built his body to become successful. This emphasis on the building of one’s body to promote masculinity is also prominent within the goals of the Civilian Conservation

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9 Ibid, 133.
11 Kimmel, Manhood in America, 140.
12 Ibid, 86.
13 Ibid, 139.
14 Ibid.
Corps (CCC), which was a program founded in the 1930s to provide young men with work and instill masculine values.  

Sports were another method of proving one’s masculinity in the early 20th century. Kimmel explains that white, middle class men felt that sports would “make young men healthier and instill moral values...In short, sports made boys into men.”

Building the physical body and demonstrating it through sports allowed men to demonstrate masculinity in a way that was particularly visible. The escape fantasies that men and boys enjoyed during this time period were also based on strength, heroic acts, or their ability to save women. There were also escape fantasies that asked men to lower their expectations of life and to manage the daily pressures they encountered as a boy or a man. One of the most popular of the escape fantasies was the Superman comic book, which first appeared in 1938, and focused on an alien man with super powers who disguised himself as a “wimpy” newspaper reporter. Superman, Kimmel explains, promised two traits of a truly masculine hero of the time—that even the weakest man could potentially be a hero and that not all men should accept

15 Suzik, “‘Building Better Men’”, 132.
16 Kimmel, Manhood in America, 93.
17 Kimmel, Manhood in America, 140.
“marital stability.”\textsuperscript{18} Attracted to his strength and abilities, Lois Lane romantically sought Superman, who could not embrace a domestic life or marriage because of his duties as a superhero.\textsuperscript{19} However, fiction was not always an optimistic show of masculinity, and disillusionment with masculinity was demonstrated by F. Scott Fitzgerald’s novel, \textit{The Great Gatsby} (1925). In Fitzgerald’s novel, Jay Gatsby follows the making of a self-made man, including a regimented schedule that involves sports and studying technology, and Gatsby’s recreation as the self-made man was also his downfall.\textsuperscript{20} The novel did not have a happy ending for Jay Gatsby, and it is a demonstration of the disillusionment with masculinity and the self-made man that many men felt at the time.\textsuperscript{21}

Masculinity during the late 1920s and 1930s had lost its footing, and the ability to prove one’s masculinity changed as old methods, such as acting as the breadwinner, were not guaranteed methods. Masculinity became tied to the physical body and thoughts that were considered exclusively masculine, such as understanding politics, knowing economic matters, and not wanting to bathe due to the idea that enjoying a bath and

\textsuperscript{18} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{19} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{20} Kimmel, \textit{Manhood in America}, 143.
\textsuperscript{21} Ibid.
getting clean was feminine.\textsuperscript{22} Although World War I provided a boost of masculinity in returning men, the 1920s and 1930s brought an uncertain capability of proving masculinity through the traditional methods. Due to this, men began partaking in masculine fantasies that were the embodiment of the disillusionment with material goods, the workplace, and the concept of the self-made man because of the economic uncertainty.

In contrast, masculinity in the post-World War II era underwent several changes from the interwar period. The white, middle class in the United States during the post-war period was defined by the rise of suburbia and the uniformity that came with it. The new masculinity partially became a reaction to this homogeneity. The role of the father, the types of escape fantasies, and eventually the response to the Civil Rights Movement and women’s liberation, defined a new type of masculinity during the 1950s and 1960s.

Fatherhood in the post-war era was no longer about using their sons as proof of masculinity. Fathers simply had to be present in order to be deemed successful as a parent. They were the ones who took boys to “to do men’s things” in a ‘man’s’

\textsuperscript{22} Ibid, 137-138.
way.”

23 This removed the previous pressures involved with using boys as proof of masculinity, which was comforting to men. According to Kimmel, fathers in this period were the embodiment of masculinity just by existing. 24 However, the boom of masculine hobbies, especially ones that included both father and son, allowed for an expression of masculine culture while in the home. These included carpentry, making boxcars, working on vehicles, and sports.

25 Aggression and self-interest were other characteristics of post-war masculinity. Men were taught both to repress their aggression, but they were also to stand up for themselves. These contradictory messages made it confusing for men and boys, and Kimmel states, “only in America do boys wear the proverbial chip on their shoulder, so that by waiting for someone to knock it off, he can ‘epitomize all the contradictory orders which have been given.’” 26 This conflict led to a sort of male anxiousness about their abilities to express their aggression and violence.

Violence was also prominent in the post-war escape fantasies. These fantasies took a darker tone after World War II. Many of the heroes of the past, such as the cowboy and the

23 Kimmel, Manhood in America, 149.
24 Ibid, 150.
25 Ibid, 162.
26 Kimmel, Manhood in America, 151.
detective, were portrayed as alienated, selfish, and living in a corrupt world. The women they encountered were equally as negative and selfish. However, western films were still quite popular during the 1950s, as ten percent of all films, television shows, comics, and books created during that time were westerns. Westerns were most popular on television, as eight of the top ten television shows were recreating the western frontier that had been lost. John Wayne films were the embodiment of this, as Wayne became a symbol of the individualized male during a time when conformity was the norm.

Another masculine form of escape that appeared during the post-World War II era was men’s magazines. These magazines, although not necessarily pornographic, explored the sexuality and sexual fantasy of middle class white men. They contained stories of men fighting through jungles, against nature, and actively expressing their aggression with an idealized woman as the final reward. True magazine’s editor stated that these magazines served to “stimulate his masculine ego at a time when man wants to fight back against women’s efforts to usurp his

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27 Ibid, 153.
28 Ibid, 165.
29 Ibid, 166.
30 Kimmel, Manhood in America, 167.
traditional role as head of the family.”\textsuperscript{31} These magazines could also serve as a method of safely expressing aggression, as these masculine men fought for their prize.\textsuperscript{32} One of the most famous men’s magazines, \textit{Playboy}, offered men a further sexual escape, but also became an indication of a new form of masculine proof. Masculinity could be proven more through their efforts at play rather than working or serving as the breadwinner.\textsuperscript{33} These escape fantasies allowed for a new focus of white, middle class masculinity, one that focused on individuality and recreation, rather than fitting in and work.

These concepts continued on into the 1960s, with the African American Civil Rights Movement and women’s liberation movement. White, middle class men continued to lose themselves within their escapist fantasies in the changing period.\textsuperscript{34} Some of the most popular escape fantasies for men and boys were based on the final frontier of space. This became popular in the 1960s after the creation of NASA in 1958, John F. Kennedy’s evoking of the frontier when discussing space and the goals of entering it,

\textsuperscript{31} Kimmel, \textit{Manhood in America}, 167.
\textsuperscript{32} Kimmel, \textit{Manhood in America}, 167.
\textsuperscript{33} Kimmel, \textit{Manhood in America}, 167.
\textsuperscript{34} Kimmel, \textit{Manhood in America}, 174.
television shows such as *Star Trek*, and the popularization of astronauts as American heroes.\textsuperscript{35}

The changes in post-World War II white, middle class masculinity focused on individuality and play more than ever. Fathers were instilling the concepts of masculinity into their sons by being a father and partaking in masculine activities such as teaching their sons how to fix cars and build objects like boxcars. A sense of aggression made for an anxious masculinity.\textsuperscript{36} Men and boys encountered a homogenous suburbia and the challenge to the exclusion of both women and other races, and the types of recreation and entertainment that they partook in allowed them to fight back against the new cultural realities of the post-World War II era.

Video games were a larger part of the masculine leisure activities of the post-World War II era. The types of games being developed were influenced by what defined masculinity during the creators coming-of-age. The masculine nature of the electronic video games is apparent in the categories of video games that were created until 1980.

\textsuperscript{35} Ibid, 177.
\textsuperscript{36} Ibid, 151.
Masculinity and Sports Games

Electronic sports video games were a very popular genre in the beginnings of the industry. Both generations of early video game developers created this type of game. However, the group that was raised before World War II created only this type of game, where the other group created both sports games and other genres of video games. Some of these sports games were Tennis for Two, PONG, the sports games included with the Magnavox Odyssey, and early Atari games based on basketball and football.

Most historians and people in the industry credit William Higinbotham as the creator of the first electronic video game. In 1958, Higinbotham, a physicist who worked at the Brookhaven National Laboratories, created an interactive game for two players on an oscilloscope.\(^{37}\) He created this game as a way to make annual visitor day more noteworthy and engaging. Called Tennis For Two, it stayed in operation at the Brookhaven National Laboratories for two years, where it was enjoyed by many visitors, especially teenage boys.\(^{38}\) The game allowed the players to direct the “tennis ball’s” trajectory, and if the ball cleared the net, the other player could then return the


\(^{38}\) DeMaria and Wilson, High Score!, 10.
ball with the push of a button.\textsuperscript{39} Despite its popularity, Higinbotham never saw this as a lasting project worth keeping at the laboratory, and he later dismantled Tennis For Two for parts for other projects.

In 1966, an early pioneer of the industry, Ralph Baer, began developing the concept of the home video game console.\textsuperscript{40} Baer’s concept of the home console, which he called the “Brown Box,” stemmed back to early work he did while employed with Sanders Associates, an electronics company that specialized in military equipment.\textsuperscript{41} By 1967, Baer and his coworkers had a working video game version of both tennis and hockey.\textsuperscript{42} Baer’s efforts at marketing to various television companies were not successful; no one was interested in manufacturing his video game system. Baer’s game console did attract the interest of one person—Bill Enders, a former employee of RCA who had been impressed with Baer’s pitch. Once Enders left for Magnavox and became the vice president of marketing for the company, he

\textsuperscript{39} Tristan Donovan, \textit{Replay: The History of Video Games} (East Sussex: Yellow Ant, 2010), 9.
\textsuperscript{40} DeMaria and Wilson, \textit{High Score!}, 15.
offered Baer a contract. This led to the production of the first home video game console: the Magnavox Odyssey.\textsuperscript{43}

Although Ralph Baer had invented the system in 1967, the Magnavox Odyssey was not released until May 1972. The system was very primitive, and it relied on screen overlays for the television and items, such as a light gun, to play the twelve games. \textsuperscript{44} These games included a table tennis game, much like Higenbotham’s, and several sports games, such as football, baseball, basketball, and hockey. In the interwar period, sports were largely reserved for men and boys to enjoy, and these would have been a masculine activity that the developers would have enjoyed growing up.

Despite heavy promotion of the system, the Odyssey was only a marginal success, selling anywhere from between 100,000 units to 200,000 units in its two years on the market.\textsuperscript{45} The Odyssey suffered from its attachment to the Magnavox brand, as many potential customers thought that the video game system would only work with Magnavox televisions. Television salesmen did nothing to combat this notion at the time as the system was only

\textsuperscript{43} Herman, Phoenix, 9.
\textsuperscript{44} DeMaria and Wilson, High Score!, 18.
\textsuperscript{45} The number of units of the Odyssey that were sold in total is 100,000 to 200,000 depending on sources. In comparison, the home version of PONG sold 150,000 units in the holiday season of 1975. Herman, Phoenix, 9, 16. DeMaria and Wilson, High Score!, 18.
sold within Magnavox stores. Consequently, the system remained on the market for only two years.

The early generation of developers was instrumental in the growth of the video game industry, and the types of games they created were influenced by interwar masculinity. Higenbotham and Baer were born in 1910 and 1922, respectively, which would place their understanding and construction of white, middle class masculinity in the period between the world wars. In particular, the types of games that they created were based on pure skill, competition to win at the electronic games, and sports, which were part of the era’s masculine emphasis on the growth of the body. These games also lacked a narrative or individualistic control of a character of any kind. During the same period, younger engineers were creating video games with a narrative and an individualized character to control. The lack of a narrative in these early games created by Higenbotham and Baer can be attributed more to the masculine concepts of proving skill, while also creating video games that were not emphasizing individualism through characterization and narrative.

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46 DeMaria and Wilson, High Score!, 18.
47 Spacewar, which was created by three MIT students in 1962, is a great example of a simplistic narrative-based game created during the same period.
Two other sports games, *Atari Football* (1978) and *Atari Basketball* (1978), were released in the early years of electronic gaming. These games function differently than previous sports games. In particular, these games allowed the user to control an individual player in the sport. Unlike the Odyssey’s earlier attempt at a football game, *Atari Football* was an accurate simulation of a game, while also allowing direct control of football players, represented by an X or an O.\(^{48}\) This is similar to *Atari Basketball*, where the user controls a basketball player in a one-on-one game.\(^{49}\) This shows that there was a transition into controlling individuals in accurate sporting games, which demonstrates a change into a narrative-based electronic video game. The shift to including a narrative or a character that the user could relate to is important, as it allows an individualistic story that lets the player place himself within the game.

One video game serves as an example of the shift to the narrative—*PONG*. Nolan Bushnell (born in 1943), the game’s inventor, received his degree in engineering in 1968 and worked in the midway arcade section of a California theme park. Bushnell’s history in the midway arcade and his education

\(^{48}\) *Atari Football* (Coin-Operated), Atari (Atari, Inc., 1978).

\(^{49}\) *Atari Basketball* (Coin-Operated), Atari (Atari, Inc., 1978).
directly influenced his future as the pioneer of the early arcade years in the United States. Bushnell is credited with creating the first coin-operated arcade game. He went on to establish one of the most successful and well-known video game companies of 1970s and early 1980s—Atari. In his early years as a game developer, Bushnell attended a marketing tour that Magnavox and Sanders Associates embarked upon to demonstrate the Magnavox Odyssey, including early video games for the Odyssey.\textsuperscript{50} After seeing the idea for a “table tennis” game, Bushnell created his own version of Baer’s concept.\textsuperscript{51} Bushnell’s first video game, \textit{Computer Space}, was regarded as too difficult, which made it financially unsuccessful. Because of this, Bushnell used Baer’s more simplistic concept to make his own game that he felt would make money.\textsuperscript{52} This game was \textit{PONG}. Unlike the two earlier tennis-based games, \textit{PONG} did have a marketing technique that allowed for a very basic narrative in a sports video game—simple instructions on the front of the arcade cabinet that said “avoid missing ball for high score.”\textsuperscript{53} \textit{PONG} is important, as it demonstrates the newer generation utilizing the earlier

\textsuperscript{50} Herman, \textit{Phoenix}, 12.
\textsuperscript{51} “Magnavox Sues Firms Making Video Games, Charges Infringement,” \textit{The Wall Street Journal}. April 17, 1974.
\textsuperscript{52} DeMaria and Wilson, \textit{High Score!}, 16.
\textsuperscript{53} \textit{PONG} (Coin-Operated), Atari (Atari, Inc., 1972).
developers’ concepts. Bushnell took the “table tennis” game, and he provided a basic narrative and sense of competition amongst players.

Sports games underwent a shift from very basic games that had no identifiable character to simulations that allowed video game consumers to play as sports players. It is understandable that sports would serve as the primary inspiration for the early game developers, especially Higenbotham and Baer, as sports were considered very masculine and a moral activity. In comparison, the shift to controlling an individual in the games created by developers born in the post-World War II era can be tied to other individualistic leisure activities that were encouraged.

Masculinity and Space Video Games

Another popular genre of video game to emerge in the early years was the space-based game. Space games were very popular throughout the 1970s and 1980s, but the genre was started in the 1960s. With an emphasis on reliving masculine space fantasies and battles from popular books, movies, and comics, these games are a reflection of Cold War masculinity, as they emphasize this

54 Kimmel, Manhood in America, 93.
individualistic narrative and the idea of space as a frontier realm.

Steve Russell (born in 1937), a graduate student in engineering at MIT in the early 1960s, created one of the earliest video games with his colleagues, Martin Graetz and Wayne Wiitanen. The development of Spacewar began in the winter of 1961 on a PDP-1 computer, which was limited to laboratories, schools, and companies due to the size and price. Russell unveiled the game to his fellow students in early 1962. The game allowed for two players, who controlled spaceships that were battling each another for space supremacy. They also had to avoid the gravitational pull of the Sun.

This game tied into the larger fascination with science fiction and space that was occurring at the time, due to the space race and the creation of NASA in 1958. The novels and movies that Russell was watching at the time directly inspired him and his fellow students’ creation. Their primary influence was the sci-fi novels written by E.E. Smith, an engineer who later became well known for writing the science fiction series

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*Lensman* and *Skylark*. When discussing his inspiration behind *Spacewar*, Steve Russell explained

> I had just finished reading 'Doc' Smith’s *Lensman* series. He was some sort of scientist, but he wrote this really dashing sort of science fiction. The details were very good, and it had excellent pace. His heroes had a strong tendency to get pursued by the villain across the galaxy and have to invent their way out of their problem while they were being pursued. That sort of action was the thing that suggested *Spacewar*. He had some very glowing descriptions of spaceship encounters and space fleet maneuvers.

*Spacewar* allowed for these game developers throughout the United States to play out the space-based masculine escape fantasies that they enjoyed reading and watching. However, *Spacewar* had a limited pool of players since the game only ran on very expensive computers until the 1970s.

*Spacewar*, as well as the other space-based games that followed, allowed the player to exert control over an individualistic character. This theme became prominent in other genres as the younger developers made games, and the character was a representation of the player. This created a narrative-based storyline that gave players control of how the story played out through winning or losing.

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This concept continued when Bushnell decided to become a video game developer. His interest in video games stemmed from playing Spacewar during his time as an engineering student, which he decided would be profitable if it were converted into a coin-operated machine. However, the price and size of computers during the mid-1960s was an immense hurdle. Bushnell stated, “With the million-dollar computers of the time, it wouldn’t work.”\(^{60}\) The price of computers would eventually drop, which allowed for more accessibility. In the early 1970s, Bushnell was able to create a coin-operated system that could run his version of Spacewar. In 1971, he began working for Nutting Associates, who manufactured Bushnell’s game, entitled *Computer Space*. While *Computer Space* was quite popular in student bars, the units that were installed in “working men’s bars” made next to no money. Bushnell surmised consequently that the game must have been too complex in its gameplay and too sci-fi driven in its content for the working-class clientele.\(^{61}\)

*Computer Space* offered similar narrative-based play as the game that inspired it, *Spacewar*, where the gamer played as a

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\(^{60}\) Donovan, *Replay*, 17.  
\(^{61}\) DeMaria and Wilson, *High Score!*\(^{16}\); After *Computer Space*, Bushnell made a deal with Bally Midway to create a driving game that they felt would be more appealing in the working men’s bars. Bushnell never delivered this promise. Donovan, *Replay*, 20, 23.
spaceship that had to survive in a space-based battle. Although
Computer Space was not a financial success, it encouraged
Bushnell to leave Nutting Associates and create his own company.
It was initially named Syzygy Engineering. After renaming the
company, Atari was incorporated in June 1972.

Atari continued to released space-based games through the
1970s. One of its most popular games was Asteroids (1979).62 In
Asteroids, the player controls a spaceship through an asteroid
field while fighting off alien ships.63 The theme of controlling
the individualistic ship from certain destruction was continued
through Asteroids, and the theme proved to be popular in the
United States.

During the same year, Space Invaders was released. Space
Invaders, although developed in Japan, was very successful with
the North American market. In its first year, Space Invaders
sold 60,000 arcade cabinets.64 While this may not seem as
significant as the numbers of home consoles, the difference in
price between home consoles and arcade cabinets was

64 Steven L. Kent, The Ultimate History of Video Games: From PONG to Pokemon
and Beyond—The Story Behind the Craze That Touched Our Lives and Changed the
substantial. The concept of this game is to protect bases from an alien invasion using a shooting spaceship. Space Invaders proved that the theme of playing an individual in space was very popular in the United States, even if the game itself was not developed within North America.

Space-themed games continued to be one of the most prominent genres throughout the 1970s and 1980s, and they were also some of the most popular. These themes tapped into the individualistic masculinity, while also including the frontier of space that became prominent in escape fantasies. Space games were one of the first types of video games to be released, and the narratives within them allowed them to appeal to boys and men in the Cold War United States.

Masculinity and Combat Games

The combat genre was also quite popular in the early period of the video game industry in the U.S. This genre includes games in which you fight another player in a war or fighting setting. Kimmel argued that men and boys in the Cold War period were drawn to aggressive entertainment since they were not supposed

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65 Arcade cabinets were an expensive investment, but they consistently brought in money. Once a home console was sold, the only money that could be made beyond the initial sale was through software.

66 Space Invaders (Coin-Operated), Taito (Midway Games Inc.), 1979.
to be violent unless provoked. Combat games could serve to relieve this aggression and tension, and the individualized style allowed players to take charge of the battle.

Nolan Bushnell argued that combat video games were a safe method of expressing aggression. When questioned about combat-based video games in a New York Times article, Bushnell explained

I believe one of the things these games do is provide a socially acceptable way of venting hostility and aggression. It’s long been believed in taverns that coin-operated video games cut down the number of fights, because they give people a way of competing.68

This ties into Kimmel’s argument that men in the post-World War II era had a sense of aggression.69 Combat video games were a method of expressing the aggression, as well as allowing for a sense of competition and proving masculinity through video game skill.

Tank (1974), Gun Fight (1975), Combat (1977, and several other early video games were examples of the combat genre. These games provided a chance for players to assume a role within the game and to play out the narrative of the fight. Tank and Combat were both games in which the player assumed control of a

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67 Kimmel, Manhood in America, 151.
69 Kimmel, Manhood in America, 167.
military tank, and the goal was to destroy the other player’s tank.\textsuperscript{70} Gun Fight was based on an old North American West duel between two cowboys who are shooting for supremacy.\textsuperscript{71} These games are representative of the early genre of combat games, and they emphasize the individualistic narrative while allowing for a safe show of aggression through electronic gaming.

\textbf{Conclusion}

The differences in masculinity and the age of the game developers’ led to two very different styles of electronic video games in the 1950s-1970s, with the younger generation’s narrative-based games winning the battle by the 1970s. There is a shift from purely skill-based electronic games that focused entirely on sports, which had its roots in masculinity in the early 20\textsuperscript{th} century, to more complicated video games that were representative of the individualized masculine escape fantasies that emerged in the United States after World War II. The narrative-based electronic games became very popular in the 1970s, and they influenced the future of the electronic video gaming industry in the United States. This masculine-based industry led to a reflection of masculine culture within the

\textsuperscript{70} Tank (Coin-Operated), Atari (Atari, Inc, 1974); Combat (Atari 2600), Atari (Atari, Inc., 1977).

\textsuperscript{71} Gun Fight (Coin-Operated), Taito and David Nutting (Midway Games, 1975).
video games and the industry that extended into the early 1980s. This culture was present in the advertisements, games, developers, magazines, and the players of video games.
GAMING CULTURE

In a never-released commercial created by the Atari coin-operated division, a young couple happily played Atari Football. As the commercial continued, it was clear that the man was losing greatly at the game, but he is not upset about his loss. Upon zooming out, it becomes clear that the woman playing Atari Football is topless, and thus she was winning because she was baring her breasts to distract the man.¹ This commercial is representative of the masculine culture reflected through electronic video gaming in the 1970s and early 1980s.

According to Kimmel, the recreation of a realm, in this case a masculine sphere, was an attempt to “create those symbols to help us return to those earlier experiences so that we can again feel secure and without anxiety.”² For example, football was a masculine sphere, as it was a realm exclusive for men to demonstrate their skills and physical prowess.³ In the case of football, women are only present in a subordinate position, such as cheerleaders. Through electronic video gaming, a masculine sphere was created, as well.

¹ Kent, The Ultimate History of Video Games, 134.
² Kimmel, Manhood in America, 81.
³ Ibid.
This masculine realm surrounding the electronic video game was a projection of white, middle class masculinity, and this was reflected in the types of magazines that covered the industry, advertisements, arcade environments, the language used by developers, and the styles of video games that were created. One of the most significant reflections of this white, middle class masculinity in video gaming is the type of games that were created. During the 1970s and early 1980s, video gaming was a primarily a masculine sphere, and the culture of gaming reflected this notion through the developers and the industry, the players and gaming locations, as well as gaming-based journalism. Through all of these elements, a construction of the masculine sphere surrounding video gaming was reflected and promoted.

The Industry

The video game industry, specifically the developers and companies, was a primarily white, middle-class male-based business. It was estimated that at the peak of the United States’ dominance in video games in the late 1970s and early 1980s, there were one hundred video game designers. Of this one
hundred, only four or five were women.\(^4\) This led to video games and their advertisements being conceived through a white, middle class masculine perspective.

One of the most visible places that masculinity was present in the video gaming culture was advertisement. Through commercials, print advertisements, and artwork for video games, the video game industry demonstrated this culture. Although this was not typically the case, the developers of the coin-operated division of Atari, rather than a marketing company, created several advertisements for the company. The Atari Football advertisement is a great example of the developers creating supplemental materials for their video games that presented a gendered representation of the games. It demonstrated that men were considered the dominant gamer in terms of skills, and that the only way that a woman could win was through diversion, in this case, removing her clothing. Another instance is another unaired commercial created by the Atari coin-operated division. In this advertisement, the men from Atari enter a brothel, where they encounter many women dressed in lingerie. One of these women is the only woman who worked in the Atari coin-operated division, Dona Bailey. Although women surround the developers,

\(^4\) Haddon, “Electronic and Computer Games,” 64.
the men direct their attention to an *Asteroids Deluxe* arcade cabinet instead. The women are ignored.\(^5\) It is important to note that in this commercial, Bailey was portrayed as a prostitute rather than one of the fellow developers who were interested in the game, which is a demonstration of the masculine sphere of video gaming. It suggests that Bailey, although she was part of the team, was primarily categorized by her sex rather than her skills as a developer. The *Atari Football* advertisement is gendered in that it indicates how these developers viewed women, as the woman in the advertisement was not able to win through skill alone. The *Asteroids Deluxe* commercial shows women in sexy clothing, including the only woman on the Atari coin-operated team, and the women seek the attention of the men who are distracted by the video game instead.

The advertisements from the industry represented the product. Many of the early Atari coin-operated print advertisements embodied this culture. The print ad for the infamous Atari game, *Gotcha*, is a great example of this culture. The ad showed visible controllers that resemble breasts, a young woman in skimpy clothing, as well as a young man who pursued her to demonstrate the maze gameplay. It emphasized the man as the

\(^5\) Kent, *The Ultimate History of Video Games*, 134.
dominant gamer, and introduced the new controls. The early Atari print ads typically showed both a young man and a young woman, which could potentially show that video gaming would be a good way to meet the opposite sex. However, while the men in the ads were fully dressed, or even dressed in a costume that represented the game, the woman was dressed in an outfit that was short or revealing. The men were playing the game, while the woman looked on or posed next to the cabinet. The women in the advertisements are shown in a subordinate position to the man, and it showed that the perceived roles of the men were to be the dominant player. This type of advertisement is gendered. It shows the man as the person acting, while the woman is either being acted upon, such as Gotcha, or is portrayed as an accessory to the action, such as the advertisement for Gran Trak 10. The woman in the print adverts was never shown playing the game. Atari’s Space Race advertisement, released in 1973, showed a woman posing next to the cabinet in a short skirt. She is not playing the game, and the arcade cabinet is not even turned on. However, this trend was not exclusive to Atari. When

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6 DeMaria and Wilson, *High Score!*, 24.
8 This advertisement shows a man in a full racing uniform and helmet as a woman in a short skirt watches him play.
Bally/Midway created its own version of PONG in 1973, entitled Winner, the accompanying advertisement followed the same pattern as the early Atari games, even though the advertisement is drawn, rather than a photograph. The advertisement shows a man wearing a suit and playing Winner while a woman looks on admiringly. In these advertisements, a hierarchy was established that placed men at the top, since they were able to demonstrate great skill at these games. The women were shown as attracted to the man due to his skill at the game in these print advertisements. These types of advertisement were common, and they showed that women were not active players of video games. Men were shown as the active party within the ads, and they are considered the skilled sex. In almost all of these advertisements, women are being portrayed as accessories or sex symbols rather than active gamers. It promotes the construction of a masculine sphere in video gaming, and it solidified the concept that gaming was considered a masculine leisure activity.

Game developers also promoted a masculine gaming culture through the types of video games that they created. In addition to the sports, space, and combat-based video games, there were other types of games developed in the United States that were

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10 Burnham, Supercade, 97.
also heavily influenced by masculinity. One such game was Atari’s *Gotcha*, released in 1973. Al Alcorn, who helped Nolan Bushnell create the first PONG prototype, developed *Gotcha*. *Gotcha* had simple gameplay, where a player controlled the symbol +, while the other controlled the symbol ■. These shapes had to navigate a maze to catch the other.\(^{11}\) *Gotcha* did not stand out for its gameplay; it stood out for its controllers on the arcade cabinet. Most arcade games in the 1970s and early 1980s utilized a joystick, which was adapted for use for video games from aircraft.\(^{12}\) *Gotcha*, on the other hand, had two pink domes that were manipulated and squeezed to control the individual characters, rather than the traditional joysticks. Alcorn designed the controller to resemble female breasts, as the Atari team joked that the joysticks were phallic and that their name was sexual.\(^{13}\) Due to the nature of the controllers, *Gotcha* was commonly referred to as “the boob game,” and the advertisements for the game showed a conservatively dressed young man grabbing

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the waist of a young woman who was wearing a short, low-cut
dress with the arcade cabinet in the background displaying the
new controllers. 14 Although the new controllers initially gained
popularity, especially in single’s bars, Gotcha was not a big
hit. 15 Eventually, the pink domes were replaced with the
traditional joysticks to avoid controversy. 16

Another controversial and masculine aspect of the video
gaming culture was the influx of adult, X-Rated games that were
developed and published in the early 1980s. These games varied
in their play styles, which included text-based computer games
and visual video games for home consoles, such as the Atari
2600. Many of these games involved sexual intercourse or rape
into the regular gameplay that was typical with non-sexual
games. To win, the avatar had to have sexual intercourse through
conquest. Although several of these games were released, many
for the the Atari 2600 game system, the most contentious was
Mystique’s Custer’s Revenge (1982). Custer’s Revenge’s gameplay
involved maneuvering a mostly nude George Custer through a hail

14 Burnham, Supercade, 93.
15 The controllers were a big hit at the bars, and the clientele also caught
on that the controllers resembled female breasts. Burnham, Supercade, 93.
16 Atari preemptively removed the old controllers to avoid controversy, rather
than risk being offensive. Typical arcade owners were not as pleased with the
controllers as the bars. Kent, The Ultimate History of Video Games, 62.
of arrows to reach to “rape” an Indian woman for a high score.\footnote{Custer wears boots and a hat in the game, is otherwise naked. His erect penis is visible. \textit{Custer’s Revenge} (Atari 2600), Mystique (Mystique, 1982).} Whether the intercourse was consensual was up for debate. Nevertheless, the game caused quite a controversy with feminist groups, the American Indian Community House of New York City, other Native American groups, and the general public.\footnote{“The Brouhaha Over X-Rated Games,” \textit{New York Times}, October 24, 1982, 145; Jas, “New Videogames Degrade,” \textit{Off Our Backs} 12 (1982), 12; Jas, “’Custer’s Revenge’ Removed: X-Rated Video Games Multiply,” \textit{Off Our Backs} 13 (1983), 27.} These games were overtly sexual, despite their limited visual nature. They present a masculine fantasy of sexual conquering, which is similar to the masculine escape fantasies where men obtained women as a reward for their masculine endeavors in the men’s magazines of the 1960s and 1970s.\footnote{Kimmel, \textit{Manhood in America}, 167.}

\textit{Softporn Adventure}, developed and published by Sierra On-Line in 1981, also emphasized sexual themes in its gameplay. Sierra On-Line was primarily known for its adventure and puzzle games in the early 1980s, and \textit{Softporn Adventure} continued in the same vein as the previous games, since it was an adventure game. However, it differed from the others because of its overt sexual themes and gameplay. The game stemmed from developers at Sierra On-Line creating programs who would print out pictures of
naked women in their spare time.\textsuperscript{20} The goal of \textit{Softporn Adventure} was to engage in sexual activity while avoiding venereal diseases. The co-owner of Sierra On-Line, Ken Williams, decided to self-publish the adult game since no software publisher was interested.\textsuperscript{21} The advertisement for the game featured three topless women in a hot tub, while a waiter with wine and an Apple II computer sat next to the women.\textsuperscript{22} One of the women in the advertisement was Roberta Williams, a developer who created some of Sierra’s most popular video games, such as \textit{Mystery House} and \textit{The Wizard and the Princess}, and co-owner of Sierra On-Line with her husband Ken. The game and advertisement demonstrate the masculine culture of video gaming, as they display women as sexualized objects, while also promoting promiscuity as an achievement. It shows that women in the video games were the reward for proving masculine skill, and as previously mentioned, this was similar to the men’s magazine stories where men “won” sexy women as their reward.\textsuperscript{23}

Another common theme in video games was aggression and violence. Kimmel examined masculine aggression in the Cold War

\textsuperscript{21} Levy, \textit{Hackers}, 336.
\textsuperscript{22} Levy, \textit{Hackers}, 337.
\textsuperscript{23} Kimmel, \textit{Manhood in America}, 167.
United States in *Manhood in America*, and Bushnell argued that including it in video games actually reduced the rate of fighting.\(^{24}\) In a column on game developers in *Joystik Magazine*, Eugene Jarvis, who developed *Defender*, discusses aggression in video games as well. Jarvis noted about the aggressive behavior found in his games, “I’m an action player. I like to be aggressive. I don’t like to be on the run. I like to feel like I have the fates in my hands and that through my skill or lack thereof I control my fate.”\(^{25}\) Aggression, Kimmel argues, was a part of Cold War white, middle class masculinity.\(^{26}\) Video games reflected this notion, as they engaged in many aggressive themes, such as the shoot-‘em-up games and combat games.

Another controversial game was developed and released in 1976. In *Death Race*, the goal was to run over gremlins while dodging the crosses that appeared after a gremlin was killed.\(^{27}\) The game portrayed violence, and the advertisement claimed, “it’s fascinating!”\(^{28}\) Due to what was considered excessive violence, groups, such as the National Safety Council, pushed back, claiming that the game promoted this violence and allowed

\(^{26}\) Kimmel, *Manhood in America*, 151.
\(^{27}\) *Death Race* (Coin-Operated), Exidy (Exidy, 1976).
players to become “an actor in the process” rather than passive viewers. However, in part because of the controversy, Death Race went on to be highly successful, bringing in $2.5-3 million in revenue. Death Race was the first electronic video game targeted specifically for its violence, but the game itself was a piece of the masculine culture of video gaming. At its core, Death Race is a video game based on skill as an “expert driver,” or the user who achieved the highest kill count while dodging the crosses. This is also tied to the aggression and violence that Kimmel argues was dominant in white, middle class masculinity of the post-World War II era.

Trade shows were also a prominent place where the masculine culture was noticeable. Video game magazines covered these trade shows, and many of these shows promoted a masculine sphere. While writing on the Amusement Operators Expo, journalist Scott Phillips stated that many of the big arcade operators had “bleached blondes passing out brochures” by their machines as promotion. John Holmstrom’s article, “Three Days in Heaven,”

30 Ibid, 12.
31 Blumenthal, “’Death Race’ Game Gains Favor, but Not With the Safety Council,” 12.
32 Kimmel, Manhood in America, 151.
33 Although this practice was common, it also emphasized the masculine sphere that made women subordinate to men, rather than as active participants. Scott
also commented on this marketing technique.\textsuperscript{34} Holmstrom chose to draw cartoons to reflect his experience. One cartoon had a woman wearing a small bathing suit standing with an arcade cabinet, and the caption says, “Girls! Girls! Girls!” Most of the game manufacturers hire beautiful models to show off the games—but they were so sexy it was hard to keep your mind on the machines.”\textsuperscript{35} These articles demonstrate that the industry chose to utilize women as accessories and sex symbols rather than gamers themselves.

Through the types of video games and advertisements made for these games, the industry reflected a masculine culture. These games displayed masculine escape fantasies, men’s activities, violence, and overt sexuality, which promoted a male sphere within video gaming, and it allowed video gaming to be considered a hobby that was acceptable primarily for men to enjoy.

\textbf{The Players and the Gaming Realm}

Game developers were not the only people who were making video gaming a primarily masculine sphere in the 1970s and early


\textsuperscript{35} Holmstrom, “Three Days in Heaven,” 65.
1980s. The places where electronic video gaming occurred were traditionally masculine spaces, and gaming continued that notion. Some gamers, meanwhile, encouraged the idea that video gaming was a masculine hobby, and some players let their feelings on this be known through the media.

Starting in the early 1970s, video gaming took place in primarily masculine places. Bars had traditionally been masculine locations, and before electronic video gaming, other types of skill gaming and penny arcades were placed in bars during the early 20th century.\textsuperscript{36} This trend continued with the introduction of electronic video gaming. Many of the early arcade cabinets in the 1970s, including \textit{Computer Space} and \textit{Pong}, were tested in bars in the United States to gauge interest. Nolan Bushnell explained the importance of these locations as a way to reach the target audience:

\begin{quote}
\textit{Computer Space} did very well on college campuses and in places where the education level was higher. However, there weren’t any arcades as such back then. You had to put your machines in bowling alleys and beer bars. That was the market. If you couldn’t do well in Joe’s Bar and Grill, you had no chance.\textsuperscript{37}
\end{quote}


\textsuperscript{37} DeMaria and Wilson, \textit{High Score!}, 16.
These locations that Bushnell mentions housed other types of arcade games, such as pinball, non-electronic shooting gallery games, and other such skill-based games, which traditionally were masculine leisure activities.\(^3^8\) Electronic video games were placed with these skill-based games in the bars and other venues, and they especially proved popular with men in bars near college campuses.\(^3^9\)

Although women did play video games and more began to enter the scene in the early 1980s, locations for video gaming were considered primarily for men. An article by Joyce Worley in *Electronic Games* magazine explained that many of the locations where early video gaming occurred were considered unsafe for women to enter:

> When a woman did actually show up, she could usually be found hanging timidly at the fringes of the action, watching her date prove his masculinity by bashing a poor defenseless pinball machine into submission. They rarely actually played the machines, and so didn’t perform very well on those infrequent occasions when they did stick a coin in the slot.\(^4^0\)

The early arcades, which Worley considered “seedy,” “shabby,” and “dirty,” were primarily considered masculine spaces that

\(^3^8\) Herman, *Phoenix*, 12.  
\(^3^9\) Kent, *The Ultimate History of Video Games*, 34.  
were associated with gambling.\textsuperscript{41} The men considered the women who attended as accessories to the masculine-based action, as they were either the girlfriends or wives of men who played video games.\textsuperscript{42}

In addition to the locations, the primary audience of electronic video gaming also shaped the masculine culture surrounding gaming. Mark Stephen Pierce, an Atari employee, explained that the arcades are “home of our target demographic, fourteen year old boys. The second ring of the bull’s-eye includes males, ages twelve to twenty-two; currently, nobody else matters.”\textsuperscript{43} However, early advertisements for arcade cabinets from the early-to mid-1970s state that they were ideal for bars, as well as cocktail lounges, which would indicate an older clientele.\textsuperscript{44} Despite the initial push for coin-operated games in bars and lounges, arcades in the late 1970s and early 1980s appealed to mostly young, school-age boys and also professional white, middle class men. Stories of men in three-

\textsuperscript{42} Worley, “Women Join the Arcade Revolution,” 31
\textsuperscript{44} DeMaria and Wilson, \textit{High Score!}, 22-23.
piece suits at arcades during their lunch breaks were not rare.\textsuperscript{45} Despite this, it seems that most people who played video games were boys of high school age.\textsuperscript{46}

Players themselves perpetuated the idea that video gaming was a hobby meant for men. A gamer, William Pobedinsky wrote a letter to the editor to complain about a 1983 article in Video and Computer Gaming Illustrated that examined women’s roles in gaming, stating that the magazine was “supposed to report on video cartridges and arcade games, not the selling of sex or the feminist outlook on the industry.”\textsuperscript{47} He continued, “I don’t want a magazine that supplies minority views, but a video magazine. And how could women be a minority anyway?”\textsuperscript{48} Another letter to the editor section complained that game reviewer E.C. Meade did not finish the games that she played, and that she should be expected to have knowledge of every game reviewed.\textsuperscript{49} This occurs in other issues as well, such as a gamer complaining, “If she took the time out to play any game at all, she would have known

\begin{footnotesize}
\textsuperscript{48} Ibid, 53.
\textsuperscript{49} Ibid, 54.
\end{footnotesize}
that it is not a paddle or any other control at all.”

While there are some other complaints regarding the reviewers, only the ones directed at E.C. Meade, the only woman who reviewed games for Video and Computer Gaming Illustrated, indicate that she did not play the games that she reviewed. This realm of gaming was perceived to be exclusively for white, middle class men, and women who entered this sphere created disorder, which some male gamers resisted.

The players and the gaming places were part of the gendered sphere of video gaming. The types of early video game players, the locations where gaming took place, and the reactions of male gamers perpetuated the masculine culture surrounding video gaming in the 1970s and early 1980s. Pieces of this culture were holdovers from the previous arcades and skill-gaming cultures, and the players included electronic video gaming as a leisure hobby for men and boys.

Gaming and Journalism

Magazines dedicated to electronic video games reached newsstands for the first time in the early 1980s. Newspapers,

51 Most complaints against the male reviewers just disagreed with their opinion or argued that they did not like the system they played on. “Input,” Video and Computer Gaming Illustrated, October 1983, 53; “Input,” Video and Computer Gaming Illustrated, January 1984, 54.
such as the *New York Times*, began covering the industry as electronic video gaming became more popular in the United States. There were also articles published in other popular magazines, especially those that appealed to men. These types of journalism embraced the masculine culture of video gaming, and journalists wrote on both the industry and the players. The video game magazines were written to a primarily male audience, with very few examples of articles that were directed at or appealed to women readers. The newspaper articles typically highlighted boys and men, especially when writing articles about who played video games and why. Very few articles were written that highlight the women who were working in the industry, as well as women who played video games, while male developers and gamers were spotlighted many times.\(^{52}\) These magazines and newspaper articles also highlighted the masculine nature of the electronic video game industry in the 1970s and early 1980s.

Many video game magazines emerged with the growing popularity of video games in the late 1970s and early 1980s, but many had relatively short print runs. These magazines were published to provide gamers with information on arcade games that were being released, home games and consoles, and articles

\(^{52}\) In the game magazines I examined, there were less than five articles that focused on women in gaming.
about the industry itself. However, the magazines reflected the masculine types of video games that were released, as well as highlighting male developers and publishing cartoons that indicated that women were not playing video games, but cleaning houses instead.⁵³

Many of the video games magazines, but especially Joystik Magazine, included monthly articles regarding the nationwide high scores for popular games. These articles were quite revealing, as the majority of the gamers were men.⁵⁴ Although this was more indicative of who the players were, the magazine also highlighted specific players to gain insight on arcade gaming. During the entire run of Joystik Magazine, only one issue highlighted women in this section.⁵⁵ However, this was only because of a request for a feature on women in the letters to the editor section.⁵⁶ Melanie Jean Mayfield wrote in, “I’d like to request a feature on women champs for a change...Anyway, how ‘bout giving the ladies a little recognition in the world of video? Some of us happen to be ACES!”⁵⁷ Although this may be seen as a step away from a purely masculine culture in the magazine,

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⁵⁶ Women were indeed interested in gaming, as proven by the existence of this article. However, the magazines were written for a primarily male audience, as these were the predominant players of video games as well.
in the same issue, *Joystik Magazine* ran an “Arcade Beauty Pageant” that included a graphic with every winning game with bare legs and high heels. The games themselves in these articles are also feminized objects, which men could exert control over. It demonstrates that although some women were entering the arcades, the sphere was still for men. It also indicated that there was a disconnect between the magazine publishers and a portion of the readership.

Most of the game magazines of the early 1980s focused on how to conquer popular games. *Electronic Games, Joystik Magazine*, and *Video and Computer Gaming Illustrated* all ran features throughout their runs about getting high scores for these games, and readers could write the editors regarding their scores and successes. Magazines encouraged the masculine competitiveness nationwide to get the highest score on the popular arcade games.

There were also many articles published in popular newspapers such as the *New York Times* regarding video games and the industry. These articles also reflected the masculine

culture within video games. One of these articles examined the new trend of “space age pinball machines,” or the new arcade games in 1974.\(^\text{60}\) In this article, arcade games were considered “the thinking man’s plaything, his intellectual equivalent to the truck driver’s pinballs.”\(^\text{61}\) The article continued to explain that whereas pinball is partially luck, playing video games relied on skill and competition with another human being, which appealed to men and boys, creating “five o’clock widows.”\(^\text{62}\) This article perpetuates the concept of the masculine realm of gaming, as women were the “widows” of the men and boys who were out playing the video games.

Other articles examined the masculine aspects and culture of gaming. An article in the New York Times identified one of the primary reasons that the game appeals to boys and men was the “sublimated violence” within the games.\(^\text{63}\) In Aljean Harmetz’s “Is Electronic-Games Boom Hurting the Movies?,” a representative of Gottlieb, best known for its game Q*Bert, stated:

Even though the games require hand eye coordination, not strength...my ten-year-old daughter plays them half-heartedly when there’s nothing

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\(^\text{60}\) Range, “Space Age Pinball Machines,” 99.
\(^\text{61}\) Ibid, 100.
\(^\text{62}\) Ibid, 103.
else to do. My nine-year-old son is a master. Once we learn how to appeal to women, we can double our business. The acknowledgement that businessmen and young men were the primary audience of video gaming throughout the article showed that The New York Times believed that gamers of the time were primarily men and boys, as they thought women and girls were not as interested in the long term. The article ends with Nolan Bushnell stating, “a video game allows a nine-year-old boy to compete with his father as an equal and beat him fair and square.”

The culture of gaming was a masculine domain, where competition amongst men and boys thrived. These articles reflected this.

Lastly, there were also articles published in non-video game magazines. For example, Popular Electronics, Esquire, Newsweek, and Businessweek published articles within their pages about video games. Video games, especially the sexualized games like Custer’s Revenge, were also advertised in adult men’s magazines, such as Playboy and Penthouse. The articles focused on topics such as examining the past and future of video games,

64 Harmetz, “Is Electronic-Games Boom Hurting the Movies?” C11.
65 Ibid.
making your own hack of Spacewar, an analysis on the popularity of Asteroids, and the economics of video gaming. The publication of these articles and advertisements for video games in magazines that had a large male readership also acknowledges that journalists perceived video gaming as a primarily a white, middle class masculine culture where men were the exclusive players.

In a Newsweek article from 1981, the author compared the new gamers of the early 1980s to “pinball wizards and pool sharks before them” while acknowledging that the vast majority of the players were either teenage boys or “pinstriped elders.” The article also described competition amongst players and themselves, where one player said, “it’s a challenge to myself, when I get a high score, I feel happy,” while another stated, “when you start to think you’re a loser, you come here and get four thousand at Space Invaders, and you ain’t a loser anymore.”

These examples show that journalism also contributed and reacted to the masculine culture surrounding video gaming. The

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69 Langway, “Invasion of the Video Creatures,” 90.
70 Langway, “Invasion of the Video Creatures,” 90.
types of articles, focus, the treatment by major newspapers, and the types of popular non-gaming magazines that ran articles on video gaming are a representation of this.

Conclusion

The developers and industry, the players and gaming spaces, and the journalists who covered video games all contributed to or reflected the masculine culture surrounding video gaming in the late 1970s and early 1980s. Video gaming was still a leisure activity that largely appealed to men and boys, rather than both sexes. There was a divide between the games and their appeal, as most video games fell into the categories of sports, space, or combat, which were primarily masculine. However, one video game changed this reality in the early 1980s so that the industry was forced to examine the influence of women on their profits and their games, rather than continuing to target only men and boys. This game would allow for a new perspective on women as an audience, as well as promote the development of new types of video games in the early 1980s.
“CUTESY” GAMES AND PAC-MAN FEVER

Despite the masculine culture that was reflected through video games in the 1970s and early 1980s, women began to be more involved in the U.S. industry from 1980 until 1984. They began to play both home consoles and arcades, and they had an economic and creative impact on the types of video games that were created. The turning point that allowed for this shift was one video game and its influence on the video game industry and culture in the United States—the Japanese-developed game Pac-Man. From its release in 1980 until the market crash of the video game industry in the United States in 1984, Pac-Man created a shift away from primarily marketing to men and boys, while also inspiring creativity and innovation in video games.

Pac-Man spawned a new category of video games, called “cute” or “cutesy” games throughout the medium.¹ These games, such as Centipede, Mr. Do, and Ms. Pac-Man, all followed the successful debut of Pac-Man in the United States. Around the same time, more women began to play in the arcades, and more women began to develop video games. Male developers also began

to create games that they felt would relate and appeal to the female audience, which would then raise profits for the company. However, the creation and success of games developed to appeal to a broader audience, the greater inclusion of women in the industry, and more women and girls playing video games created some pushback from men and boys, especially regarding the skill levels and rumors of promiscuity of women who played certain types of games. Despite the pushback, these new “cutesy” games were very popular with both men and women. Dona Bailey, a co-developer for *Centipede*, said, “I never heard any complaints from men about *Centipede*.”² The appeal of these new types of games was broader than the previous genres, which thrived in the masculine space.

The Influence of *Pac-Man*

“It’s a cute creature with cute features...I don’t think the novelty is going to wear off,” said the vice president of marketing at Bally/Midway while talking about the runaway success of the arcade game *Pac-Man*.³ It was a colorful game in which the player leads a yellow character through a maze while avoiding ghosts that pursue the titular character. *Pac-Man* was

² Krueger, “Welcome to the Club,” 51.
developed in Japan, but it was released in the United States in 1980, where it became a huge success.\(^4\) *Pac-Man* became influential in the video game industry in the United States, as it changed how some women viewed video games, which led to more women taking up the hobby. It also changed how video game developers and the industry viewed women as video game consumers. Finally, *Pac-Man* inspired video game designers, including women developers, to create new types of video games, such as puzzle and platforming games, that would have a broader appeal.\(^5\)

According to Anne Krueger in *Video Games Magazine*, *Pac-Man* appealed to women for various reasons. One of the reasons was because *Pac-Man* had a personality, due to the colors, characters, and side art on the arcade cabinet.\(^6\) The characters also all had names, including the enemy ghosts, and they interacted in intermissions between levels.\(^7\) This, she states, was quite different from the previous types of games where the player would be forced “to shoot up unidentifiable flying objects in space.”\(^8\) Lastly, one of the most popular reasons that *Pac-Man* was well-liked among women was that the rules of the

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\(^5\) A platforming game is one that involves a character exploring a world through jumping. The most famous example of a platforming game is Nintendo’s *Super Mario Bros* (1986).
\(^6\) Krueger, “Welcome to the Club,” 51.
\(^7\) *Pac-Man* (Coin-Operated), Namco (Bally Midway, 1980).
\(^8\) Krueger, “Welcome to the Club,” 51.
game, as well as the presence of only one joystick and no buttons, simplified the learning curve for those with little to no prior experience.\(^9\) This was important, as it allowed women who were relatively new to video games to play Pac-Man. However, it also led to some men criticizing women who played it, as they argued that women were only capable of playing the easier game.\(^10\)

The success of the game could be estimated in multiple ways, such as arcade attendance and profits. Bally/Midway, the North American publisher for Pac-Man, estimated that of the people who played arcade video games, eight percent were women before the game’s release.\(^11\) In comparison, after the 1980 release of Pac-Man, an estimated thirty percent of arcade gamers were women.\(^12\) Regardless of the sex of the person playing, Pac-Man was a massive success. In 1981, Bally/Midway sold 96,000 Pac-Man arcade cabinets, and the total revenue from the arcade version of the game was $200 million in the same year.\(^13\) In total, the game took in an estimated $1 billion.\(^14\)

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\(^{9}\) Krueger, “Welcome to the Club,” 51.

\(^{10}\) Ibid, 53.

\(^{11}\) Ibid, 51.

\(^{12}\) Ibid.

\(^{13}\) “Pac-Man Sublicenses Extend Bally’s Profits,” D1.

Due to the success of the original game, Bally/Midway decided to produce a successor that served as a “thank you” video game for women who had played Pac-Man. This game, entitled Ms. Pac-Man, starred a yellow character much like the original, but with added lipstick, eye shadow, and a large red bow. The game was considered to be more challenging than the original, as there were four different types of mazes within the game and the ghosts no longer followed set patterns. Pac-Man had been a big hit with both men and women, and Stan Jarocki, a Bally/Midway spokesperson, explained:

Pac-Man was the first commercial videogame to involve large numbers of women as players. It expanded our customer base and made Pac-Man a hit. Now we’re producing this new game, Ms. Pac-Man, as our way of thanking all those lady arcaders who have played and enjoyed Pac-Man.

Because of the influx of women who began to play, the video game industry took note and realized that they could include women and expand its profits through games that appealed to both sexes. Ms. Pac-Man, which was created by men, was clearly a

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16 The title Ms. Pac-Man was disputed when the concept was originally pitched. According to one of the developers, the original title was Miss Pac-Man. However, since the game showed a stork leaving Pac-Man and Ms. Pac-Man a baby, it was deemed inappropriate to have her unwed. The title ended up being Ms. Pac-Man to avoid controversy. Kent, “The Ultimate History of Video Games,” 172.
reaction to the success of *Pac-Man* and the phenomenon of “*Pac-Man Fever,*” which was a term used to explain the phenomenon of the popularity of the game and the character.\(^{19}\)

The success of *Pac-Man* inspired innovation amongst the developers: it showed that new types of games had real potential of success.\(^{20}\) This included games that were “cute” and could appeal to women and younger audiences. Many felt that the industry was shifting from an emphasis of “get tough” to “get cute.”\(^{21}\) Another innovation of *Pac-Man* that many other games began to duplicate was the concept of personalities to the individualized characters, as well as providing more narrative through the gameplay or through intermissions.\(^{22}\)

Due to the influence of *Pac-Man*, the industry could no longer ignore women as gamers, and game developers began to adapt to accommodate this new audience. Although most video games released after 1980 still primarily fit into the dominant categories of sports, space-based, or combat, there was more innovation and an expansion of the types of video games being

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\(^{19}\) “*Pac-Man Sublicenses Extend Bally’s Profits,*” Dl.

\(^{20}\) Wolf, “*Video Game Stars: Pac-Man,*” 73.


\(^{22}\) This concept became quite popular, and another famous Japanese game, *Donkey Kong*, used a similar tactic. Wolf, “*Video Game Stars: Pac-Man,*” 73.
released, such as the puzzle or platforming genre. Although the elements of video gaming that had long reflected masculine ideals did not go away in the 1980s, this shift into creating new games for new audiences meant that the exclusivity of men and boys was no longer there, and women and girls were more likely to play, particularly in arcade settings.

The Invasion of the Masculine Space

There were also more women who developed video games, and the games they developed appealed to both men and women. The influence of women developers within the industry, development of games that appealed to broader audience, and the changes in arcade demographics and atmosphere led to a change in the culture of video gaming in the United States from 1980 until 1984.

One of the shifts that occurred after the release of Pac-Man was that there were more video games designed by women. Although there were still very few women in the field who worked as part of the design and development teams, the women who were employed in the creative side of the industry were able to exert

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23 The best-known puzzle game from this period is Pac-Man (1980). The success of Nintendo’s Donkey Kong (1981) and Super Mario Bros (1986) led to more platforming games in the late 1980s and early 1990s.
their influence over games during the early 1980s.²⁴ Dave Nutting, owner of Nutting Associates, felt that his company had an edge by having women developers. He stated, “Women are better at creating the patterns, imagery, and atmosphere for games. They have more of a sense of feeling and color than men do. Games done by men work fine, but usually will look a bit stiff.”²⁵ This demonstrates that Nutting felt that women had a distinct role to play in video game development, and this role was to influence the visuals of the game. Although there were not many women in the industry, the few who were actively influenced the games that their employers published.

One of the most prominent examples of a woman having influence in the industry and on video games was Dona Bailey. Bailey was the only woman working in Atari’s coin-operated division, and she co-developed Centipede (1981) with Ed Logg. Logg mentioned that the game was created to appeal to women in arcades, and he felt “that without Dona’s viewpoint it would have ever made it there.”²⁶ One of Bailey’s most influential design choices was her decision to implement pastel colors into

²⁴ Of the estimates regarding developers in the industry in the U.S., only four or five women were actively creating video games during the 1970s and early 1980s. Haddon, “Electronic and Computer Games: The History of an Interactive Medium,” 56.

²⁵ Krueger, “Welcome to the Club,” 52.
²⁶ Ibid.
the game. Bailey said, “I really like pastels, which is why there are so many pinks and greens and violets in Centipede. I really wanted it to look different, to be visually arresting. I think that’s a new emphasis in games.”

The game involved a player defending against an invading centipede that moves down the screen through a maze of mushrooms. In a survey of women who played arcade video games, Centipede was ranked as the third favorite game in 1982. It was one of the most prominent games that was influenced by the Pac-Man shift in 1980.

Although Dona Bailey created popular video game, she eventually left Atari. She explained that being the only woman in the coin-operated division was tiresome: “it was like being on another planet...I just wasn’t comfortable, and I think it reflected in my work or lack of.” She argued that more women were not in the industry because they were “discouraged by the male domination” of the business. This shows that although there were women in the industry, it was still primarily a masculine sphere that was exclusionary of the women who were there and made for an uncomfortable working atmosphere.

27 Krueger, “Welcome to the Club,” 52.
29 The top two games were Pac-Man and Carnival. Worley, “Women Join the Arcade Revolution,” 32.
31 Ibid, 52.
Another woman who was influential in the video game industry was Roberta Williams, the co-founder of Sierra On-Line and the developer behind many of their successful games, such as *Mystery House* (1980) and *Wizard and the Princess* (1980). Williams created these games because she was interested in making games that she would want to play.\textsuperscript{32} In an interview, Williams explained that the transition in the 1980s to more innovative games inspired gamers to rely on “creativity, logic, and wit required to get to the end of the story” instead of “speed and reaction time.”\textsuperscript{33} She also argued that the industry would have actively marketed toward women if more of them had taken an interest in video gaming, which was evident with the release of *Ms. Pac-Man.*\textsuperscript{34}

After the great financial success of *Pac-Man* in 1980, the video game industry began to rethink some of the games that were developed. Although most games stuck to the traditional genres, there was experimentation with colors, gameplay, and characters to try to make video games more broadly appealing. Other popular “cutesy” games were released during this time. Some of these games include *Centipede* (1981), *Ms. Pac-Man* (1981), *Mr. Do!*

\textsuperscript{32} Levy, *Hackers,* 297.  
\textsuperscript{33} June Davis, “Keyboard,” *Videogaming and Computergaming Illustrated,* October 1983, 4.  
\textsuperscript{34} Davis, “Keyboard,” 4.
(1982), and Q*Bert (1982). These new types of games were popular with both men and women, and they also were innovative video games that were highly influential to the future of the industry.

Ms. Pac-Man borrowed many gameplay elements from the original game. Nine MIT students created *Ms. Pac-Man* as a hack of the original game, and Bally/Midway purchased it to release in arcades. Much like *Centipede*, *Ms. Pac-Man* added pastel colors to the game in an effort to appeal to women players. However, it also revamped the difficulty levels to maintain broad appeal.

Another game that was released to appeal to both sexes was Universal’s *Mr. Do!* (1982). In the game, the player controlled a clown who dug tunnels through the ground to collect cherries while being pursued by monsters. This game, much like the others mentioned, had very bright colors and did not have many controls. *Mr. Do!* was less successful compared to *Pac-Man*, as 30,000 arcade cabinets were sold in 1982. Desiree McCrorey, who received an arcade spotlight in *Joystik Magazine*, explained that

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36 Ibid, 173.
37 Perry, “Ms. Pac-Man,” 17.
38 *Mr. Do!* (Coin-Operated), Universal (Taito, 1982).
Mr. Do! was “one of those cutesy games for relaxing...It’s not as complex in strategy—not so demanding.”

One of the most innovative games of this period was Gottlieb’s puzzle game, Q*Bert (1982). In Q*Bert, the player had to navigate a pyramid of cubes while avoiding enemies, balls, and the edge of the pyramid. The goal was to change all cubes of the pyramid to the same color. This game was originally developed as a shooter game, much like Asteroids or Space Invaders. However, Warren Davis, one of the game’s developers, changed the format to a puzzle game instead. This game sold 25,000 arcade cabinets and had a marketing campaign similar to Pac-Man’s; lunchboxes, cartoons, and board games were all created after the success of the arcade and home video game.

Because of the new types of video games that were being released, as well as a new image for arcades themselves, women were beginning to enter the arcades at a quicker pace than they had previously. Although men still made up the majority of gamers, the influx of some women into arcades did not go unnoticed. It is important to understand that although these

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40 “Joystik Charts,” 63.
41 Q*Bert (Coin-Operated), Gottlieb (Gottlieb, 1982).
42 Ibid.
44 Kent, The Ultimate History of Video Games, 224.
women were coming into arcades due to the revamped image of arcades and the new types of games, they did not exclude themselves from the traditional genres of video games that were released in arcades at the time.

Several magazine articles were written regarding the entrance of women into the arcades in the early 1980s. These articles examined the women in the arcades, the types of games that they played, and why there were more women playing video games after 1980. There were also articles discussing the perspectives from the industry, including popular feminist opinions regarding the video game business. These articles showed that the entrance of women into video gaming, even in small amounts, was a newsworthy event.

One of the articles, “Women Join the Arcade Revolution,”
examine the move toward women playing arcade games, rather than being there “just for decoration.”

As previously mentioned, the arcades in the 1980s began to change their image away from the seedy, dirty, and strictly male-oriented arcades, and the article argues that women were able to match men in video gaming skills since they did not have to rely on physical strength to

\[\text{46 Worley, "Women Join the Arcade Revolution," 31.}\]
However, this article credits Pac-Man with the influx of women, and it also states that women liked games, such as Asteroids and Space Invaders, which they “weren’t supposed to like.” This article brings women into the forefront, allowing gamers to see that women were beginning to enter the culture.

Joystik Magazine published a section in its top arcade players article in April 1983 that highlighted two prominent women gamers and their preferences. The article states that their goal was to prove that women weren’t “just interested in ‘cutesy’ games.” Both women were asked their top five games, their high scores, and their reasons for playing these games. While the women admitted to being drawn to the cutesy games, such as Ms. Pac-Man, Centipede, and Mr. Do!, games, they also played some of the traditional “shoot-em-up” arcade video games. This information is consistent with the survey information from the article from Electronic Games Magazine.

The feminist viewpoint regarding video games was also explored in an article in Videogaming and Computergaming Illustrated in October 1983. Two prominent feminists, Lindsay

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47 Ibid.
48 Ibid, 32.
49 “Joystik Charts,” 63.
50 “Joystik Charts,” 63.
51 The survey has been reproduced in Appendix B. Worley, “Women Join the Arcade Revolution,” 31.
Van Gelder and Gloria Steinem, were interviewed about the state of the industry and why women were hesitant to become more involved with video games and computers. Steinem explains the hesitancy of women to get involved with video gaming and the problem of the culture in the article. She says,

I think the problem with these games...is that they are presented as a high-tech activity which enters the culture in a masculine way. They appeared either through the math department in school or through the entertainment arcade in a section of town which is thought of as men’s turf.52

She continues with stating that women were not raised to believe that they must prove their masculinity, and thus they were less willing to involve themselves with the industry.53 When asked about Pac-Man and its influence, Steinem explains, "At least Pac-Man gets away from the militaristic theme, and the player isn’t killing people."54 This article provides a feminist viewpoint as to why the industry still emphasized men and masculinity, despite the fact that women were becoming more involved with video gaming. These prominent women felt that women were conditioned to not enjoy these types of technologies, but that providing them with games that were enjoyable and less

52 June Davis, “Videogaming Illustrated Profile,” Videogaming and Computergaming Illustrated, October 1983, 23.
53 Davis, “Videogaming Illustrated Profile,” 23.
54 Ibid.
overtly masculine allowed women to feel more welcome in arcades.  

However, due to the influx of some women into arcades, myths regarding skill levels and other reasons to delegitimize women who played began to emerge, emphasizing the backlash to the female invasion of the masculine culture in video gaming. Some of these myths claimed that “good girls” did not play video games, or that women were only allowed to play “cutesy” games if they wished to be considered a “good girl,” rather than games in the traditional genres. The myth that women only played video games with simple control schemes also existed. Janice Hendricks, a developer for Williams, argued that women were initially drawn into arcades by simple games, much like Pac-Man, because they were beginners; she goes on to say that as women became more skilled with the simple games, they began to play more complicated games, as well. Lastly, one argument was that women only played arcade games because of they were drawn to the colors. Dona Bailey said that the colors were popular with both men and women, and Tim Skelly, another game developer, explained that colors were just as important to men as they were to

55 Ibid.
57 Ibid.
women.\textsuperscript{58} These myths were a method of exclusion used against women who were visiting the arcades, as they made the female interest in gaming seem less legitimate than the traditional male gamers. Because more women were beginning to enjoy video games, there was a risk of “devaluing” the technology and hobby for men, so these myths allowed men to maintain video gaming as a masculine activity.\textsuperscript{59}

\textbf{Conclusion}

Although more women were beginning to enjoy and develop video games in the early 1980s, the video game industry and culture was still primarily a masculine one. However, this shift was significant, as it demonstrated that the industry noticed that women were potentially interested in playing video games as well. Money could be made if video games were created that appealed to both men and women, and more developers began to make video games that could potentially have a broader audience. \textit{Pac-Man}, through its huge financial success, became a turning point for the video game industry in the United States, as it promoted more innovation and catapulted video gaming into the

\textsuperscript{58} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{59} Davis, “Videogaming Illustrated Profile,” 23.
public eye through marketing techniques. However, the industry in the United States would not be able to capitalize on this new shift for very long, as financial difficulties of U.S. companies and the emergence of a video game giant left the industry in shambles from 1984 until 1986.

60 “Pac-Man Sublicenses Extend Bally’s Profits,” D1.
CONCLUSION

The developers and companies from the United States had their most success in the video game industry in the 1970s and early 1980s; however, the industry would soon collapse upon itself due to the influx of many poor quality video games that were released and the financial difficulties of the business.¹

In 1982 and 1983, the video game industry began to struggle financially, despite the release of several hit games.² One of the primary reasons was the poor quality of some games that were released. Atari, the pioneer company, was primarily responsible for this. Seeking to ride off the success of the arcade version, Atari created a home console version of Pac-Man (1982). Atari had ordered 12 million units of the cartridge, but they sold 7 million copies. Despite the large number of cartridges that were sold, many of these copies of Pac-Man were returned and refunded because of the quality of the game.³ Another misstep by Atari was the release of the home console game, E.T.: The Extraterrestrial (1982), an adaptation of the movie. The game had been in

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² For example, Q*Bert (1982) and Dragon’s Lair (1983) were successful arcade games.
³ Kent, The Ultimate History of Video Games, 236.
development for only six weeks, and it did not sell well and critics and gamers alike panned it. Most E.T. cartridges went unsold. The most infamous demonstration of the imminent crash of the video game industry was when Atari buried unused inventory, including E.T., in the New Mexico desert.\(^4\)

Another major issue with the industry was that there was no quality control or regulations on what games could be released for a video game system. For example, hundreds of companies emerged to release video games at a disorienting pace, and many were poor quality or knockoffs.\(^5\) Games were increasingly becoming too difficult, as developers tried to make them more challenging and more profitable in the arcades.\(^6\) However, this led to gamers giving up on playing these games. Noah Falstein, a designer of Sinistar (1982), explained the move to more difficult games,

> As players got better at them, coin-op games got more challenging in order to keep the coin drop high...our management insisted on making it tougher to keep it more profitable.\(^7\)

Another problem that plagued the video game industry in the U.S. was the release of adult video games, such as Custer’s Revenge,

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\(^4\) Kent, *The Ultimate History of Video Games*, 240.
\(^5\) Kleinfield, “Video Games Industry Comes Down to Earth,” Al.
\(^7\) Ibid, 97–98.
which gave the industry a negative image. These issues all led to financial difficulties amongst the video game companies and the crash of the industry.

Profits for the various video game companies, as well as many of the individually owned arcades, began to fall drastically in 1982. Atari stock fell significantly after a sales report indicated that their sales would only reach an increase of 10 percent instead of 50 percent. By the end of 1982, Atari had lost $356 million. Others soon followed, such as Mattel’s $201 million deficit, Activision’s $3 to $5 million-dollar loss, and Bally’s loss of 85 percent of its profits. Eventually, Atari was split, with Warner Communications owning the coin-operated division, while the home division was sold off. Coleco, one of the biggest companies in the industry during the early 1980s, had its stock collapse much like Atari’s. The company survived until 1988 due to a shift in focus to Cabbage Patch Dolls and away from video games. Mattel dropped out of the video game industry all together in 1984.

8 “The Brouhaha Over X-Rated Games,” 145.
9 Kent, The Ultimate History of Video Games, 234.
10 Ibid, 239.
11 Charles P. Alexander, “Video Games Go Crunch!” Time, October 17, 1983, 64.
12 Kent, The Ultimate History of Video Games, 268.
13 Ibid, 253-255.
14 Ibid, 255.
The arcades also struggled to survive. The number of people who opened arcades, thinking that they would be the next big money maker, was large.\textsuperscript{15} However, due to the volume of arcades and the debts that arcades had from buying machines, many arcades began to close in increasing numbers from 1982 to 1984.\textsuperscript{16} The collapse of the industry left a black hole for video games in the U.S.

By 1984, the video game industry in the United States was struggling to survive. The industry was essentially dead. However, Nintendo, a company who had previous successes in arcade games, prepared to release its own home video game console, the Nintendo Entertainment System, in the United States as a limited release in 1985 and a wide release in 1986.\textsuperscript{17} Herb Weisbaum, a \textit{CBS News} consumer affairs correspondent explained his confusion at Nintendo’s announcement that it could bring video gaming back when he said

> All the headlines said, “Video games are dead,” and here was this little upstart company that no one had heard of called Nintendo that said they [sic] were going to bring video games back again. Everybody

\textsuperscript{15} The estimated number of arcades was 10,000 by 1982. By the time that Kleinfield wrote his article, at least 1,500 had closed. Kleinfield, “Video Games Industry Comes Down to Earth.”

\textsuperscript{16} Donovan, \textit{Replay}, 97.

\textsuperscript{17} The limited release was in New York City for the holiday season of 1985. Donovan, \textit{Replay}, 167.
seemed to think that it was a joke. “Oh yeah, they say they can bring video games back again.”

Nintendo saw the missteps of the U.S. companies, and its executives decided to tailor their new console to avoid those mistakes.

Nintendo’s new marketing concepts were the primary reason why they were able to rebuild and become a huge success with the Nintendo Entertainment System. After seeing the poor quality and adult games that flooded the U.S. market, Nintendo implemented a security chip in its console that let Nintendo decide which games could be released on their system. Sensing that retailers and gamers alike would no longer trust a console marketed as a video game system, Nintendo also launched the console with a laser gun and a robot to promote it as a toy instead of a video game. During the limited holiday release in New York City, Nintendo sold 90,000 Nintendo Entertainment Systems, making it a huge success. In 1986, Nintendo released the home console version of Super Mario Brothers for the Nintendo Entertainment system, which ended up selling millions of copies and

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18 Kent, The Ultimate History of Video Games, 277.
19 Donovan, Replay, 166.
20 Ibid; Kent, The Ultimate History of Video Games, 297.
21 The console was only on sale in New York City in the holiday season of 1985 when it was able to reach these sales numbers. Donovan, Replay, 167.
skyrocketing the system into the homes of millions of gamers in the United States.  

With the release and success of Nintendo’s console in 1985, the industry in the United States belonged to Japan. Although Atari did attempt to regain dominance with the release of the Atari 7800, it was never able to reach the height of success that it had held previously or Nintendo had after 1985. Another Japanese company, SEGA, also released its Master System in 1986, which led to a battle for supremacy between SEGA and Nintendo. Due to the video game crash that began in 1982, the U.S. would no longer be the most prominent country that produced video games and video game consoles.

Despite the shift from a U.S.-based industry to a more worldwide industry, the people of the United States continue to be a large consumer base for video games. In addition, gender representations in video games are still examined, and masculinity continues to be a dominant feature of the worldwide video game industry. Further research could explore the

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22 Ibid, 167.
23 Kent, The Ultimate History of Video Games, 305.
24 Ibid, 303-305.
influence of masculinity on the types of video games that were released after 1986, as well as if they were developed with the U.S. consumer base in mind.

The video game industry, which had begun in the United States in 1958 with the development of the first video game, had been a reflection of masculine culture of the time. Through the types of games that were created, the developers, and the media, a projection of masculinity in the U.S. dominated video game industry had been present from 1958 until 1984, when the crash of the video game industry allowed for a more worldwide perspective on gaming. Despite this masculine projection, some women had been able to not only play video games, but also to develop them. This became especially true after the great financial success of Pac-Man, which many industry experts had attributed to the influx of women who visited the arcades. The culture that surrounded video gaming had been a primarily masculine one, focusing on skill, gendering, competition, and individuality. Even after more women began coming to arcades, a pushback from the previously exclusive masculine sphere occurred.

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APPENDIX A: LIST OF VIDEO GAMES REFERENCED
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<tr>
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