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VIRTUAL WOMEN: REPLACING THE REAL

presented by

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has been accepted towards fulfillment
of the requirements for

Master's degree in Journalism

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Date Dec. 13, 1999



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VIRTUAL WOMEN: REPLACING THE REAL

By

Nnedimma Nkemdili Okorafor

A THESIS

**Submitted to
Michigan State University
in partial fulfillment of the requirements
for the degree of**

MASTER OF ARTS

Department of Journalism

1999

ABSTRACT

VIRTUAL WOMEN: REPLACING THE REAL

By

Nnedimma Nkemdili Okorafor

In this day and age of technology, video games are a form of media and thus affect many people. As time progresses, video games grow more complex and realistic. They are becoming real fantasy worlds. Nevertheless, they are anything but real. And neither are the women that appear in them.

These “pixilated heroines” are often the first females that boys spend time with. And with the incorporation of the “virtual women” into the mainstream (i.e. through magazines and films), they are also female beings that real women compare themselves to and that real men often seek. In many ways, “virtual women” are replacing real women.

This study investigated 21 virtual women from 1993 to 1998 using content analysis, character profiles, and previous research. Three game series were also studied. The findings indicated that virtual women were highly negatively stereotyped and the stereotyping was worsening with time.

To my Mother and Father whom I couldn't have done this without. And my brother,
Emezie Okorafor, for inspiring me to write about this topic.

Da-alu

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

First and foremost, I'd like to thank the *Powers That Be* for creating the circumstances to write this thesis.

I wish to thank Professor Lucinda Davenport for all of her help, especially in the final process. I'd also like to thank Professor Darcy Green and Steve Lacy for being great committee members. I am further indebted to my sisters, Ifeoma and Ngozi Okorafor, for their input and support and Okechukwu Mbachu for being a voice of reason. Last of all, I'd like to thank the video game world and the Internet for providing me with so much bizarre material to research.

“Imagination and fiction make up more than three quarters of our real life.”- Simone Weil, philosopher

**“It is more difficult to murder a phantom than a reality.”
-Virginia Woolf, writer**

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INTRODUCTION

Video games came into existence in the early 1960s. Since then, video games have become one of the most popular forms of electronic media. A 1996 report by Nielsen Media Research showed that about 40 percent of people over the age of 12 live in households with video game systems. Sales of video game hardware and software rose 51 percent from 1996 to 1997 to reach an all-time high of \$5.5 billion, reported the NPD Group (Video Business, 40).

Video games are easily and cheaply rented at most video rental agencies across the country. Yet it was only with the onset of the 90s that female characters in video games have made their way to the forefront of the screen as heroines.

Prior to the 90s, the few females who did appear in video games were placed in the background in stereotypical female roles. The two most popular stereotypical roles were the “woman as victim” role and the “woman as prize” role (Dietz, 1).

For example, Double Dragon, a popular Nintendo video game of the early 80s, had only one woman in the game and she had large breasts and wore a mini-skirt. In the beginning of the game she was walking down the street minding her own business when a man walked up and hit her in the midsection, knocking her down on the sidewalk. He subsequently threw her over his shoulder and carried her away. This was the “woman as victim” stereotype.

Zelda, another popular game of the 80s, was another example. The only female human or monster one encountered throughout the entire game was at the end when one wins the game and “gets” the princess. This was the “woman as prize” stereotype. These

stereotypical characters were powerless, featured in the background and voiceless. A game player could not actually choose them as the character to play with. However, with the onset of the 90s, an interesting thing began to happen: female heroes became the “in thing” in the video game arena.

These new types of characters could fight and were not afraid of a little blood.

Lara Croft of the best-selling computer game series, *Tomb Raider*, was a buxom British woman with a Ph.D. in archaeology and violence. Chun Li of the popular *Street Fighter* series could defeat a man three times her size in hand-to-hand combat. One of Sindel’s fighting moves in *Mortal Kombat* involved throwing her opponents with her long hair. In such a male dominated domain, these virtual women were definitely a change from the norm. Not only were these characters no longer mere victims, but also their skills matched and often surpassed their male counterparts.

The list of female warriors (a.k.a. virtual women¹ and female heroines) rapidly grew long in the last decade in comparison to the past. And so did video game sales carrying the characters. This was the first time that female characters played such a prominent role in video games.

However, along with the virtual woman’s mere existence and strength, came a high price: No female heroine was stereotype-free. Lara Croft of the hugely successful *Tomb Raider* series wore tiny shorts and a tight T-shirt in the snow without freezing. Chun-Li would giggle like the schoolgirl after she would defeat an opponent.

A 1995 study on video game sexism revealed that traditional gender roles were still very much a part of video games (Dietz, 1998). With video games growing more sophisticated (the graphics becoming more realistic, fighting moves and story lines more

¹ The definition of “virtual woman” can be found in the Glossary

intricate, and game consoles more sophisticated) and the media blowing life into these characters (i.e., featuring Lara Croft on magazine covers and in movies and conducting interviews with her) the issue becomes more of a question of what effect these characters have on the portrayal of real women.

These virtual women often look straight out of a virtual adult magazine (for no real woman could look like these ones, even in adult magazines). What will the perception of real women be in a society where the lines between reality and virtual reality are almost interchangeable?

If virtual women become the female role models (what women and girls aspire to be like and the type of woman men and boys aspire to be involved with), there will be dire consequences. These consequences are especially high for children. Some show that children easily observe the feminine stereotypes, while others report that 'North American children viewing sex-typed materials lead to sex-typed attitudes,' (qtd. in Graham).

The topic of this study is the portrayal of female heroines in the video games of the 90s (1993-1998). The history of female characters, which goes back to comic books, was reviewed. The study delves into the question of whether virtual women are being stereotypically portrayed. It also looks at the degree of the stereotyping and whether or not the stereotyping is progressing or regressing. It also discusses the odd mixture of fantasy and reality involved in the concept of virtual women and the role technology plays within it. The study is comprised of a literature review, a content analysis, a qualitative analysis of character biographies and profiles and a study of various versions of games. The study is concluded by a discussion of the possible future of virtual women.

Chapter One: Review of Literature:

The Ancestors: A Brief History of Comic Book Heroines

Before virtual women were kicking and shooting their way across the television and computer screen, their ancestors were making history in comic books. Though comic books were a popular form of entertainment for the youth in the early 1900s, the first super heroine² didn't appear until 1940. And, from the beginning, she was plagued with issues of gender.

"In the pages of Thrilling Comics, undercover policewoman Peggy Allen decided she could do a better job solving crimes if she donned a disguise-- a long red hooded robe and matching mask. Evildoers and the police she assisted had no idea that The Woman in Red was actually a police woman, and thus she was also the first super heroine with a secret identity." (Robbins, 3).

However, The Woman in Red never had her own book. She remained a character that appeared here and there in the pages of Thrilling comics over a five-year period.

This was the dilemma of most comic book actions heroines. None appeared in their own book, and they were always short-lived, rarely lasting for more than two or three appearances before fading into oblivion. Thus girls really didn't have any images to identify with. For this reason, it is no surprise that it was mostly young boys who were attracted to the colored pages of comic books.

Aside from their brief careers, female superheroes had limited roles, rarely deviating from sidekicks, love interests and "damsels in distress." In December 1941,

² Definition of super heroine found in Glossary

their plight took a historical turn. The Amazon Princess, later to become Wonder Woman, took the comic book market by storm in All Star Comics No. 8 and Sensation Comics No. 1.

It took both Superman and Batman a year after their first appearances to get their own books. However less than six months after her appearance in Sensation, the summer 1942 issue of Wonder Woman No 1. arrived on the market. What was most surprising was that she even had her own title.

The origin of Wonder Woman is an interesting one. She was created by a psychologist named William Moulton Marston, who also created the lie detector (hence the idea of Wonder Woman's Lasso of Truth). Marston had a doctorate in psychology from Harvard University, was a successful author of mainstream and academic books and was a member of the Massachusetts Bar. Marston initially created Wonder Woman to counteract the chauvinistic ideology prevalent in comic books and to attract more female readers (Robbins).

In 1943, he wrote an article for the American Scholar Journal in which he discussed his reasons for creating Wonder Woman:

"It seemed to me, from a psychological angle, that the comics worst offense was their blood-curdling masculinity....It is smart to be strong. It is big to be generous but it is sissified, according to exclusively male rules, to be tender, loving, affectionate, and alluring. 'Aw, that's girl stuff!' snorts our young comics reader, 'Who wants to be a girl?' And that's the point: not even girls want to be girls so long as our feminine archetype lacks force, strength...Women's strong qualities have become despised because of their weak ones." (Marston, 7).

Comic book entrepreneur, Max Gaines, worked as Marston's partner. Marston's wife, Elizabeth Holloway Marston, who was also a psychologist, helped in the creation of the well-known comic book character.

Wonder Woman had thick curly hair, a strong, well-defined chin, and the slim, muscular body of a professional swimming champion.

Initially, Wonder Woman was Princess Diana. She came from the land of the Amazons, Paradise Island. Men were forbidden to set foot on the island. When Steve Trevor, an American intelligence officer crash-landed on the island, Princess Diana's destiny was changed. She nursed him back to health and fell in love with him. When she took him back to America, she decided to stay and fight evil and wrong doing as Wonder Woman.

Over time Wonder Woman evolved from an Amazon princess to a woman given powers by the Greek and Roman gods to fight crime and do good for humanity. The majority of the villains were women and eventually learned their lesson, "thanks to the message of love and humanitarianism that Wonder Woman carries to the world as she rights wrongs." (Robbins, 8).

Aside from being a strong female comic book character, the Wonder Woman series had a group of sidekicks, the Beeta Lambda sorority sisters from Holliday College. Possibly the most interesting was Etta Candy. Wonder Woman initially found her in a hospital bed suffering from a condition strikingly similar to anorexia nervosa. "In the August 9 panel, she gives the girl a box of chocolates. Etta says, ' Gimme-gimme more! Gimme the box!'" (Robbins, 4). The result was a healthier chubby little girl.

Not surprisingly, the Wonder Woman series received plenty of criticism. Because the comic series was centered on women, many male writers said that the earlier versions of the series had lesbian undertones. Male critiques also said that these early versions featured an overabundance of scenes portraying men in bondage.

Marston predicted these reactions. He described the negative reactions to Wonder Woman: “well, asserted my masculine authorities, if a woman hero were stronger than a man, she would be even less appealing. Boys wouldn’t stand for that; they’d resent the strong gal’s superiority.” (Marston, 6).

Marston turned out to be correct. He was successful in introducing a strong main female character to the world of comics. However, eventually the majority, who viewed women within and outside of comic books stereotypically, took over and female comic book characters were molded to fit what was expected. Hence the path of the comic book heroines was set and, consequentially, the virtual women’s.

Following the success of Wonder Woman were hundreds of leading female heroines. So many were burdened by some sort of gender stereotype, that the virtual stereotype became assumed.

Within the same year of Wonder Woman’s appearance, Catwoman appeared in Batman comics and she has remained in print ever since. Catwoman was one of the first successful female villains. Though she was a successful villain, often the root of Batman and Robin’s problems, it wasn’t surprising that her costume was a skintight cat suit. However, unlike other Batman comic villains, she also carried a secret liking for Batman and deep down was not evil. There were even times when she saved his life.

Another unique female comic book character was Flash Comic's Black Canary. She appeared in 1947. She was a sort of female Robin Hood working for the poor, ignoring the law and stealing from criminals. Black Canary ended up replacing Johnny Thunder in the Johnny Thunder comic strip. Her costume consisted of a tight fitting vest, a blonde wig and fishnet tights.

A popular female phenomenon over the years was "the sidekick." The list of female sidekicks in comic books was long but most of them had two common attributes. The first was that she was significantly weaker than male characters. The second was that she was more trouble than good, often ruining a plan or in need of rescuing. To add to this problematic image, almost all female sidekicks were called girls.

"Bulletman, Doll Man, Rocketman, Hawkman, the Owl and the Flame had as their female counterparts Bulletgirl, Doll Girl, Hawkgirl, Owlgirl and Flame Girl. There was literally not a woman among them." (Robbins, 51)

In the 60s and 70s, women working in the comic book industry hit an all time low. At the same time and ironically enough, the women's movement was in full swing. This was the reason that the combination of female characters continuing to appear in comics were developed mostly by men. The women's movement prompted comic book artists to keep female characters in their books. However, the characters were made mostly by men because the number of women artists had dropped significantly around this time (Robbins).

Once again, though these characters could do amazing things, stereotypes still anchored them to "their place." Aside from there being a disproportionately small number of female characters, their appearances reflected little variety in physique. In

1975, the X-men comic series was revived, having been discontinued in 1970. Its new cast included three female characters. Storm was Marvel Comic's first black character. She was a goddess-like figure from Africa who had the power to control the weather. However, though Storm was supposed to be of African Descent, she had long silky white hair.

Phoenix was the most powerful superwoman of the X-Men. Her great powers led to her demise. However, her costume, similar to Catwoman of the 1940s, was a second-skin-like red suit. A third X-Men character, Rogue was a bad girl turned good who had a white streak in her hair and a raspy Southern accent. She also wore a skintight yellow and green suit, though hers was noticeably clothing, unlike Phoenix's.

In 1978, Spider-Woman appeared in Spider-Man comics. Her costume, though created by a woman, Marie Severin, fit the usual mold of super heroine attire: a black/yellow and red body suit with spider web "wings."

The characters listed above are some of the best-selling female comic book characters. But they are only a few of many female super heroines that have graced the pages of comic books (though there were few in proportion to their male counterparts). Nevertheless, as the number and popularity of comic book heroines increased, the stereotyping of their characters increased. Much of this may have been due to a desperate attempt to recapture a dwindling male audience. Studies showed that since 1993 comic book sales dropped over 20 percent (Sullivan, 37)

A 1991 study of 54 Marvel Universe super hero trading cards found that women were vastly underrepresented as superheroes, accounting for 24 percent of the cards (Young, 1993). The Marvel Universe was one of the comic book genre's most popular

“worlds,” giving birth to superheroes such as Spiderman, Captain America, The Incredible Hulk and the X-Men. A follow-up study in 1993 found that in the Marvel Universe, women were also depicted as the “weaker sex.” (Young, 50).

“Jubilee, for example, is described as a spunky mall rat who followed the X-men home from a Southern Californian mall. Silver Sable is described as elegant and irresistible in social situations, but needing help from other super-heroes to capture the more dangerous criminals. Firestar was originally frightened by her abilities to fly and generate beams of intense heat, while She-Hulk is said to be anything but shy about showing off her complexion and sensational figure.” (Young, 50).

Aside from being portrayed as stereotypically weaker than males, super heroines were also sexualized. From the beginning, a female character’s sex was an issue. However, close inspection showed that with the progression of time, female comic book characters are progressively more sexualized in their appearance and behavior.

“By the nineties comic books had become not merely a boys club, but a Playboy Club. Using a kind of circular logic, editors at the major comic companies continue to produce sex object-heroines, which appeal to a male audience. Their excuse for not adding strong female characters that might appeal to women is that ‘women don’t read comics.’ Of course, as long as female comic characters are insulting to the average woman, she won’t read comics.” (Robbins, 166).

Comic book artists even began to take female characters from past and reshape them. In 1994, Mike Deodata became the new artist for Wonder Woman and drew her as a barely clothed, exaggeratedly sexualized pinup. In 1993, the same thing happened when the Catwoman character was brought back and drawn with exaggerated, enormous breasts by Jim Balent.

Comic book artists often used the argument that male characters are also drawn with enormous bulging muscles. However, this argument ignores the fact that the male character's sexual characteristics and attractiveness are not stressed, his athletic abilities are.

“Male comic readers seem to think that women must have enormous breasts in order to be ‘excessively perfect physical specimens,’ something that most women would definitely consider debatable. The 92 percent male comic book readership of the nineties expect, in fact demand, that any new super heroines exist only as pinup material for their entertainment.” (Robbins, 166).

To add to the layer of sex in comics is the “bad girl” phenomenon. Comics journalists, Kurt Samuls, described them in Trina Robbin's book as “buxom characters who a) have had their families murdered by a psycho; b) were abused as children and are now planning on controlling the world wearing only a string bikini while getting soaked by buckets of blood.” (Robbins, 169).

The most popular “bad girl” was Death, herself, of Chaos! Comics. Lady Death is a demon that had to defeat Lucifer to become Queen of Hell. She was white-haired, balloon-breasted, and wore a string bikini with a skull at the crotch. She even had her own special lingerie edition. A 1996 Forbes article said that Chaos! Comics' Lady Death sold 160,000 copies each month and Crusade Comics' sexy Shi, another “bad girl” character often outsold Batman. These comics sold nearly as well as favorites like Superman. Other “bad girls” were Barb Wire, Lady Rawhide and Avengelyne.

Though many comic book artists were using sex to increase sales, there was also a thriving underground of comics that were more woman-friendly. One example is Action

Girl, a comic centered on an energetic super heroine and her friends. The comic's creator, Sarah Dyer, describes it as "a guide to projects produced by girls, grrls and women. Boy-friendly, but very pro-girl." (Robbins, 185).

All these paper-based heroines are the beginnings of the animated, lively video game characters one sees today. It did not all happen on the television and computer screen. The comic book heroine's history showed that it started considerably before video games even existed. In the next chapter, the evolution continues.

The Evolved: A Brief History of Virtual Women

The successful evolution of the female super heroine from the pages of comic books to the television and computer screen took about two decades. However with the many video games that have come and gone since the 70s, it is almost impossible to figure out who was the first video game heroine.

Experts cite that the reason for so few female characters in the 70s was because there were so few females played video games. Even today, the percentage is low. "In a study of one hundred arcade games 92 percent contained no female roles whatsoever. Of the remaining 8 percent the majority (6 percent) had females playing the "damsel in distress," and 2 percent had females playing active roles. However, of these active roles, most were not human, i.e. *Ms. Pacman* and *Mama Kangeroo*." (Provenzo, 1991). In 1998, Jeffries and Co., a San Francisco investment firm, estimated that females comprise only 21 percent of the video game players in the United States. Nevertheless, it is possible to peg the noteworthy video game heroines.

Namco's *Ms. Pac-Man* chomped her way into history as the first successful video game heroine in 1982. The object of the puzzle game was to navigate *Ms. Pac-Man*, a yellow circle with a pie-slice mouth, a red bow and a dimple, through a maze and chomp all the glowing pellets before the ghosts got her. *Ms. Pac-Man*'s only defenses were evasion or to eat the larger dots, called Power Pellets, which gave her ghost-chomping power. Often called "Pac-Man in drag," *Ms. Pac-Man*'s only difference from the original Pac-Man, who was male, was her red bow and her dimple.

In 1984, Windham Classics' *Below the Root* became the first video game to offer the opportunity to choose between male and female characters. This role-playing game took place in the world of Green-Sky. Genaa was a strong, charismatic woman. Pomma was a delicate girl with great mystical skills. Though the game never became very well known, it did manage to break the mold.

In 1986, the first successful game starring only a female character hit the market. *Metroid* was the first of a series of three adventure games made by Nintendo. The game starred a bounty hunter named Samus Aran, who was on a quest to stop an organization of horrible Space Pirates, led by Mother Brain, from terrorizing the galaxy by using the deadly energy-sucking Metroids. Throughout the game, Samus is dressed in heavy red and yellow armor. The player only found out the character is female at the end of the game when she took off her armor.

In 1987, another female "pixel pioneer" made it to the forefront. Her name was Princess Toadstool of Nintendo's *Super Mario Brothers 2*, a best selling adventure game. In the original game, *Super Mario Brothers*, the object of the game was for the Mario Brothers, Mario and Luigi, to save Princess Toadstool from the evil King Koopa. This

second time around, in *Super Mario Brothers 2*, Princess Toadstool moved up to become an active character.

The dainty and proper Princess Toadstool was one of four characters of which players could choose from. Each character had its own special gift. Mario was a good all-around player, Luigi was quick on his feet and could jump high, Toad was extremely strong but slow, and Princess Toadstool could float for a limited time. One played through seven worlds consisting of a variety of levels and in the end one must defeat the evil Wart.

Only two years later, another prominent female heroine made history.

“It’s 1989, around the same year that televangelists fell harder than baseball-sized hail, Dan Quayle was elected vice president of the United States of America, and people from your realm were disturbingly enthralled with the music of Menudo. Somewhere among this plethora of weirdness was another cyberspace first: Rosella of Daventry upstaged all of her kinsmen and took the starring role in *King’s Quest IV*. Not content to be merely a supporting character, or to be one of several possible choices, she became adventure gaming’s first leading lady.” (Vanous, Online)

The *King’s Quest* series was a role-playing series from Sierra On-Line. The games were about a royal family, which had long adventures and journeys in mystical lands to accomplish some goal. The games basically let one explore worlds finding items and interacting with characters. Rosella was a direct result of a woman being in the industry.

The cofounder of Sierra On-Line was Roberta Williams, one of the first women in the computer games arena. By 1989, with her fourth title in the *King’s Quest* series, she started incorporating female characters into the games. As Williams created these female

characters, she feared that she'd lose her male audience. Nevertheless, this was not the case. Her games were a great success in sales. And following Williams' example, other gaming companies started including a female character in the lineup. Hence the ball was rolling for the phenomenon that struck in the 90s.

"Gone are the days of the heroine tied to the railroad track (or held captive at the top of the screen by a giant psychotic monkey), waiting patiently for the hero to fight his way up and save her. Today's pixilated Andromedas are perfectly capable of unchaining themselves from the rock, bashing the sea monster over the head, and escaping without the assistance or interference of any passing Peruses types." (Vanous, Online).

There were two major events that greatly popularized the virtual woman. The first was the rise of the fighting game.

"They are not window dressing. They are lethal. And in games that take their cue from Marvel comics, they are flamboyantly lethal, in a distinctive female way." (Herz, 178).

The object of a fighting game was to beat one's opponent. Once one does this, he or she moves to the next level and fights a stronger opponent. Usually the game was set up as a tournament and one chose from a variety of characters to fight with. And though highly sophisticated today, even in the beginning, each character was given something to differentiate themselves from other characters. It was the fighting game that brought in large numbers of female characters into the gaming arena.

In 1987, a game called *Street Fighter* was introduced and from then on gaming would never be the same. It was this game that sparked the fighting game to become the

most popular type of video game today. However, though *Street Fighter* had various characters to choose from, none of them were female.

This changed when the second version came out. In *Street Fighter 2*, which came out in 1991, of the eight characters, only one was female. Her name was Chun Li and she could put a man twice her size on his back. Fast and strong, Chun Li fought using Wu Shu Kung Fu and years later was second only to Lara Croft of the *Tomb Raider* series in popularity.

Since the first *Street Fighter*, there have been over 20 *Street Fighter* games to follow, the most recent hitting the market in 1999. Over time, female characters became a normal part of the game. Cammy was light and agile, and with long blonde braided ponytails and a green leotard could fight using a “Special Force” technique. Sakura may be a little girl but she also has mastered Shotokan Karate. Rose is a magician with a chip on her shoulder.

In 1992, along side with *Street Fighter*, *Mortal Kombat* came out. Most known for its controversial blood, gore and violence, the game prompted Sega and Nintendo to institute their own version of the voluntary rating system used by music and movie companies. However, *Mortal Kombat* outdid *Street Fighter* in one way. In its original game, it had one female character. Sonya Blade was a U.S. Army Special Forces Lieutenant and skilled fighter. However, in *Mortal Kombat 2*, though it had more new female characters, Sonya Blade was kidnapped and the object of the game was to save her. Nevertheless, in *Mortal Kombat 3*, she was free to fight again.

Aside from the blood and gore, *Mortal Kombat* had a method to its violence. At the end of a fight, the player had the option to perform a “fatality” on their defeated

opponent. A “fatality” was some sort of highly violent end move. Each character had his or her own unique creation. Kano pulled out his opponent’s heart and held it high above his head, Cage knocked off his opponent’s head, and Raiden electrocuted his opponent’s head off. Female characters tended to have stereotypically feminine fatality moves.

Sonya Blade blew a “kiss of death” to her opponent that burned or crushed him or her alive, depending on how recent the version was. Kitana, depending on the game version, either cut off her opponent’s head with her fan or kissed him, which resulted in the person exploding. Only Shiva, a dark skinned, four-armed, terribly belligerent monster wearing close to nothing had a somewhat neutral fatality. She would rip off her opponent’s skin. Maybe her non-feminine fatality move was meant to counteract her super sexual physique. There are about a half dozen *Mortal Kombat* series games, the most recent being from 1997, and a dozen female characters.

As Cindy Vanous’ Gamecenter.com article said: “The Babe’s the Thing.” The second, and by far the most successful event that popularized female characters was the creation of Lara Croft, the star of the best selling *Tomb Raider* series.

A San Francisco Chronicle article in 1998 said, “The original 1996 ‘*Tomb Raider*’ game and its 1997 successor, ‘*Tomb Raider 2*,’ have sold close to 10 million copies collectively. With an average per-copy price of \$35, those sales outstripped the \$312.8 million box-office take of Disney’s ‘*The Lion King*,’ touted as the biggest animated feature in history.” (Evenson, 27).

“*Tomb Raider 3*,” which hit the market in 1998 was also predicted to be a best seller. “*Tomb Raider 3*” is scheduled for Christmas of 1999.

The star of the adventure games was Lara Croft, an archaeologist in search of a hidden treasure. She is also “has thin thighs, long legs, a waist you could encircle with one hand, and knockers like medicine balls.” (Cassell and Kinder, 338). Critiques cited that Croft’s physique was, like the Barbie Doll, impossible. Two main criticisms were that a real woman as thin as Croft would not have such large breasts and that if she had a waist that thin, she’d die instantly from compressed internal organs.

The object of the game was to go through a 3D network of ancient Peruvian temples, caverns, and underwater passages. Along the way, traps and wild animals exist. Part of the game’s success was due to its stunning 3D images and smoothness. However, gaming experts said that it was Croft’s mass appeal that sent the game over the top.

What is so unique about the Lara Croft phenomenon was that her popularity extends much farther than the actual video game.

Not only did droves of gamers build shrine-like websites dedicated to Lara Croft, they also romanticized her life, posting fictional stories featuring her character in scenes and exploits far beyond what her creators ever imagined. Young boys sent her virtual flowers and love letters. Doctored artwork of Lara Croft in the nude called “Nude Raider” also popped up all over cyberspace.

“She’s the only silicon character to become as big as Japanese pop cyber-star Kyoko Date DK-96 and as beloved as Bean on both sides of the Atlantic, with 3 million games sold worldwide. She’s also appearing with U2 on its PopMart tour, and she’s popping up in magazines ranging from Britain’s Economist to the American Time Digital, where she was the only synthetic character to rank with Bill Gates, Steve Jobs and Steven Spielberg among the 50 cyber-elite.” (Evanson, Pixel-Packin’ Mama D1).

In “Lara Croft reveals all,” a 1998 article, the Irish Times was one of a few publications privileged enough to hold an interview with Croft.

“Q: Not so long ago you were a completely unknown entity and in a relatively short space of time you have become a world famous heroine and sex symbol. How has this fame affected you - has it changed you as a person?

A: I’ve always been my own person, and fame will never change my attitude to life. If I did, my family and friends would not be slow in informing me if my opinions of myself got out of hand. Fame has its difficulties but I just tend to get on with it.”

The Irish Times claimed that the interview was “held on the net, of course.”

After the interview, the article even gave a short biography of Croft.

“Born on St. Valentine’s Day in 1967, Lara Croft started her education in Cheltenham College for girls. She is the daughter of the wealthy Lord Henshingly Croft, but was disowned by her father (her mother is deceased) for not complying with his aspirations for her -- to get married, have kids and settle down. She has a B.A. in linguistics, an M.A. in anthropology and, most recently, a Ph.D. in archaeology from the University of Chicago. She lives alone in a mansion in Surrey”. Everything from her favorite music and food to what she does with her free time can be found in great detail in “The Tomb Raider’s Traveler’s Guide.”

Though Croft’s fame outweighs the fame of all other virtual women so far, there are still a few who gained moderate fame.

After the fighting game was popularized and Lara Croft came along, the path was wide open for female characters. Games such as *Tekken*, *Final Fantasy*, *Dead or Alive*, *Virtual Fighter*, and *Parasite Eve* all had plenty of room for female characters. Nevertheless, to grace down that path a virtual woman had to pay a hefty toll.

Issue of Beauty³ and Technology

A virtual woman had to be “beautiful.” “Beauty” was the virtual woman’s most valued and powerful asset, not her mastery of martial arts or her ability to shoot her way out of danger. An “ugly” virtual woman was hard to find, if one could even be found at all. This was consistent with ideas of women depicted in mass media as a whole (Wolf).

In traditional media, women are stereotypically portrayed in roles where their sexuality and beauty is of utmost importance. If she does not have this attribute, she is at a great disadvantage. The traditional media help to preserve these traditional patriarchal roles. This is most obvious when looking at prevalent people in technology (Wolf).

“The most famous men in the world of technology are the likes of Bill Gates and Michael Ellison, smart young bucks who have founded billion-dollar empires. The most famous woman in the business, on the other hand, wears a short dress, provocative smile and wields a mean Uzi. Faced with a virtual creation like Lara Croft, is it any wonder women feel that technology isn’t for them?” (The Times, 6).

Webster’s College Dictionary defines beauty as “the quality present in a person or thing that gives intense aesthetic pleasure or deep satisfaction to the mind or the senses.” According to this definition, beauty is a matter of personal opinion, in the eye of the beholder. However, in the world of technology, this is far from the case. In video games, beauty was defined as a female attribute and typically involved a robust chest, long legs, a distinct facial structure (large eyes and a small nose and thick lips) and light pigmented flawless skin. This rigid mold is looked at more in-depth in Part Four’s content analysis.

³ The definition of “beauty” can be found in the Glossary

Experts have in-depth theories as to why it is so important for women to possess this redefined version of “beauty.” Naomi Wolf explored a few of these reasons in her book titled The Beauty Myth: How Images of Beauty Are Used Against Women.

“We are in the midst of a violent backlash against feminism that uses images of female beauty as a political weapon against women’s advancement: the beauty myth.” (10).

According to Wolf, the demand for a woman to be “beautiful” is the male population’s way of maintaining power over the female population. A fear of women and their success is the reason Wolf cites for the male population to promote the “beauty myth.”

“It is summoned out of political fear on the part of male-dominated institutions threatened by women’s freedom, and it exploits female guilt and apprehension about our own liberation- latent fears that we might be going too far.” (Wolf, 16). The redefined definition of “beauty” is unattainable. However, it is presented as attainable, thus putting women who strive to attain it in a helpless position.

“Cyborgasm,” a research article on the portrayal of technology in films, also cited male fear of women and technology as the reason why certain images and themes about technology began to appear in films in the eighties.

“In the films of the eighties, the figure of the cyborg combines violence and loss of self in a hysterical response to the impact of the technological development and rapid social change on masculinity and patriarchy.” (Kibby, Online). The study said that there is an anxiety that the evolution of technology is causing a decline in the patriarchal environment.

As a result of the anxiety “jobs were lost, men were retrained for positions they saw as less manly, their place on the skilled/unskilled hierarchy became less certain, and they were working with/competing against women for the first time.” (Kibby, Online).

“Computerized composition has hit the compositor’s craft a terrible blow, hacking the class and gender relations that have been developing over hundreds of years, throwing them into a maelstrom of confusion.” (qtd in Kiddy).”

The image of the technology portrayed in films was one expression of this crisis. According to Cyborgasm, men feel displaced by technology, hence a way of taking back control is to turn to the women and try to control them using the technology. An example of this male control was the “breast bouncing switch” in the game called *Dead or Alive*. When this mechanism is switched on within the game, the three female character’s breasts significantly bounce. When the switch is off, they do not.

Combine the prior existing fear of woman that Wolf discussed with the more recently developed fear of technology and the dilemma of the virtual woman seems quite logical.

“Since middle-class Western women can best be weakened psychologically now that we are stronger materially, the beauty myth, as it has resurfaced in the last generation, has had to draw on more technological sophistication and reactionary fervor than ever before. The modern arsenal of the myth is a dissemination of millions of images of the current ideal; although this barrage is generally seen as a collective sexual fantasy, there is in fact little that is sexual about it.” (Wolf, 16).

The new method that men have created to control women using the arsenal of beauty is through technology; images created for magazines, television, film, billboards, the Internet and video games. When bombarded with these images from so many angles of media, the result is powerful.

The wish to “perfect” the “flawed” female sex by men through technology was simply a way for men to take back the control of women that he had lost. This idea of correcting the “flawed” sex is not a new concept, however. Before sophisticated technology was altering women, more primitive measures were taken. “As the twentieth century proceeded, so the substitution of gynoids (manufactured versions of women) for women becomes more and more commonplace, and naturalized.” (Stratton, Online).

In Jon Stratton’s *Man-Made Women*, a painter named Oskar Kokoschka had a gynoid created for himself after he broke-up with his girlfriend of three years. The doll was designed to be a life-size replica of his ex-girlfriend. “Kokoschka describes his anticipation before its arrival. ‘I was preoccupied with anxious thoughts about the arrival of the doll, for which I had bought Parisian clothes and underwear.’” (1). This mixture of strong emotions for something non-living, seemed very similar to the way men and boys reacted to Lara Croft.

For Kokoschka, the doll substituted the woman with whom he can no longer have a relationship. However, the doll was something better to him, in ways. Unlike the real woman, the doll was passive and accommodating.

Men were seen with their gynoids at operas, in carriages and at parties. For a time, artists even took interests in them as subject matter.

“During the 1920s, Hans Bellmer started making jointed dolls in the form of adolescent girls. He arranged these in erotic poses and photographed them.” (Stratton, Online). The concept of the gynoid seeped further into European and American culture, than one would think.

“In Dictionary of Slang and Unconventional English, Eric Partridge writes that the word ‘doll’ to describe an attractive and desirable woman, came into use in

Britain in the periods before 1864. In this way, language use also reflected the new preoccupation with the gynoids.” (Stratton, Online).

The meaning of the word “doll” is also linked with the sexual attractiveness of a woman, “particularly associated with her use of cosmetic and other fashion aids and a general suggestion of her submissiveness to men’s wishes.” (Stratton, Online).

The concept has further buried itself into the norm as time has passed. “At the same time, in both American and British popular songs, men sang about their preference for dolls over women. In 1961, Johnny Walsh, in a song called ‘Girl Machine,’ sang “I’m gonna make me a girl machine/ and build me a doll that looks like a dream.” (Stratton, Online).

Computers and modern medicine took this concept a step further. The use of technology to “perfect” images and the bodies of women is at all time high. Today, the images of women on the cover of magazines are heavily make-up’d and airbrushed. The actual women are very often surgically enhanced and even physically manipulated by computer programs.

Aside from titillation, the allure of pornography is similar to all the forms of media just mentioned. It provides illusion. It is fantasy presented as real. Most pornography is presented from a male perspective. And the illusion presented by pornography is reaching people by the millions.

Pornography generates enough money to compete with enormous money making industries like film, TV, and magazines (Wolf). The newest technological way to modify the image of women is the virtual woman.

Cal Jones, reviews editor for “PC Gaming World Magazine,” thought the problem was very clear. In From Barbie to Mortal Kombat, Jones said, “The bad news is that

womankind have met an even more dangerous foe. She isn't a supermodel or a movie star--she isn't even real. No, this threat comes in the form of a silicon chick--none other than the *Tomb Raider* herself, Lara Croft." (Cassell and Jenkins, 338).

"If you genetically engineered a Lara-shaped woman, she would die within around fifteen seconds, since there's no way her tiny abdomen could house all her vital organs. More to the point, thin women do not have big jugs. Period. Any woman who is skinny and appears to have big hooters is either a) surgically enhanced, or b) wearing a Wonderbra with padding in it." (Cassell and Jenkins, 338).

Naomi Wolf expressed a similar idea.

"The 'ideal' has never been about the bodies of women, and from now on technology can allow the 'ideal' to do what it has always sought to do: leave the female body behind altogether to clone its mutations in space. The human female is no longer the point of reference. The 'ideal' has become at last fully unhuman." (Wolf, 266).

"Women are comparing themselves and young men are comparing young women with a new breed that is hybrid non-woman. Women's natural attractions were never the aim of the beauty myth, and technology has finally cut the cord." (Wolf, 267)

The same way that gynoids were basically cloth and stuffing, virtual women are pixels and coding. Just like the gynoids of the 1920s, once again the woman is replaced by the inhuman. The human body being flawed and natural cannot compete with something that is made to be one's idea of perfection.

The reason for concern about the distortion of the female body and image is because of the possible results. Plastic surgery is at a high where one in 40 American women have silicone breast implants, and as a result are twice as likely to develop breast cancer now than 30 years ago (Abbott, C12). According to new statistics, more teenagers than ever are undergoing cosmetic surgery in the United States. Between 1992 and 1998,

there was a 20 percent increase in the number of breast implants teenage girls had.

Liposuction amongst teenage girls increased by 67 percent (Krum).

These statistics and the increase in the distortion of the female body and image is not a coincidence. "The resulting hallucination materializes, for women, as something all too real. No longer just an idea, it becomes three-dimensional, incorporating within itself how women live and how they do not live." (Wolf, 17).

These impossible images have the great potential and likelihood to affect the way women perceive themselves. Jones had plenty to say on this issue.

"Show me a woman who is happy with the size of her thighs and I'll show you a rarity. Much of the blame for this has been put on the media's portrayal of women ultrathin model who live on a diet of Marlboro Lights and coffee, actresses who have their own personal trainer and enough time to work out for four hours a day, and heiresses who can afford cosmetic surgery, figure-enhancing designer togs, and celebrity hairdressers. These are not realistic role models for women who work eight or more hours a day or have children to bring up, yet we feel pressured into looking like them." (Cassell and Jenkins, 338).

The problem was not restricted to only women, Jones said.

"Now, you may well ask why such a ridiculous creature like Ms. Croft is threatening to women. Obviously, we're sensible enough as a sex not to take her seriously, but the same cannot be said of impressionable teenage boys. It's a well-known fact that most youngsters get their first good look at the female anatomy via porn mags, and come away thinking women have jutting bosoms, airbrushed skin, and neatly trimmed body hair. Now, thanks to Lara, they'll also think women are superfit, agile gymnasts with enough stamina to run several marathons back to back." (Cassell and Jenkins, 339).

These images are detrimental to society as a whole. However, those most effected are girls and boys. In the next chapter, the influence of the virtual woman on children will be discussed.

Children and Games

As previously established, video games are a major form of media.

About 35 million homes in the United States own one of the console systems. This means that 30 percent to 40 percent of American homes own a video game console. Another 10 percent to 20 percent rent these consoles, or share with neighbors (Cassell and Jenkins, 7).

Experts said that video-game systems, portable video games and video-game software dominate the number one spot in what kids hope to get for Christmas. Even the majority of girls wanted video games (Andrews, E2).

However, it has also been established that the majority of the game players are male. To be more specific, seventy-nine percent of video game players are male (Jeffries and Co., 1995). “80 percent of American boys play video games on a regular basis (Cassell and Jenkins, 14).”

There are various reasons for such a gender gap.

In a 1998 study that examined the portrayal of women and the use of violence utilizing a content analysis of 33 popular Nintendo and Sega Genesis video games showed that the gender gap in game characters was very significant. There were no female characters in 41 percent of the games with characters. In 28 percent of these, women were portrayed as sex objects. Most of the characters in the games were white. (Dietz).

In a study of one hundred arcade games “92 percent contained no female roles. Of the remaining 8 percent, the majority (6 percent) had female playing the ‘damsel in distress,’ and 2 percent had females in active roles.” (Provenzo 1991).

The video game arena in many ways is an exclusive boy’s club. Its audience is assumed to be male. Game ads target males. The majority of game designers are male. The characters are mostly male. The female characters are fashioned for males. As a whole, game playing is viewed as a masculine past time.

Nevertheless, contrary to what many game companies believe, girls do play video games.

A few games have always been popular to girls as well as boys, although they were not specifically aimed toward the female market. “The most successful examples of androgynous games have been abstract-pattern games such as *Tetris* and *Baku Baku*, puzzle-based games such as *Myst*, and exploration games such as *Donkey Kong Country*, *Sonic the Hedgehog*, *Ecco the Dolphin*, and *Nights into Dreams*.” (Cassell and Jenkins, 9).

“The most powerful challenge to the separatist logic behind the girls’ game movement has come from an unlikely corner-organization of female gamers who have embraced traditional fighting games, especially *Quake*, as a space where they can confront men on their own terrain and literally beat them at their own game.” (Cassell and Jenkins, 32).

“All female” groups such as Crack Whores and Clan PMS (Psycho-Men-Slayers) battled their male counterparts in the online version of *Quake* (a popular dark bloody adventure game consisting of dungeons, mazes and gory monsters). They became well known and respected due to their superior skills in the game.

According to many gaming experts, women and girls are more likely to start buying computer and video games if they were included in commercial marketing. A few companies tried to capture the evasive female audience using this tactic. By far, Mattel was the most successful with “Barbie Fashion Designer Interactive.”

“‘Barbie Fashion Designer’ sold more than \$50,000 copies its first two months, outstripping such industry megaliths as *Doom* and *Quake*, and demonstrating that interactive media aimed specifically at girls might have strong market appeal.” (Cassell and Jenkins, 15). However, in many ways, these “girlie games” simply perpetuate the problem. Many of these companies make the mistake of trying to attract the female audience using stereotypes. The sad thing is, with today’s computer game market overflowing with ‘games created for girls’ full of things like dolls, make-up, boys, and fashion, this kind of theory is common.

In From Barbie to Mortal Combat, Vangie Beal, a writer for GameGirlz.com (an online video game magazine for girls) said, “Like many other women gamers out there, I dislike the image of females that many software companies have set. This is a topic I have discussed at length with many of the women (both game players and women working in the industry).” (Cassell and Jenkins, 337).

In a study by Heather Gilmour of the University of Southern California on how girls relate to interactive games, a gender-based formula was found in these games.

“According to popular wisdom, men like action, solving puzzles, lots of definite and rigid rules, competition, challenging gameplay. Women are presumed to like solving problems amongst characters, getting credit for trying, encouragement and support from the game, few and simple rules, winning through cooperation, quitting when they get bored.”

“The binary structure of this list essentializes women as neo-Victorian subjects who have short attention spans, prefer interpersonal relationships to competition,

require encouragement to proceed with gameplay, don't get as involved with games as men, prefer not to follow rules, value competition over cooperation, and are easily bored." (Gilmour, Online).

The exclusiveness did not only discourage girls from enjoying the fun of video games. By being excluded, girls miss out on something bigger. Studies showed that video games also impact one area that was of great importance:

"The relationship between boys' comparatively higher interest in computer games and their comparatively larger representation in high-power computer jobs is not accidental." (Cassell and Jenkins, 11).

Studies showed that video games help to acclimate children to technology. This is a significant problem in a time where knowledge of computers is of great importance. However, studies showed that girls are at a disadvantage in terms of technology.

Computers as a whole are used more by boys than by girls. And thought to belong more to boys than to girls (Cassell and Jenkins). Even in kindergarten children give a male gender to video games, viewing them as more suitable toys for boys (Cassell and Jenkins). This perception could become a reason more boys are "heavy users" of computers than girls.

This gender problem becomes compounded as more and more fields (i.e., business, science, journalism, law) become heavily dependent upon computers. The area of video games was yet another blow against girls.

One may think an easy solution would be to get girls playing more video games. However, when one is portrayed in a stereotypical, even insulting, manner, it is natural to avoid that place or thing. This sort of reaction is also a high possibility for female players. Did negative female representations drive females away or did the lack of a female

audience cause game makers to ignore them? At this point, that does not necessarily matter. What matters is that it is a vicious cycle that puts women and girls at a disadvantage.

“Computers and video games provide an easy lead-in to computer literacy.” (Loftus and Loftus 1983, Greenfield 1984; Greenfield and Cocking 1996, Kiesler et al. 1985). And so those children who aren’t playing them at young ages may end up disadvantaged in later years. This should be the main concern.

The exclusion of females from video games also could have possible effects in a more general sense.

“Psychologists have discovered that children learn important cognitive skills by playing video games, such as the ability to maintain attention and to orient things in space, and these skills differ between boys and girls, apparently because of their differential exposure to this medium (Subrahmanyam and Greenfield 1994). Video games are not simply about entertainment. There is much more that a child can benefit from playing them. However, there are also negative effects it can have on a child. Many of these negative effects stem from the medium of animation.

The next chapter looks at issues of exclusion and stereotyping in cartoons.

Where Cartoons Fit In

Virtual women are a combination of animation and comic book heroines with a dash of media induced life. Thus far, the exclusion and stereotyping of the female was found in abundance in two of these influential media of today’s youth (comic books and

the traditional media). But what of the medium of children's animation? Children's animation is not only a form of entertainment for today's youth but it is similar to comic books and video games it has a strong cultural influence.

Television is a powerful medium. Not only can television be a source of information about others, but it can also be a source of information about those whom we consider like ourselves and even ourselves. In other words, girls can learn what it is to be a girl from girl characters and boys from boy characters. If these characters are stereotyped, the children will pick them up. Being a part of television, animation has the same effect.

"Animation is one of the most effective ways of teaching, according to Donald F. Roberts, professor of communication at Stanford University and an architect of the RSAC system that rates video games. 'They're striking, simple, and highly colorful'. Cartoons grab kids without distracting background detail and can make a strong impression." (Consumer Report, 38).

Nevertheless, the same trend of exclusion and stereotyping can be found in yesterday and today's animation.

"A quarter century of research has shown the world of children's animated programming to be a fairly homogeneous place. Content analyses conducted in the 1970s found that the television world greatly underrepresented both nonwhite and female characters." (Seggar and Wheeler 1973; Gerbner and Signorielli 1979).

As video games and comic books, cartoons were problematic because of its effect. Studies have shown that children easily observe the feminine stereotypes; North American children report that viewing sex-typed materials lead to sex-typed attitudes (qtd. in Davidson, Yasuna & Tower, 1979, Pingree, 1978). This study showed that these cartoon images do have an effect on children.

A recent study of the top eight Saturday morning cartoons in 1995 showed that “cartoons, in their current state, are depicting significant differences in the status, behaviors, and capabilities of female and male characters. Thus, cartoons tell cultural stories that can’t help but to inform young minds about who they are to become.” (Hudak and Spicher, 14).

Male characters tended to be at the center of attention, as aggressors or victims or both. Of all the characters categorized, 26 percent were categorized as prominent males and only 5percent were categorized as prominent females. A prominent character was defined as “one with a pronounced role in relation to other characters, and who was central to the story.” (Hudak and Spicher, 5). “Prominent females tend to be more androgynous.” (Hudak and Spicher, 13).

In “The good, the bad, and the foreign: the use of dialect in children’s animated television,” another study done in the Fall of 1996 on children’s animation there were similar results. According to the study, the animated world is “overpopulated by males.”

Twelve animated programs were selected out of the 76 programs running at that time. All together, 323 characters were chosen, 69 percent were male and 27 percent were female (5 percent had an uncertain gender). The data revealed that male characters were portrayed as stronger and smarter than females.

“The majority of female villains were rated as heavier and uglier, whereas heroines were uniformly identified as thinner and more beautiful.” (Dobrow, Julia R. And Calvin L. Gidney, Online).

The study also found differences in the depiction of male and female characters. Where there was little variation in female characters, “depiction of male characters is

somewhat more diversified. Generally, male heroes tend to be thin and handsome. There were several exceptions, however, including male characters drawn as heavier (such as Fred and Barney in the Flintstones) and male comic leads rated as unattractive (such as Shaggy in Scooby Doo).” (Dobrow, Julia R. And Calvin L. Gidney, Online).

In the study, the majority of characters in children’s animated television are still young, male, and Anglo-Saxon.

The results of the study “mirrored those of Thompson and Zerbinos (1995), who found a three-to-one ratio of male to female characters; this is an improvement from prior studies that noted a four-to-one ratio.” (Dobrow, Julia R. And Calvin L. Gidney, Online).

Video Games are a combination of both animated cartoons and comic books heroism. If both of these media yield the dire results of sexist stereotyping and influence on kids, what makes the existence of the virtual women any better? Logically, if animation and comic books depict female characters stereotypically, the likelihood that video games follow suit is very high.

Chapter Two: Research Questions and Method

Research Questions:

- 1. How stereotypical are females in video games?**
- 2. Does the treatment of females in video games vary according to the type of game?**
- 3. Is the treatment of females in video games becoming more stereotyped over time?**

This research not only presents what is but in the process, also, formulates an argument. Video games provide a world of fantasy and imagination. Nevertheless it can be assumed that not all human beings fantasize about the same things. Thus it would be logical (and even economically smart) for there to exist a variety of types of characters to choose--fat, skinny, old, young, clothed, naked, etc. The argument made is that though this maybe the case fore male characters, this is not the case for female characters.

Method:

In this study, to support the argument stated above, an investigation of the origin, paradox and technology of the virtual woman will be conducted. The method is separated into three parts: a study of character profiles, a content analysis, and study of character profiles.

The research of character profiles, content analysis, and qualitative analysis of various versions of games provide further information about the depiction of virtual women in video games.

In Chapter Three, the profiles of 21 characters were compiled and analyzed to obtain character profiles. The information was obtained from official websites, game booklets and game magazines. Their motives, background and personalities were

investigated. It should be noted that some of the characters had more in-depth personal biographies than others. Other character's biographies were combined with the plot. The format varied depending on the game and the character. It is important to look at character profiles because game players do read them. In many cases one must know the character's profile to know her strengths and weaknesses. In a fighting game, this plays a role in winning or losing a fight. This also goes for action/adventure games. In a role-playing game, knowing the character's profiles is important to understanding the plot. The purpose of studying character profiles is to answer research questions 1 and 2.

In Chapter Four, the same virtual women were selected and closely investigated. The units of analysis were virtual women from 1993 to 1998. They had to be playable female video game characters.

Prior to viewing the games, a coding sheet was developed that allowed an attempt at answering the research questions. The author prepared a coding sheet with the help of one male coder.

A list of virtual women was compiled for Chapter Three and Five using various methods. All heroines were sampled from games that came out between 1993 and 1998. This time period was chosen because this was the time when the trend of including female heroines in video games began and up to the present time. Prior to the nineties, game heroines were sparse and unpopular.

Since there is no official list of "the most popular virtual women," top ten game lists from two popular video game magazines (Electronic Gaming Monthly and Game Center.com), numerous newspaper articles and word of mouth generated the list of games. Top gaming lists were not enough because only a fraction of game heroines were

popular enough to even be in the general top ten game listings. Three serious game players from the area (two male and one female) were interviewed about popular games and well-known virtual women. Less popular characters that did not appear on top gaming lists were chosen through information obtained using the interviews with the gamers.

Games featuring these characters were from the Sony Playstation console games because the Sony Playstation (next to Nintendo 64) is currently the most popular game console. Also, most of the games chosen were available across various platforms, including computer game platforms.

After obtaining the list of games with each chosen heroine, each game was played and the instruction books read. The content analysis was used to collect information about the portrayal of women in the video games. The unit of analysis and observation was the character.

Games were analyzed both from the player point of view and the viewer's point of view. In other words, information for analysis was collected while playing the games and viewing someone playing the games. The purpose of the content analysis is to help answer research questions 1 and 2. No intercoder reliability was used in this content analysis.

In Chapter Five, three games from three series were chosen for research on how much virtual women changed over time (research question 3).

Since some female characters appeared only once in a game, various characters were studied, depending on the game. One game series of each of the three types of video games was chosen: a role-playing game, a action/adventure game and a fighting game.

The game chosen had to be a game series with at least three versions. No sports games were studied in the content analysis or in the qualitative analysis because only one sports game featuring prominent female characters exists thus far.

The games with these chosen characters were rented from stores or borrowed from individuals. Their instruction and introduction booklets were also analyzed for they add to the perception of the game characters by giving story lines, pictures and other background information that one does not get from the game itself.

The following characters were the units studied for Chapter Three (study of character profiles) and Five (the content analysis):

CHARACTER	GAME TITLE	GAME TYPE⁴
Aeris Gainsborough	<i>Final Fantasy 7</i>	Role-Playing
Ayame	<i>Tenchu</i>	Action/Adventure
Aye Brea	<i>Parasite Eve</i>	Role-Playing
Cammy	<i>Street Fighter 2</i>	Fighting
Chun-Li	<i>Street Fighter 2</i>	Fighting
Claire Redfield	<i>Resident Evil 2</i>	Action/Adventure
Julia Chang	<i>Tekken 3</i>	Fighting
Kasumi	<i>Dead or Alive</i>	Fighting
Lara Croft	<i>Tomb Raider 3</i>	Action/Adventure
Lei- Fang	<i>Dead or Alive</i>	Fighting
Ling Xiaoyu	<i>Tekken 3</i>	Fighting

⁴ Game type definitions found in Glossary

Nina Williams	<i>Tekken 3</i>	Fighting
Pai Chan	<i>Virtual Fighter</i> ⁵	Fighting
Rose	<i>Street Fighter 2</i>	Fighting
Sakura	<i>Street Fighter 2</i>	Fighting
Sarah Bryant	<i>Virtual Fighter</i>	Fighting
Sheeva	<i>Mortal Kombat 3</i>	Fighting
Sindel	<i>Mortal Kombat 3</i>	Fighting
Sonya Blade	<i>Mortal Kombat 3</i>	Fighting
Tifa Lockheart	<i>Final Fantasy 7</i>	Role-Playing
Tina	<i>Dead or Alive</i>	Fighting

The following games were chosen for study in Chapter Five (study of various versions).

GAME SERIES TITLE	CHARACTER	GAME TYPE
<i>Tomb Raider</i>	Lara Croft	Action/Adventure
<i>Street Fighter</i>	Chun Li	Fighting
<i>Final Fantasy</i>	Various Characters	Role-Playing

Code Book Variables:

Below is the list and description of the character variables studied. Charting the different variables below will give a better idea of just how stereotyped the characters are. Is there variety in the types of variable attributes or are they fairly homogenous? If there is a lot

⁵ All *Virtual Fighter* characters are from the Megamix version of the *Virtual Fighter* Series

of variety then most likely the characters are not portrayed stereotypically. However, homogeneity typically signifies the presence of stereotypes. Some variables are numbered to make typing them in easier.

Hair:

Hair length of characters is important in that it can be a signifier of femininity. In Western society, women typically have long hair and men have short hair. In many cases, the longer the hair, greater the individual's femininity, according to society.

Long -flowing past shoulder

Average -shoulder length

Short -shorter than shoulder length

Can't Tell - for example, if it is long but it is tied in a bun on top of her head or if she is wearing a hat.

Skin Color:

This is important because these characters are portrayals of women. If all the women are portrayed as light skinned (European or Asian), then there is racial exclusion and stereotyping. For these characters are portrayed as icons of "beauty" and if they are all light, then what does that indirectly say about women of African descent or Indian descent?

Also, skin color is different from Ethnicity because looks can differ from words. For example, Elena of the *Street Fighter* is supposed to be from Africa yet she has white hair and light skin and European facial features.

Light - white to peach

Medium - tan

Dark - brown to dark brown

Ethnicity:

Ethnicity's importance goes along a similar line as "skin color". Looking at ethnicity also helps to detect "sexist racism." For example, Strom, the comic book heroine, was supposed to be African American, however she had white long silky hair and light skin

Asian

Caucasian

African Decent

Can't tell

Type of Being:

This is important in looking at beauty. A monster is typically unattractive. A creature can be less sexualize, for part of being a human involves sexuality. To make her human means, her attractiveness and sexuality can be clearer.

Creature

Monster

Human

Attitude:

The "attitude" of a character is important because it shows how she acts, her personality (if she has one).

Angry - gritting teeth, scowling, mean, screaming, etc.

Sexy -sultry eyes, walks in a hip swinging way (like she's modeling on the runway as opposed to exploring a cave, for example), hand on hip other arm to side, etc.

Childish -jumps up and down and giggles, schoolgirl clothes

No Nonsense -stoic, serious, get job done, no monkey business

Spunky -hip shaking, snappy, sarcastic, etc.

Heart of Gold- friendly, humble, sweet, thoughtful

Other

Clothing:

Clothing or lack of clothing can imply what is most important about the character. If she is borderline naked, then most likely the predominantly male players will look at her in a sexual way. If she is clothed respectfully, the most likely she will be viewed less sexually.

Sexy/Revealing -basically scraps, clothes are both tight and shows plenty of skin

Sexy -tight fitting but shows not much skin

Childish/Sexy

Neutral- does not highlight her sexuality. Example: Just wearing pants and a shirt that fit normally (not tightly outlining her figure).

Chest Size:

This goes along the same lines as clothing. If she has breasts like giant balloons how seriously will she be taken? If all the characters have balloon shaped breasts, this would basically imply that female characters aren't meant to be taken seriously.

Busty- Lara Croft is the standard

Large -a bit smaller than Croft

Medium

Small

Can't Tell

Leg Length:

The leg length is important in conjunction to height in that it'll show a special stereotype. For example, if all the characters look like they are over six feet tall but none of them are taller than 5'5, this implies something odd. It would imply that male players and game makers like the look of tall women but not the threat. Hence they use the fantasy factor of video games to create the impossible: A tall short woman.

Long/Slim

Long- long but not slim

Thick/Short- short and muscular

Thick/ Medium- Medium length but are muscular

Medium- Medium length but not muscular or fat.

Other

Height:

Tall - 5'8 and above

Average -5'4 to 5'7

Short - 5'4 and below

Victory Action (what she does when she wins a fight).

Victory Actions and Losing Actions show the characters personality and thus can be another area where stereotypes can hide. Do most of the characters do stereotypical feminine things when they lose, such as cry? Or do they do a variety of things?

1. Brought attention to her gender - ex: If her breasts bounce provocatively when she wins. An action that would seem odd if a male character did the same thing.
2. Did not bring attention to her gender

Losing Action (what she does when she loses)

1. Brought attention to her gender - ex: If she cries. An action that would seem odd if a male character did the same thing.
2. Did not bring attention to her gender

How She Falls (what happens when she is knocked down, example: when Chun-Li falls her panties show).

This is important because even the most respectable hard-core character can be brought down to being “just a woman” in the eyes of players if she falls with her legs open revealing her underwear. This is yet another area where a female character can be “put in her place.”

1. Brought attention to her gender – ex: If her panties show whenever she falls. An action that would seem odd if a male character did the same thing.

2. Did not bring attention to her gender

Body Type:

The importance of body type goes along the same lines as chest size.

Curvaceous -an hourglass shape: wide hips, very narrow waist, large breasts, though relatively slim (this is a very unrealistic body type)

Athletic - small waist, narrower hips, average chest

Athletic Plus - small waist, narrower hips, large chest (this is also an unrealistic figure)

Thick - an hourglass shape: wide hips, very narrow waist, large breasts and not slim

Stocky - small chest, wide hips, muscular, not slim but not fat

None of the above

Face:

This is important for two reasons. It will show the variation in facial structure of the characters. Also the variation in ethnicity, for number one and number two would exclude typical African features (wide nose *and* large lips) and an Asian feature (slanted eyes).

1. Large eyes, small nose, thick lips

2. Large eyes and small nose

3. Wide nose

4. None of the Above

Age:

Note: age may fluctuate in series of game by 1 or 2 years. Typically, in a game series, the first game will happen and then the next game will occur years later. The characters usually did not age from one game to another or their age even went backwards.

Note: Some characters will not have specific ages. In these cases, age is determined by how they look, unless she is an immortal creature, where they have no real age.

Chapter Three: Character Profiles

Character Profiles-Results:

The following are the results of the 21 character profiles extracted from game instruction booklets, documents and official websites. The character's profile adds context to the story, gives incite to her personality. It is important to look at character profiles because game players do read them. In most cases, one must know the character's profile to know her strengths and weaknesses. In fighting games, this plays a role in winning or losing a fight. This also goes for action/adventure games. In a role-playing game, knowing the character's profiles is important to understanding the plot.

A few of the character profiles include the general game storyline. This is to add context to the importance of the character in the game. Some character profiles are more in depth than others due to the fact that some games are more or character driven than others. Other character profiles have more in-depth storyline due to the fact that some games are more plot driven than others. Just how plot-driven or character-driven a game is also tells about the significance and importance of the character herself. Understanding the intricate plots of the games are not as important as understanding the character's place in the game studied. For, many of the games studied have plots that have been going for many years.

Also, many of the plots and storylines of the games are incomplete, dropping or ignoring sections of the story that do not pertain to the game. Last of all, fighting games are also typically centered on a tournament. For example, in the *Street Fighter* series, the games are centered on the *Street Fighter* tournament. In the *Tekken* series, it is the *Tekken*

tournament. The goal is to win this tournament and be the most talented fighter in the land.

Lara Croft of *Tomb Raider 3* - Action/Adventure:

“Born on St. Valentine’s Day in 1967, Lara Croft started her education in Cheltenham College for girls. She is the daughter of the wealthy Lord Henshingly Croft, but was disowned by her father (her mother is deceased) for not complying with his aspirations for her - i.e. to get married, have kids and settle down. She has a BA in linguistics, a Ph.D. in anthropology and most recently a Ph.D. in archaeology from the University of Chicago. She currently lives alone in a mansion in Surrey.” (The Irish Times, 22). In her free time, Lara Croft raids tombs for magical objects.

The following is the opening storyline directly from the instruction booklet for *Tomb Raider 3*, Lara Croft’s third adventure:

Millions of years ago, a meteor survived the plunge through the Earth’s atmosphere impacting the then warm climate of Antarctica...

The first people to discover this land were a tribe of Polynesians. Despite the now freezing conditions, there was an abnormal abundance of life and the tribe settled, worshipping the meteorite crater for the powers it appeared to hold.

Generations later though, catastrophic events forced them to flee in terror.

Today, the same area is being excavated by the research company; RX Tech, who are picking up unusual readings from the meteorite’s impact zone. It is in this zone that they uncover the body of a sailor from Charles Darwin’s voyage on *The Beagle*. It seems a few of his sailors had explored the interior of the crater.

Following a story from one of the sailor's journals, RX Tech have started to take a particular interest in, not only the crater area, but other parts of the globe where the sailors traveled to...and died in...

One of these places is India, where Lara is currently searching for the legendary Infada artifact. Unaware of its true history, she only knows that in local beliefs it was supposed to hold great powers and has been revered by tribes there throughout the years....

Soon she will discover a lot more.

Aye Brea of *Parasite Eve* - Role Playing:

The following is directly from the *Parasite Eve* Instruction Booklet:

After losing her mother in an accident when she was a child, Aya grew determined to become a detective. She has been on the NYPD's 17th Precinct force for 6 months. Although quiet on the surface, she can be very stubborn and unyielding. She and her partner, Daniel, called 'the father and daughter team,' occasionally get into arguments because of her stubborn nature.

Ling Xiaoyo of *Tekken 3* - Fighting:

This young girl loves amusement and theme parks. Her dream is to build the perfect amusement park in China when she grows up. She is both young and small in stature, but Ling is a skilled martial arts expert. Many believe if she was more serious, she could achieve real greatness. Having learned that the Michima Financial Empire is rich and powerful, she seeks out Heihachi (president and CEO of the MFE) to make her

dream a reality. While on vacation to Hong Kong with her family, Ling stowed away on a yacht bearing the name “Michima Financial Empire.” Heihachi was not on board and MFE men discovered her soon after the ship left port. Heihachi was informed immediately. Upon his arrival, Heihachi found his men beaten and strewn around the ship as if it was hit by a hurricane. She threatened that she would go berserk again if he did not accept her challenge. Roaring with laughter, he promises to build her the amusement park of her dreams if she wins the *Tekken* tournament, (Instruction Booklet).

Nina Williams of *Tekken 3* - Fighting:

In the last *Tekken* tournament she was ordered to assassinate a competitor names Kazuya, but an untimely quarrel with her sister, Anna, prevented it. Shortly thereafter, both sisters were captured by Kazuya’s corps and were used as guinea pigs in Boskonovich’s “Cold Sleep No. 2” experiment. They did not wake for 15 years. Heihachi’s private corps, the “*Tekken* Forces,” went to the burial site and excavated the “God of Fight.” This unearthing unleashed the “God of Fight’s” spirit, which awakened Nina’s resting soul. Now controlled by the “God of Fight,” Nina acts robotically with the command to assassinate Jin Kazama (Instruction Booklet).

Julie Chang of *Tekken 3* - Fighting:

Julia studies archeology in Michelle Chang’s tribal lands. As a baby, Julia was deserted in the ruins of a Native American settlement where Michelle found her. Michelle rescued Julia and brought her up with love. Julia loved Michelle plus her adopted tribe and trained with Michelle to protect her beloved homeland. When Julia was 18, stories of

sudden disappearances of famous martial artists all over the world began to reach the tribe. The tribe knew the cause, which was contained in the tribal legends... the legend of the God Fight spirit. People in the tribe feared that Michelle's pendant, the key to a Native American sacred treasure, had something to do with the disappearances. With apprehension spreading thorough the tribe, Michelle left for Japan to ask Heihachi why he had sought to take the pendant during the second *Tekken* tournament. Michelle hoped to learn about the origin of the God Fight's power. Michelle did not return, Julia suspected Heihachi and now seeks him out to discover the truth, (Instruction Booklet).

Claire Redfield of *Resident Evil 2* - Action/Adventure

Claire went to Raccoon City in search of her brother, who was reported missing and rumored to be affiliated with the evil Umbrella Corporation. Having arrived in town, Claire and Leon, a police officer, go on separately to gather clues and solve the same mystery.

"Claire is a light-hearted, articulate modern women. While she can be a bit of a tomboy at times, she is somewhat wild. Self-confident and extroverted, Claire is the first person to try something that many others would not" (Instruction Booklet).

Aeris Gainsborough of *Final Fantasy 7* - Role-Playing

Aeris, her background mysterious, is a bright spot in the middle of a dark and dreary town. While selling flowers near Avalanche's first target, Aeris' life was forever altered with a chance meeting with Cloud (*Final Fantasy 7*'s main character). Now she must fight against Avalanche (a group of rebels against the kingdom's leaders and who

now wishes to enslave Aeris) and destroy what she holds most dear. Aeris is the closest character *Final Fantasy 7* has to a dedicated magic user. Her physical attacks are fairly weak, but she possesses great skill with Materia (a form of magic) and its various forms, (Instruction Booklet).

Tifa Lockheart of *Final Fantasy 7* - Role Playing:

Tifa and Cloud were childhood friends, but parted ways when Cloud left their hometown of Nibelheim to join Soldier, a group of rebels against Avalanche. When her parents died, Tifa also left Nibelheim and headed for Midgar. Soon after opening her bar, Tifa's Seventh Heaven, she met Barret and joined his group of rebels known as Avalanche. When fighting, Tifa lets her fists do the talking. Tifa is a great frontline fighter, (Instruction Booklet). Both Tifa and Aeris vie for Cloud's heart, (Instruction Booklet).

Note-Final Fantasy* series storyline has been going since 1987. Also, being of the role-playing game genre means that the game is very plot driven. Therefore the storyline is very intricate and somewhat confusing for those who have not been following it closely. For this reason the character profile of Aeris Gainsborough and Tifa Lockheart are short and many of the groups, such as Avalanche and Soldier, are not defined.

Chun Li of *Street Fighter Alpha 2*- Fighting:

Strong and light on her feet, Chun Li has practically unparalleled physical prowess. Chun-Li has a rapid, flexible style that can accommodate any rival. Although

she represents China, it is understood that she grew up in America with her father, a special agent. After his death at the hands of the crime syndicate Shadowloo, Chun Li joined the Special Forces, vowing to find her father's killer. After previous *Street Fighter* tournaments, Chun Li discovered her target was Vega, the leader of Shadowloo. Through the tournament, Chun-Li pursues Vega (Fielder, Joe, Jeff Gerstmann, Jer Horwitz, Greg Kasavin, Ryan MacDonald, Justin Speer, Ken Williams 1999).

Sakura of *Street Fighter Alpha 2*- Fighting:

Naive and stubborn, Sakura's fighting spirit soars, even though it has not fully flowered. Unaware of the world around her, Sakura fights single-mindedly towards her goal of winning the Street Fighter tournament. Sakura has been following Ryu for as long as she can remember, slowly picking up the techniques of Shotokan Karate. At the *Street Fighter Alpha 2* tournament, Sakura feels the need for direct instruction, and seeks out her idol.

Sakura uses many of the well-known moves of Shotokan, but has introduced her own unique flavor to the style, which some say excels even Ryu's (Fielder, Joe, Jeff Gerstmann, Jer Horwitz, Greg Kasavin, Ryan MacDonald, Justin Speer, Ken Williams 1999).

Rose of *Street Fighter Alpha 2*- Fighting:

Normally a tarot reader, Rose has entered the *Street Fighter Alpha 2* tournaments in hope of suppressing her evil cousin, Vega. Although they share the same power, Rose

employs hers for refinement and cleansing of the spirit (Soul Power), while Vega uses his for manipulation and destruction (Psycho Power).

An unorthodox fighter, Rose must be used to making the most of her high priority and well-balanced special moves. Rose is ranked second only to Vega in the *Street Fighter* tournament of *Street Fighter Alpha 2* (Fielder, Joe, Jeff Gerstmann, Jer Horwitz, Greg Kasavin, Ryan MacDonald, Justin Speer, Ken Williams 1999).

Cammy of *Street Fighter Alpha 2*- Fighting:

Cammy is a 19-year-old British special agent working in a Special Forces unit called “Delta Red”. Three years earlier, Cammy was found unconscious, and taken in by a Colonel Wolfman. She had no memory of her past, just a scar on her left cheek. Cammy is described as being moody, fairly naive, having a quick temper, and possessing a definite cruel side. Colonel Wolfman recognized Cammy’s quick reflexes, and trained her to fight. She did well, and eventually joined “Delta Red” to fight in the “Street Fighter Tournament.” (Fielder, Joe, Jeff Gerstmann, Jer Horwitz, Greg Kasavin, Ryan MacDonald, Justin Speer, Ken Williams 1999).

Sheeva of *Mortal Kombat 3* - Fighting:

Sheeva becomes suspicious of Shao Kahn’s loyalty toward her (Sheeva’s) race of Shokan when he places Motaro as head of his extermination squads. Shao Kahn is the ruler of the Outworld (a world other than earth). In the Outworld, Motaro’s race of Centurions is the natural enemy of the Shokan. She enters the Mortal Kombat tournament to find out more, (Instruction Booklet).

Sindel of *Mortal Kombat 3* - Fighting:

Sindel once ruled the Outworld at Shao Kahn's side as his queen. Now, 10,000 years after her untimely death, she is reborn on Earth. Her evil intentions in the Mortal Kombat tournament are every match for Shao Kahn's tyranny. She is key to his occupation on Earth, (Instruction Booklet).

Sonya Blade of *Mortal Kombat 3* - Fighting:

Sonya disappears in the first tournament, but is later rescued by a friend named Jax. After returning to Earth, she and Jax try to warn the US Government of the looming Outworld menace. Lacking proof, they watch helplessly as Shao Kahn begins his invasion. Sonya enters this Mortal Kombat tournament to keep an eye on things, (Instruction Booklet).

Pai Chan of *Virtual Fighter Megamix* - Fighting

Quick tempered and moody, Pai Chan is a leading star in Hong Kong action films. An only child, Pai was trained by her father, Lau, in martial arts from a young age. Lau was jealous of her superior abilities, however, so she ran away from home at 16 when her mother died. Two years later, she was a success in the movie industry. When she received word that her father was going to enter the World Fighting Tournament, she also decided to enter. She went on to fight her father in the World Fighting Tournament and again in the Second World Fighting Tournament. She lost both times.

Pai left the second tournament with a new perspective on her father. What is it that he seeks with his fists that is so important that he would forsake his family? Pondering that, Pai began working on her new world spanning, big budget film, until she heard that there would be a 3rd tournament, (Instruction Booklet).

Sarah Bryant of *Virtual Fighter Megamix* - Fighting

Sarah was suspicious of the circumstances surrounding her brother Jacky's racing accident. As she was investigating this accident, she was kidnapped. The kidnapper uses hypnosis to control her actions. Her innate fighting sense heightened by the hypnotism, Sarah was sent into the World Fighting Tournaments to deliver the knockout blow to her brother Jacky. She does not succeed.

In the second World Fighting Tournament, Sarah is still held captive and hypnotized. She is further trained by the Syndicate to become the strongest fighting machine in order to kill her elder brother Jacky. Although Sarah was rescued at the tournament by Jacky, who claimed to be her brother, all of her memories had been wiped clean. Although occasional fragments of her memories began to return as she lived her daily life, she found that they returned far more often during her training. Perhaps she can recover the rest of her memories by fighting? With that hope, she decided to enter the 3rd tournament, (Instruction Booklet).

Ayame of *Tenchu* - Action/Adventure

The following is directly from the *Tenchu* Instruction Booklet:

It was a time of great turmoil.

Bitter wars raged as those in power sought yet more power, but only chaos prevailed. There was but one beacon of hope shining amidst the madness- Matsunoshin Gohda who ruled his people with wisdom, compassion and justice.

Behind the great man were two ninjas who were sworn to serve and protect their master to the death. Rikimaru, a leader of the Azuma Shinobi-ryu ninja sect, and Ayame, a young female ninja, sully their hands with the blood of the wicked and unjust far from the public's eye. This is the tale of two shadows of justice born unto darkness and destined to die in darkness."

Ayame was "an orphan who has been trained since childhood as a ninja. Ayame has served Lord Gohda since she was fourteen. She is renowned for her boldness, spontaneity, and quickness. Ayame adores Gohda's daughter Kiku as if Kiku were her own baby sister. She is acerbic and tough and her tongue is almost as sharp as her sword.

Lei Fang of *Dead or Alive* - Fighting:

The following is directly from the *Dead or Alive* Instruction Booklet:

Lei Fang is an impulsive little vixen, which is actually how she ended up in Missoula, Montana, anyway. She applied and was accepted to Montana State University's overseas scholarship program, and found herself in this small Montana mountain-basin town. Her only regret is that her favorite hobby -karaoke- is an unheard-of pastime up here, where mountain climbing and kayaking are the norm.

She stays busy between Dead or Alive matches (the tournament of this game is called "Dead or Alive"), taking classes at the university, and teaching a course in the

Chinese martial art, Taikyokuken. At 5'5 and 110 pounds, this Lethal Fighter is a real eye-catcher and she's one little vixen you'd better keep your eyes on at all times.

Tina of *Dead or Alive* - Fighting:

The following is directly from the *Dead or Alive* Instruction Booklet:

This blue-eyed beauty is no typical American woman--even though she is from Kansas City, loves cycling marathons, won't tell her age or her weight, and collects friends like gnats on a ripe banana.

Tina isn't typical, because she's been a pro wrestler since high school, and is now one of *Dead or Alive*'s most feared competitors.

Tina shares an apartment with her chubby little black cat, Egger, where she lives, breathes and eats fighting --between Lethal matches she fantasizes about the sport with the help of her unparalleled collection of fighting video games from around the world.

Tina is no typical American woman: she's a lethal fighter to be reckoned with.

Kasumi of *Dead or Alive* - Fighting:

The following is directly from the *Dead or Alive* Instruction Booklet:

At 17, Kasumi is the youngest competitor in *Dead or Alive*. This ultra-serious high schooler is an accomplished escape artist and straight-A student who tells horoscopes on her lunch hour. She loves strawberry pastries, the Angel Eyes video game, and staying out past her curfew.

She weight in at only 106 lbs. and stands just 5'5", but watch out --if you think this quiet little thing is a sweet kitten, you're in for an ugly surprise. Kasumi's expertise is assassin-style Ninjitsu --and like a cat, you never see her coming until it's too late.

b. Character Profile- Discussion:

Though there were slight references that could be interpreted as gender discrimination, there was not enough to say that there was an issue of sexism in language or the profiles of female characters. One example was the way that Ayame of *Tenchu* was described in the instruction booklet. "Rikimaru, a leader of the Azuma Shinobi-Ryu ninja sect, and Ayame, a young female ninja." Both Rikimaru and Ayame were not given a specific age. However, both looked to be in their twenties, though Ayame looked younger. Nevertheless, Ayame was described as a "young ninja" and there was no reference to Rikimaru's age at all. Ayame's gender was also pointed out while Rikimaru's was not.

"Rikimaru, a leader of the Azuma Shinobi-ryu ninja sect, and Ayame, a young female ninja, sully their hands with the blood of the wicked and unjust far from the public's eye." (Instruction Booklet). Rikimaru's gender was assumed and he is described as a leader. However, Ayame's gender is pointed out and she is described by her gender and age.

There was also an issue with the way some of the characters were described. For example, Lei Fang of *Dead or Alive* as a "vixen" for no other reason other than the fact that she is aggressive *and* "beautiful."

Of all games, booklets, and literature studied about female characters, a large amount of the character's strength was in their stories/profiles. The profiles and stories of the characters gave them perspective and personality. Without her story, Lara Croft was just a body, a "pretty" face. With her story, Croft was a Ph.D.-ed archeologist, seasoned in raiding tombs and having the courage of a lion. The fact that Lei Fang of *Dead or Alive* was accepted into MSU's overseas scholarship program turns her into more than just a female character whose breast can be set to bounce profusely. A history added context, it made the characters more realistic not in the visual sense but in a real life sense.

There would be an issue of discrimination if most of the stories/profiles had the motivations of the characters as being driven by revenge against an unfaithful boyfriend, avenging the death of a brother or father or trying to win money for a new wardrobe. This would show that women were only motivated to act only for love, male family members and money for frivolous things. A few characters were avenging the deaths of a brother or father. For example, Chun Li of *Street Fighter* was searching for the killer of her father. Claire Redfield of *Resident Evil 2* enters a city infested with Zombies in search of her missing brother.

Aeris Gainsborough and Tifa Lockheart of *Final Fantasy 7* were both seeking to gain the main character's heart. However, of the 21 characters, stereotypical female motivations were not the norm.

Some characters were selfish and hard headed. Lara Croft of *Tomb Raider 3* was driven by her own ambitions to obtain magical objects. Sheeva of *Mortal Kombat* of the Shokan race (a race of four armed monsters) entered the *Mortal Kombat* tournament to

protect her people. The childish Ling Xiaoyo of *Tekken 3* entered the *Tekken* tournament to win money to build the biggest amusement park in the world. Plenty of variety existed.

Across the board, there were no references to the character's sexuality in their stories/profiles. Most of stories/profiles were respectable, meaning that most of the characters were intelligent and motivated. They were up to great things in their lives. And the ones that weren't, such as Ling Xiaoyo, were young and immature.

In terms of age, there was a complete lack of older women. The oldest woman character was Lara Croft who is 31. A 50-year-old woman would have a different, even more extensive story than this younger character. So in that sense, there is no variety. Ageism was the only form of discrimination found in the character profiles.

Chapter Four: Content Analysis

Results- Chart⁶

Content Analysis Discussion

Seventy-one percent of the games studied were rated Teen, meaning that one must be thirteen or over to purchase the game. Twenty-nine percent of the games studied were rated Mature, meaning one must be 17 or over. This meant that the majority of the games studied were rated suitable for teenagers. Nevertheless, teenagers were the largest audience of all the games studied, including those rated Mature.

The results of the content analysis showed that virtual women must fit a highly specific mold that is mostly dependent on their “Beauty.” It showed that there was a very specific definition of “beauty” and if a virtual woman didn’t possess it, she did not exist. The virtual woman had a very specific facial structure: 62 percent of the virtual women studied had large eyes and a small nose. In 1998, 90 percent of the characters studied had this facial structure. The only characters that didn’t have this facial structure were less cartoon-like, there was more shading in her face, more lines, more detail. The difference is comparable to the difference between a cartoon and a painting. The less cartoon-like a character is, the less possible it is to have such a standardized facial structure. Lara Croft was the only character that had large eyes and thick lips. No characters had a wide nose, however.

Age was also a big issue. Only one character with a given age (out of 12) was over the age of thirty. And the characters with no given age looked well under thirty. Strangely enough, that one character was Lara Croft. Lara Croft, however, was not presented as a 31-year-old. In this case, Croft is an anomaly. Age-wise, Croft deviated

⁶ Content Analysis Chart: Appendix C

greatly from the norm, the majority. Hence, not much could be garnered from this fact about her age. All the characters, except for Croft and Chun-Li were under 25.

In the games where there was more than one character, the female characters were always on the younger end, in many cases significantly younger. The reason for this might have been to make sure that the female characters were not too threatening. No matter what extraordinary feats she was capable of doing, she was always close to the age of the game players. Therefore, she's not too threatening or intimidating. However, when it came to male characters, since they are male, their ages can vary from 10 years of age to 70 years. Youth also signifies inexperience, lacking the wisdom that comes with age.

For virtual women, to possess beauty one must be young. This is part of the rigid "beauty" mold. As with other attributes discussed, without youth, a virtual woman is not beautiful. Hence she will not exist. Thus, the vast majority of the virtual women studied were young.

All the characters, except one (Sheeva of *Mortal Kombat 3*), were light-skinned. The majority had at least long or medium length legs, long hair, sexy clothing and had medium to large breasts. They were human, and Caucasian or Asian. The sum of the content analysis added up to a very specific type of virtual woman. It defined a concept of beauty. None of the characters studied in the content analysis were overweight, had blemished skin, or wore loose clothing. Visually a message could be garnered about the beauty of women from the information gathered in the content analysis. The message was that this defined "beauty" was the virtual woman's most important feature; that it must be constantly displayed; that there is little variety in what is considered beautiful in the

gaming arena; and that this problem of stereotyping has existed for years within the medium.

The most popular virtual woman's success lies mostly in her beauty (the rest lies in the strength of the game). Lara Croft is Caucasian, has a very large chest, light skin, a curvaceous figure, long legs, long hair, a small nose, and wears skimpy clothing. Most of the virtual women migrate toward this type of physique. However, except for the characters in *Dead or Alive*, most of the characters were not this extreme. Nevertheless, Croft was the most successful of all the characters. Thus this formula was expected to be emulated in the future.

In terms of attitude, the greatest number of virtual women, 43 percent, had a “no nonsense” approach to the way they did things. The reason for this may have been to compensate for the way they look. It would almost be comical for Lara Croft, for example, to look the way she did and then to have a sexy attitude. That would have been overkill. Or making her serious could have been a way of making her sexier. The number of characters with a sexy attitude (meaning she behaved as if she felt that she was being watched by men who liked the way she looked and she enjoyed this and played it up by swaying her hips more, having sultry eyes, etc.) was the second largest number of attitude types (19 percent). However, in 1998 that number increased to 30 percent.

This may be due to the fact that female characters as a whole are increasingly becoming more stereotyped and sexualized. As time goes by, the issue of overkill (a sexy physique with a sexy attitude with sexy clothes, for example) may become less and less of an issue.

There was also a hint of negative stereotyping in how a character behaved (many of their actions were dictated by the fact that they were female). A singular individual is more than just their gender. Virtual women were being touted as characters with feelings, histories, likes and dislikes and motivations. Hence, there was no reason for their actions to be so dictated by the fact that they were female.

Results were split down the middle when it came to victory actions, what she does when she wins a fight. Fifty-six percent of the characters reacted in a way that brought attention to a stereotype in some way. Fifty-six percent reacted in a way that did not bring attention to their gender. It should be remembered that, many of the characters had more than one victory action, some of which brought attention to their gender and some that did not. Forty-three percent only reacted in a stereotyped way. And 44 percent did not.

Though it is a fifty-fifty split, the same conclusion could be made about the studied characters: Virtual women were stereotyped by their gender. For fifty percent of the characters to react to victory in stereotypical way is problematic, fifty percent is a significant percentage. The same split was present in "Fatality or Taunt" and "Losing Action." Fifty percent of 21 prevalent virtual women is too large of a percentage of virtual women to be behaving in a stereotypical female way. That left only half of the game heroines to have the freedom of behaving in a variety of ways. The numbers were not as split in the category of "character taunt" (she does this before the fight starts). Thirty-three percent did something that highlighted their gender in a stereotypical way. For example, Rose of *Street Fighter Alpha 3* shook her finger and says "tut tut" with a heavy accent and a mischievous smile on her face. This leaves 67 percent doing something to taunt their opponents that did not stereotypically highlight their gender. For

example, Chun Li of *Street Fighter Alpha 3* said something in Japanese and chopped her hand forward.

The results also showed that there is a possibility that virtual women behaving in a stereotypical way is increasing. In 1998, 57 percent of the characters behaved in a stereotypical way when they won a fight and 83 percent had a stereotypical losing action. As opposed to the pre-1998 games where 29 percent had a gendered losing action and 44 percent had a stereotyped winning action. The curvaceous body type had increased in the 1998 games studied by about 10 percent.

However it isn't across the board. The Athletic Plus build (which means an athletic figure with large breasts) decreased over time by thirty percent amongst the games studied.

As a whole, stereotypically feminine physiques and behaviors dominated and increased or stayed the same over time.

Chapter Five: Different Versions:

Tomb Raider (action/adventure) Results:

Three versions of *Tomb Raider* exist: *Tomb Raider 1* (1996), *Tomb Raider 2* (1997), and *Tomb Raider 3* (1998). *Tomb Raider 4* is due in December 1999.

In the first *Tomb Raider*, Croft's mission was to find an artifact called the Scion. In *Tomb Raider 2*, Croft searched for the Dagger of Xian. In *Tomb Raider 3*, Croft searched around the globe for artifacts that fell from the sky in a meteor.

In this version, the opening movie (which the player watches to learn the plot) was centered on Croft and the quest she decides to go on. Lara only encountered human beings near the end of the game. The majority of the time, she explored environments where the only enemies were vicious wildlife (bats, wolves, dinosaurs, bears, etc.).

In *Tomb Raider*, Croft only had one outfit, a pair of tight short shorts and a tight white shirt. She wore it regardless of the temperature or terrain. Her chest size was atypically large and her long brown hair was tied back so that it is not flowing freely. Croft's personality was developed but not very realistic. She was a hard-core, no-nonsense woman with excessive bravery and callousness.

In *Tomb Raider 2*, there were significant changes. The opening movie did not feature Lara at all. The movie featured the history of the Dagger of Xian: Aside from a lot of blood and gore and Croft's absence in the opening movie, the variety of guns that Croft collected throughout the game increased to include an underwater harpoon and M-16. Also, there were more human beings as foes.

In the second version of the game, Croft's wardrobe expanded. She began the game with her original outfit of short tight shorts and a tight white shirt. However, as the

game progressed, the player saw Croft in various different clothing including a wet suit, a bomber jacket, and a camouflage winter coat and pants.

The graphics were much less grainy and smoother. There was a lot more color to the game, and Croft moved more smoothly. Croft's chest size increased and detail was added to make it look softer and more lifelike. She looked closer to being made of flesh as opposed to stone. Her skin also looked softer, less stone-like. Her ponytail was in a braid that went down her back. It was animated to swing back and forth as she moved. At the end of *Tomb Raider 2*, the player got a nice view of Croft's "end," as the game ended with a view of Croft's backside.

Tomb Raider 3 was not much different from the second *Tomb Raider*. Once again, the opening movie did not include Croft. It showed when the meteor containing the artifacts fell from the sky long ago. Croft did not have different outfits in this version. She started off wearing the same outfit as in the first *Tomb Raider*, except for one difference. The white tight shirt she was wearing became a half shirt. The graphics are even more sophisticated. Texture palettes were improved for greater detail. Croft also was given new moves, including crawling, the monkey swing and a speed dash move.

In December of 1999, the fourth version, called *Tomb Raider: Last Revelation*, is scheduled to hit the market. This version is coming out when Croft's popularity is at an all-time high. The official *Tomb Raider* website (www.tombraider.com) boasted that "State of the art graphics: single skin technology allows a smoother character model with no split elbow and knees; bit-mapping brings 3D textures to life. Completely new puzzle types based on new moves and inventory development."

A film featuring Lara Croft is currently being discussed. *Tomb Raider 4* is predicted to be even more graphically sophisticated, blowing more life into Lara Croft. Eidos Interactive (the makers of the *Tomb Raider* series) even boasts that the detail will be so great that Croft's nostrils will even flare.

Throughout all three games, regardless of her tight shirts and short shorts or black skin tight cat suits, the men Croft encountered addressed her as if she were just one of the guys. Only in the very first *Tomb Raider* did a man speak with Lara in a provocative manner (and this was in the opening movie of the game).

Tomb Raider (action/adventure) Discussion:

Since 1996, Eidos Interactive has come out each year with a new version of *Tomb Raider*. With each version, the star of the game, Lara Croft, becomes more real, increasingly life-like. Not real as in more like a real woman. If Croft was made human, she would not live because she has no room in her abnormally tiny waist to fit her vital organs. Croft was more realistic in the same way that an alien in a movie with expert special effects looks realistic.

In the first *Tomb Raider*, Croft's reputation as a sex symbol was not yet established. One could almost say that the first *Tomb Raider* was geared toward a female audience. It was the first three-dimensional game to feature a female character as its one and only character. Also, most of the foes in the game were animals such as bats, dinosaurs and wolves. The first *Tomb Raider* was also the only version that centered the opening movie on Lara Croft and her quest. In *Tomb Raider 2* and *Tomb Raider 3*, the opening movies gave perspective to the plot, but neither of them directly involved Croft.

In *Tomb Raider 2*, the opening movie showed a bit of the history of the Dagger of Xian: an artifact hidden in an ancient Emperor's palace within the Great Wall of China. In *Tomb Raider 3*, the opening movie showed what happened when British sailors discovered a meteor buried deep in the earth and looted the artifacts inside it.

The exclusion of Croft from opening movies after the first version symbolized the fact that the plot and Croft's abilities and motivations as an explorer were secondary to Lara Croft as a sex symbol. It also symbolized the change in the game's audience. In the next two versions, there were more human foes, more guns, Croft had more sexy outfits, her chest size increased, and her body as a whole was more detailed and animated. The crawling move that was added in the third version is yet another factor. When she crouched and crawled, the player had a significant view of her backside.

There was a particular significance to Croft's changes in clothing throughout the game. It humanized her. Human beings do not wear the same outfit all the time. They change clothes. Though all of her clothes, at least, showed the outline of her physique (including her winter coat and pants), it was more human to bundle up when it got cold. Also, the player got a more rounded idea of what Croft looked like. When she changed clothes, one saw different aspects of Croft and in doing so, got a more solid idea of Croft. A player could say "I'd know Lara Croft anywhere, no matter what she's wearing."

By the second version, Croft reputation had exploded within the media. Hence, though her personality didn't change much between *Tomb Raider 1* and *Tomb Raider 2*, it was still developed outside of the actual game in the media (the Internet, newspapers, television and magazines). By the second version, not only was her personality solidified but also Lara Croft became a cultural icon. The *Tomb Raider* movie being discussed,

which features a real woman playing the part, is yet another attempt to bring Lara Croft to real life. In cyberspace there is an argument ensuing about the fact that no real woman will even “measure” up to the “real” Lara Croft.

Though the majority of Lara Croft’s fans view her as a sex symbol and that is how she is packaged, the contradiction was that Lara Croft was also a Ph.D.-ed archeologist with tremendous courage and strength. However, this is not focused on. For, if Croft had all the brains without the physique, she would not be nearly as popular.

In conclusion, each year, a new *Tomb Raider* version comes out. Each year, gaming technology evolves tenfold. Game experts are predicting *Tomb Raider 4* to be breath taking. Meaning that each year, this female game character gets closer to being a “living” being. A *human* living being? Not exactly. For, her attributes are extremely abnormal and she’s is not made of flesh and blood but well organized pixels.

***Final Fantasy* (role-playing) Results:**

Only two games were studied in the *Final Fantasy* series; *Final Fantasy 7* (1997) and *Final Fantasy Tactics* (1998). This was because all the previous *Final Fantasy* games could not be found due to their age. *Final Fantasy 8* recently hit the market and was not available at the time of the study.

Final Fantasy 7 did not start off with any female characters. The player begins the game with Cloud Strife (a male) who was central as a character as can get in *Final Fantasy*. The player quickly met up with another male character. The player encountered the female characters later. Regardless of the female characters, the point of view of the plot was from Strife’s. The player had to decide how to act toward the two women, Aeris

Gainsborough and Tifa Lockheart, who both competed for his love. Also, other characters addressed the player as if he or she were male. Three of the twelve main characters in *Final Fantasy 7*, were female. Two of which were in love with the main character. Aeris Gainsborough was a flower seller who gets caught up in a revolution. Tifa Lockheart was a feisty woman who owned a bar and befriended Strife.

The objective of the game was complex. It involved joining a rebel group, saving the world and whatever else popped up. The movement of the game revolved around choices made by the player. The spectacular graphics appeared during the movies. During actual play, the graphics were good however; the player did not control the player in real time. For example, when one wanted to attack the enemy, one had to open the menu screen and choose what one wanted to do. Then one went to the attack template and once that option was chosen, the menu popped off the screen and the character attacked.

In *Final Fantasy Tactics* the game started off with two female characters, Ovelia Atkashka, Agrias Oaks included within a band of six. Ovelia Atkashka was a princess who was kidnapped after the first battle in the game. Very much like the classic Nintendo game of the early 80s, *Double Dragon*, she was punched in the stomach, slung over the shoulder of the kidnapper and carried away. Agrias Oaks was Princess Ovelia's protector. She was 25 years of age and a knight. She had a strong sense of loyalty and justice, and joined the player when she saw the state in which the kingdom is in. The player controlled all six characters. However, the point of view was from a male character named Delita Hyral. Once again, other characters referred to the player as a "he."

Graphic-wise, *Final Fantasy Tactics* looked different from *Final Fantasy 7*. The graphics were surprisingly less sophisticated during actual game play. In *Final Fantasy 7*,

there were three types of sections, the animated movie (which was the most sophisticated part of the game, graphically); the segments where the character is moving from place to place (this was where the character looks squat and small, during these segments, no matter how many characters the player has, he or she only saw Cloud); and the battle segments, where the player fought enemies using all the characters he or she accumulated. During the battle scenes, the characters looked tall and thin and more three dimensional than during the segments where the character went from place to place.

In *Final Fantasy Tactics*, one saw all the characters all the time. However, during battle scenes and the sections where the characters went from place to place, the characters always looked squat. Only in the movie intervals did they look tall and thin.

Final Fantasy Tactics was also much more plot driven than *Final Fantasy 7*. The characters spoke to each other much more. This meant that the plot was more developed and intricate.

The object of the game was also complex and depending on the choices the player makes. The method of attacking and acting was the same as in *Final Fantasy 7*. The player did not move the characters in “real time.” The player had to go to the menu, choose what he would do and then choose “execute.” Then the character did what the player chose.

Final Fantasy (role-playing) Discussion:

The *Final Fantasy* series was very different from the *Tomb Raider* series. It was an entirely different type of game. *Final Fantasy* was a role-playing game and *Tomb Raider* was an action/adventure game. This meant that far more significance was placed

on plot in the *Final Fantasy* series; there was a lot of dialogue between the characters, which develops the plot. The player must actually sit and read as the characters had discussions and arguments.

The game also revolved around more than one character in the *Final Fantasy* series. In *Tomb Raider*, the main and only character was Lara Croft. Typically in an action/adventure game, the game focused on one character, even if there was more than one to choose from (if the game was a two player game, then the plot normally revolves around two characters). This was how it was in the *Tomb Raider* series. Everything was from Croft's perspective and her life was all that the player cared about maintaining.

In a role-playing game, the plot overshadowed the characters. For example, in *Final Fantasy*, instead of controlling one character, the player controlled a group of them, each with their own personalities, opinions, strengths and weaknesses. Some characters were at the beginning of the game; other characters appeared along the way.

When there was a battle, the player used each character as if she had a variety of weapons to fight the enemy. Some characters were of better use in defeating a particular enemy than others. Hence that character would be selected for the given situation.

Altogether, there were nine *Final Fantasy* games, *Final Fantasy 8* recently hitting the market. There's already a rumor that a *Final Fantasy 9* is currently in the making.

The *Final Fantasy* game came out in 1987 in Japan and 1990 in the United States. For the time, it was a somewhat graphically sophisticated game. Out of the six main characters, none of them were female.

In *Final Fantasy 4* (1991), Rosa, 19, was a powerful wizard but she was in love with the Dark Knight, Cecil. She became deathly ill when he left. Rydia was a seven-

year-old girl with magical skills and Porom was a five-year-old twin. Though *Final Fantasy 4* game makers finally decided to put female characters of importance in the game, the characters were almost all young, Rosa (a knight) was literally sick with love, and one of the three was a twin (meaning she does not stand alone). By *Final Fantasy 6* (1994), there were 14 main characters and only two were female; Celes Chere, an ex-general, and Terra Branford, who was highly gifted in the art of magic.

Though, thus far, there are no overweight or elderly female characters in the *Final Fantasy* series. Nevertheless, *Final Fantasy* female characters tended to be more well-rounded. They talked, they had natural emotions, some of them were tough and some of them were soft hearted.

Over time, there was no progression of sexist stereotypes. The stereotypes of female characters being overtaken by love and emotion, always being young and “pretty,” and always showing more skin in terms of clothes than the male characters, remained consistent from *Final Fantasy 7* to *Final Fantasy Tactics*.

Though *Final Fantasy 8* and the older versions of the series could not be played, the character profiles and game reviews were available. According to the information, not much changed in terms of female characters except for the fact that as time progressed, more female characters were added to the game and the graphics of the game increased in sophistication. However, graphic sophistication was not used to make the female characters more sexualized. It was used to create increasingly advanced landscapes and to make the characters less block-like.

What was most odd about the game was the difference in the way that the characters looked in the interval movies versus the actual game. In the movie, the

characters all looked tall, thin with a definite homogenous facial structure. It was the “Japanimation” style (meaning character faces had small noses, large eyes and small mouths, and characters were tall, thin and long legged). This was also the way the characters looked in advertisements for the game and on game covers. However, when actually playing the game where one controlled the character’s actions, the characters looked short and squat, almost like dwarfs.

Thus, in the *Final Fantasy* series there was no room for a female character’s breasts to bounce exaggeratedly as in the game *Dead or Alive*. There was no chance for her dress to fly up showing her underwear as in *Tekken 3*. This was the case in both *Final Fantasy* games that were studied and most likely the case in all the previous versions. Whether this will change or remain the same in *Final Fantasy 9*, was yet to be determined.

To sum, over time the number of female characters in the *Final Fantasy* series increased. However, though virtual women were not as marginalized and stereotyped compared to the other games, there were some issues. For one, the number of female characters was significantly lower than the number of male characters. In *Final Fantasy 7*, only 3 of the 12 main characters were female. In *Final Fantasy Tactics*, it got a little better. Two of the 6 characters were female. This was a vast improvement from *Final Fantasy 1*, where there were no female characters.

The point of view of the main character reflected whom the game was targeted toward. There was no question that the majority of video game players are male. However, if the games were not targeted only toward males, would there be more female players? Most likely. At the same time, should the game makers produce game for an

audience that was not known to exist? It is a cycle. However, was the gender of the main character so important that the game must specify at the very beginning? Why not simply leave it up to the player to choose the gender. If the player could choose the character's name, why not the character's gender?

It made a significant difference when the other characters addressed one as a "he" or "she" as one moves through this complex game. Hence, this was a significant issue. However, though improvements were made to include central female characters, some of which were very strong figure, the game still maintains that its main character must be male.

Also, though there were more female characters (some of some of which were knights, queens and little girls) the problem of stereotyping still seemed to crop up. All the female characters of both games studied had to fit the video game mold of beauty. Two attributes of this mold were that she was never overweight and she was young with flawless skin. This "beauty mold" was clarified in the content analysis.

Also, in *Final Fantasy 7* the two main female characters were in love with the main character. This was doubtfully a coincidence, since the game makers obviously assume that the player was male. This twist in the plot put these two characters into the powerless role of "love interest to the main character" as opposed to standing on their own.

The graphics from *Final Fantasy 7* to *Final Fantasy Tactics* increased only a bit in some areas and somewhat decreased in others. More attention was focused on the plot, for in *Final Fantasy Tactics*, the plot was even more intricate (i.e. there was a lot more dialogue and interaction between characters).

Final Fantasy 8 is being marketed as a love story and the main character, who is male, must once again save the world. He must also save the woman he loves. Thus, once again, the main female character is packaged as the main character's love interest as opposed to being her own person. She is also a "damsel-in-distress."

Though the *Final Fantasy* series, over time, became more woman-inclusive. It was still male-centered. However, its female characters tended to be more diverse compared to most video games and the plot was more important than the visuals. This meant that less attention was devoted to the female character's looks. The outcome was that the virtual women of *Final Fantasy 7* and *Tactics* were somewhat stereotyped and limited in their roles. However, the stereotyping was not as severe as in other video games.

Street Fighter (fighting) Results:

By far the most extensive and groundbreaking game series in video games up to date is the *Street Fighter* series. Starting with *Street Fighter*, the first of the series in 1987, the series has accumulated a very large dedicated following.

Below is a list of *Street Fighter* games up-to-date:

Street Fighter--August 1987- No female character

Street Fighter 2: The World Warrior --Released March 1991

Street Fighter 2: Champion Edition --Released April 1991

Street Fighter Alpha 3: Hyper Fighting -- Released November 1992

Super Street Fighter 2: The New Challengers --Released August 1994

Super Street Fighter 2 Turbo -- Released April 1994

Street Fighter The Movie (Arcade Game) -- Released First Quarter 1995

Street Fighter The Movie (Home Game) -- Released Mid 1995

Street Fighter Alpha -- Released June 1995

Street Fighter Alpha 2 -- Released August 1987

Street Fighter Alpha 2 Gold -- Released July 1996

Street Fighter Three: A New Generation of Street Fighters --Released 1997

Street Fighter EX -- Released December 1996

Street Fighter EX Plus -- Released Early 1997

Street Fighter EX Plus Alpha -- Released July 1997

Street Fighter 3: Second Impact -- Released Fall 1997

Street Fighter Alpha 3-- Released 1998

Street Fighter Alpha 3-- Released July 1998

Street Fighter Alpha 3 Plus--Released Summer 1999

Street Fighter EX Plus Alpha -- Released Summer 1999

Street Fighter 3: Third Strike -- Not yet released

The three games studied were *Street Fighter 2 Turbo*, *Street Fighter Alpha 2 Gold* and *Street Fighter EX Plus Alpha*. These three games were chosen because they were readily available and fairly recent.

The first game studied was *Super Street Fighter 2 Turbo*, which was released in 1994. Being a fighting game, the object of the game was very simple, to beat one's

opponent. Of the 16 playable characters, only 2 were female, Cammy and Chun-Li.

Cammy was an undercover British special agent fighting against anyone who stood in her way of Bison, the key to her mysterious past. She wore a green thong leotard and combat boots and wore her long blonde hair in two braids. When she won a fight she did several different things, including turning around to show a majority of her bare backside.

Chun-Li secretly pursued the Shadowlaw organization, while seeking revenge for the death of her father. She was short and stocky with incredibly powerful legs. Most of her power was in her legs. Her special move was called the multiple leg attack where she kicks her leg so fast that it looks like she was kicking more than one. She wore a blue dress with slits up the side that went past her hips. Chun Li did three different things when she won: stretched, folded her arms and nodded and jumped up and down and giggled.

Both characters had her own fighting style. Cammy fought using the Special Forces style and Chun-Li used Wu Shu Kung Fu.

Street Fighter Alpha 2 Gold (1996) (the second game studied) was more graphically sophisticated, the character's intricate moves animated in more detail. It had 18 characters, three of which were female. Chun-Li was one of them and she remained basically unchanged except for her clothes and her body. Instead of the dress with the thigh high slits, she wore a green skintight full body suit and cleat shoes. She still was short and stocky with powerful legs, but in this version her legs looked significantly more muscular. The tight body suit showed every detail of muscle.

Sakura was a girl of about 12 or 13. Her mentor was one of the "Street Fighters" named Ryu and she followed him to the *Street Fighter* tournament. She wore a schoolgirl

outfit and her school skirt was well above her knees. Whenever she kicked, the player could see her red underwear. When she won a fight she did a variety of things including a little dance.

Rose was a woman whose age is unknown, though she looks to be between 20 and 30. She was a mystical figure who used a form of magic called Soul Power as her weapon. She could multiply, magically change outfits before one's eyes and animate clothing into lethal weapons. She entered the tenement to track down an opponent whom she believed was misusing Soul Power. She wore a purple dress with a slit all the way up the middle that gave a full view of her legs. She wore purple pantyhose and high heels. When she won a fight she did a variety of things including changing clothes in a split second.

The third game studied was *Street Fighter EX Plus Alpha* (1997). This game was the series' 3D version of the game. Of the 23 characters, 5 of them were female: Chun-Li, Sakura, Blair Dame, Pullum Purna and Hokuto.

Blair Dame Blair traveled the world looking for action and riches, and her journey lead her to the tournament where she hopes to make a killing monetarily. She wore a white armless leotard with a thong back and black book that reach her thighs. When she won a fight she would either turn around and say something in Japanese or she did an no-handed cartwheel and posed sexily.

Pullum Purna was the daughter of an Indian multimillionaire, until one day she happened upon a secret which revealed that her family's riches were granted through the organization called Shadoloo. She vowed to find out the nature of Shadoloo, She was medium skin toned, however she had blue yes. She wore the attire of a belly dancer and

her fighting moves reflected her dancer's background. Her victory actions included a little dance with a tambourine.

Hokuto was a member of Guy's Bushinryuu Ninja Clan. Her search for her missing brother led to the tournament. She fought wearing big wide pants and a white top. She is slight in frame. Her victory actions included posing with one hand on her knee and smiling.

The greatest change in this version was that it was three dimensional, meaning, it was not cartoon-like as the previous versions. The characters were much more realistic. The player also viewed the character from many angles. Sometimes the angle was from the point of view of the player's character. So that the player did not see his or her character. He or she only saw the character that he or she was fighting from a frontal view. Or the angle can show both of the characters from behind. The angles could also be from the front, side or above. Being a three dimensional game meant that all angles existed and could be viewed.

This allowed for the characters' moves to become more real, for instead of moving along a 2D plain, he or she was moving in a 3D plane. They could spin 360 degrees, kick to the side, etc.

Street Fighter (fighting) Discussion:

The first *Street Fighter*, released over a decade ago, had twelve playable characters, none of them female. It emerged during the period in the late 80s when the popularity of video games was waning. With the emergence of *Street Fighter* and other fighting games such as *Fatal Fury*, video gaming came back to life. Not surprisingly, the

popularity of fighting games also sky rocketed. Today, fighting games are the most popular type of video games.

It was *Street Fighter 2: The World Warrior* (1991) that brought the gaming world the first popular virtual woman Chun Li. Prior to Chun Li, female characters only made small ripples in the sea of video games. She was the sole female character of eight playable characters. Chun Li was unique among females who appeared in video games because she was not tall, slim and leggy. She was short, stocky and had thick powerful legs. She was touted by the game as "the strongest woman in the world."

It took the series three years (two versions hitting the market within those two years) to come up with another female character. In *Street Fighter 2: The New Challengers* (1994), Cammy of the Special Forces, joined the game. She and Chun Li were the only female characters of 16 playable characters. The success in popularity of these two characters pushed *Street Fighter* game makers to continue to add more virtual women to the games from then on.

From the beginning, the *Street Fighter* series was developed based on the concept of variety in playable characters. This allowed for the female characters to eventually procure some variety over time. This variety grew in number as time progressed. However, as the number of characters increased, the number of male characters also did. Hence the percentage of female characters did not change much.

In the beginning there were no female characters. As time progressed, one could find a female magician, some school girls, a special agent and many more. Chun-Li was one of the video game arena's most unique characters for she does not migrate toward the typical virtual woman look of looking tall and having long legs and a large chest. She is

short and stocky with powerful legs. From the beginning, all of the series' virtual women had their own special intricate fighting style. And as the number of virtual women increased, so did their variety.

Nevertheless, though there was more variety in the virtual women compared to most games, that variety was limited to staying within the boundaries of the "beauty mold." None of the virtual women studied were overweight, all had flawless skin and all of them had a very particular facial structure (small lips, large eyes and small nose) regardless of their race. This was also the case from *Super Street Fighter 2 Turbo* to *Street Fighter EX Plus Alpha*.

The same went for the character's behavior. If one were to watch Chun-Li fight, one would think she was serious, mature and a great fighter. However, this image was shattered when at the end of one--third of her victories, she throws her hands in the air, jumps up and down and giggles. The change was incredible, for when she fought, she looked focused and serious. And the other two--thirds of her victory actions were very solemn and serious. This reaction made Chun-Li significantly less threatening. Who could fear a woman who behaves like a little girl?

The character's clothing in all three games also lacked much variety in terms of the amount of flesh that was shown. The only character that did not show skin was Hokuto. All the other showed at least the full length of their legs. And characters such as Blair Dame, showed a lot more than that.

The one difference (aside from the evolution of graphic sophistication) in the three games was in *Street Fighter EX Plus Alpha*. *Street Fighter* virtual women with dresses suffered most in this version. The various angles often showed close up shots of

their underwear when they kicked or jumped. If the angle was from the player's point of view and he or she was fighting Sakura, every time she kicked, the player could see her red underwear under her schoolgirl dress. Blair Dame's backside also was the focus of many of the angle shots. The camera in this 3D game definitely took on a "male gaze."

The *Street Fighter* series was the series that really started the trend of the virtual woman. Much of Chun-Li's success was due to her sexy attire and physique. Though not the traditional "beauty," she still possessed the attribute. Then Cammy, who was very traditional in her "beauty," came along. Game makers simply copied the idea of the sexy virtual woman and thus the type of the virtual woman was born.

For this reason, it is not surprising that not much changed from *Super Street Fighter 2 Turbo* to *Street Fighter EX Plus Alpha*. The *Street Fighter* series came up with the successful form of the virtual woman, so why would she change much over time? From the very beginning, beauty and sexuality were of utmost importance to *Street Fighter* virtual women.

Chapter Six: Summary and Conclusion

Summary

Though, this research is one of the first of its kind, fairly solid answers were garnered from it. The three main questions for this thesis and the results were the following:

1. How stereotypical are females in video games?

This research found that female playable characters in the video games studied were highly stereotyped by their sex. They tended to fit the existing western stereotype of what feminine beauty should be (this stereotype is unrealistic and exaggerates femininity).

2. Does the treatment of females in video games vary according to the type of game?

The severity of the stereotyping of the virtual women studied did vary depending on the type of videogame it was. Action/adventure and fighting games tended to stereotype females more than Role-Playing games. Though all types of the games studied stereotyped virtual women in some way. This difference may have been due to the fact that role-playing games were more plot driven and fighting games and action/adventure games were driven more by visuals.

3. Is the treatment of females in video games becoming more stereotyped over time?

Stereotyping does increase over time.

Conclusion

So far, there have been studies on gender and gaming, sexism in video games, violence in video games and video games as a form of influential media. However, this is one of the first studies focusing on the female characters. The purpose of this study was to start a dialogue and state an argument about such an issue. This study suggests that as each year goes by, game makers and the media breathe a bit more life into female video game characters. However it is not for the purpose of bringing reality closer to fantasy but to bring fantasy closer to reality --to make the unreal more realistic.

In the beginning there were only drawings, comic book characters. Today, these characters are amazingly animated. They can perform fluid complex martial arts moves that will amaze any expert. They have in-depth histories created through their personal profiles and biographies, which give them personalities, motivations, likes and dislikes, ages, a past, and other experiences. Many of them are featured in commercials and some of them even graze the covers of magazines. If the video game industry were a utopian fantasy world, there would be variety in both male and female characters.

Nevertheless, many of these female characters are highly stereotyped. As one can see in the content analysis, only one of the 21 characters studied was over thirty (Lara Croft, 31). Compared to the male characters, the female characters were significantly younger than the males. There were no “fat” virtual women of the 21 characters studied. The facial structure of the majority of the characters studied was very distinct. The majority of them had long legs. And a huge chest size was always a factor.

When it came to looks, there was definitely a very ridged mold that each must fit. Only a few deviated. And this mold did not represent in any way the typical or majority

of real women. Game experts said that most of these virtual women were actually anatomically incorrect.

There was plenty of variety when looks were not the issue. Character profiles and motivations were very diverse. Also, the virtual women tended to be very serious and mentally strong. And when she wasn't, it was either because she was very very young or she just wasn't a serious person.

Nevertheless, due to the nature of video games, the visual aspect came first. If these were books, the impact of a virtual woman's personality and history would have much more of an impact on the feminine portrayal in games. Hence, the fact that she had a strong personality and an amazing past had little impact on the portrayal of the female in video games. In a role-playing game, such as *Final Fantasy 7*, the character's past and accomplishments may have a little more impact since role-playing games are plot driven. However, this is not the case in action/adventure or fighting games.

Also, in terms of ethnicity, character portrayals were highly homogenous and borderline racist. A virtual woman's most prized possession was her "beauty." Much of the *Tomb Raider* series' success lies in the sexualization of Lara Croft. If she did not look the way she looked, her popularity would not be nearly as high. The same goes with Chun-Li and most of the other virtual woman. This was why there were no "fat," or "ugly" virtual woman out of all the characters studied. The key to the success of a virtual woman lay in her beauty.

One must question that there was no female character of African descent of all the characters studied. The closest any of the characters came was Sheeva of the *Mortal Kombat* series. She was the only character with dark skin. She was also a four-armed,

terribly angry monster who liked to stomp her opponents to death. What does this fact say?

Of all the virtual women that were looked at during this study, only one was described as being of African descent. Her name was Elena of the *Street Fighter* series. Nevertheless, she had light skin, blue eyes and white hair. Oddly enough, this was the same treatment that was given to the first African character in comic books in the 70s, Storm of the X-Men series. Storm was a goddess from Africa who could control the weather. She also had white long silky hair and pupil-less white eyes. This was not a coincidence.

Could it be that game makers felt that beauty existed only in those of “fair” skin, straight hair, and small noses? The under-representation of dark skinned and African virtual women is an issue that needs to be further looked at in future studies on virtual women.

Another suggested future study is a study on the difference in portrayal of female characters that started out as film or TV characters. For example, Xena, the main character from the television series “Xena”, and Ripley, the main character from the Alien movie series, are two characters that started out as “real” super heroines in movies and on television and were turned into video game characters. Are these characters more likely to be portrayed in a more realistic manner than virtual women, who were created from scratch through the minds of game makers? Most likely, yes, because they were not created from scratch. Even if their attributes are enhanced and altered, they must remain recognizable as the characters from the movies. For example, Ripley did not have balloon

breasts. If she did as a video game character, the game may lose credibility or not be taken as seriously. Nevertheless, an in-depth study is needed.

A study of the portrayal of men in video games is another future study suggestion. Are men just as stereotyped as women in video games? What are some of the stereotypes? And do they have more flexibility?

The medium of video games is highly influential, especially to boys. Virtual women are often the first women young boys spend a lot of time with. These women are not presented as characters to play with or look at. Video games are an interactive medium. Thus, the player interacts with the character. Many young boys may view a virtual woman as their girlfriend. Hence, the way these women are presented is very important. These characters are also just another form of the media. In other words, they present yet another image of women to the world.

The future of virtual women can go in many directions. It could simply be a trend that will soon dissipate. Or it could continue to develop. The latter is the more likely predictions.

Virtual women will continue to evolve. They will continue to look more realistic; their skin more life-like, their facial expressions more detailed, their hair more animated, and their movements more fluid. They will also continue to be stereotyped. If things continue going the way they are going, it would not be surprising if the concept of virtual woman took a dark path.

Down this path, there is more focus on their bodies. She will develop the ability to talk and even converse with the player. There will be the option of seeing her nude and an option allowing the player to customize her personality. As the science of virtual reality

develops, the virtual woman will go down an even darker path. The path of the virtual woman is dictated by the purpose she serves in the game. As long as her top reason for being in the game revolves around her looks and her sexuality, the future does not look too rosy for her.

This study can be used for many things. It can be used to help show how the media as a whole misrepresents the feminine being. It can, in particular, be used as a study to strengthen the argument that videogames need to be taken seriously, for young boys are spending hours playing them. It can also be used to help figure out why girls and women tend to avoid playing most video games.

As in every study, this study had its flaws. The availability of games was an issue in that a pertinent game couldn't be studied. In the gaming arena, the age of a game greatly reflects its availability. For this reason, *Final Fantasy 6* could not be studied. Another problem with this study was that the images of virtual women in commercials and in magazines was not studied. The image of the virtual woman exists in more than just the platform of the actual video game. She is also in magazines, television and billboards. These images are also part of the portrayal of the female in video games, though not directly in the video games. The more characters studied the better a study is.

Although this study did cover a number of characters, it could be updated immediately.

Chapter Seven: Final Note

After researching female characters in video games for over a year, it's not surprising to say that I have a few things to say.

The first has to do with the amount of violence in these games. I have watched my share of scary violent films and television. I'm not someone who actively seeks it out but it doesn't deter me from watching something.

That said, I must voice my personal disgust with one game in particular that I was forced to study. The game *Resident Evil 2* was appalling. The amount of violence in the game was incredible. It makes me shiver to know that vast numbers of young boys in their teenage years and maybe even younger are playing this game for many hours and enjoying it.

I found myself only able to play the game at short intervals with lots of time in between. When I did play it, I had to mute out the sound. There were images of cannibalism (for, zombies at one time were human beings). With the sound on, I could hear the crunching and slurping. And there was plenty of blood. The game revolved around killing these zombies. If they get you, they bite your neck and or pull you to the ground and feast on you. The game's environment was dark and dirty. It was like running around in a horror movie. And the graphics were highly sophisticated and not in a good way. Some of the things in it, I'd rather have seen in less detail.

All this equals a very unpleasant experience. As with all the games, after playing them for a while, I'd dream about them when I went to bed. Needless to say, *Resident Evil 2* gave me plenty of nightmares. The game also made me physically nauseated.

However, I'm sure if I played this game long enough, I'd cease to have this reaction. I'd become numb, desensitized. I also doubt I'd be as saddened when I see road kill. And I'd venture to say I might not be as horrified if I were to see someone shoot someone else. After playing this game, my take on the partial blaming of video games for the recent brash of school violence has changed.

I see their point now. These games have to have some impact on the player, especially if the player is young and impressionable. I'd be lying if I said that I didn't *want* to kill the zombies. They were so vile that I wanted to put them out of their misery. Basically, the game made me want to kill. Even if it was all make believe, is that not somewhat problematic?

The second thing I'd like to discuss a bit were the results of studies done on female persons and what we look for in games. At first, my hackles went up. There's something about clumping a certain group of people into a category and then saying that they all behave in some particular way. The studies that I encountered said that women preferred to play with female characters. Studies also showed that women and girls tended to buy and play certain games, *Myst*, *Riven*, *Tetris*, and *Super Mario Brothers* were the most popular.

Nevertheless, I must say that I *was* more prone to choose female characters to play with and all the games that studies showed were preferred by women and girls *were* my favorite games. The *Barbie* CD-ROM was the only one that was not on my list of favorites. This made me feel that there was something behind the studies of female players and what we (women and girls) like. However, there's a definite line between

being just plain discriminating and using studies to help understand something.

Segregating games by sex is not the way to go.

All in all, I learned a lot from doing this study. I came into it feeling that I would find an even mixture of positive and negative qualities in the virtual woman. What I found were more negative than positive. There was little variety in the characters that I came across in my studies. And I'm willing to bet if all the virtual women *were* studied, that the same results would be found. If I were Goddess of the world and I could mold, change and alter video games however I wanted to, here is what I'd do first: add more variety of female characters. Among the virtual men, I saw plenty of variety. I saw old, fat, young, skinny, ugly, half-naked, fully clothed, and more racial diversity (though not much).

The existence of sexy, scantily clad, large-chested, "beautiful" women is not necessary the problem, it's the lack of many other types of women. In the real world there is an infinite number of different types of women, why not represent this diversity in video games? And thus to young boys? This would not alleviate the issue completely. For most likely the "beautiful" characters will be the most popular due to preexisting notions. However, if I, a Goddess, instilled each and every character with a special talent unique to only that character (no talent better or worse than others), more of the problem will chip away. Each character will develop its own beauty, something that makes him or her special.

Video games are a form of media. Hence they have an impact on the way a large amount of individuals think and behave. This is very important. And I hope this study is

taken seriously because, in these days of technology, fantasy is just as important as the real.

APPENDICES

APPENDIX A

Glossary

Virtual Woman – A playable female video game character (including feminine creatures that were not necessarily human).

Super heroine - A female character that is a hero. She can be in a comic book, video game, TV show, etc.

Beauty- 1. The traditional dictionary definition: the quality present in a person or thing that gives intense aesthetic pleasure or deep satisfaction to the mind or the senses (Webster's Dictionary). 2. The limited mold created for female characters by video games.

Action/Adventure Game - Action/adventure games are games such as *Tomb Raider*, which stars Lara Croft. In an action/adventure game, the player is a character whose purpose is to achieve some sort of simple direct goal, i.e., by going through a maze of caves, fighting wild animals, scaling cliffs and finding one's way through a tombs in order to get to the magical. The focus of the game is on adventure. The plot is not terribly complex or central to the game. The character also stays relatively the same throughout the game. In other words, he or she does not become able to do a sort of magical move that he or she was not able to do before. The character does not become more intelligent

or grow old. If the character does change, this change is relatively small or simple. For example, Lara Croft accumulates weapons as she moves through the game.

Role Playing Game - A role-playing game is similar to an action/adventure game. In many ways, the line between the two is not clear-cut. However, typically, what sets them apart is that in role-playing games the focus is on plot, the story. The plot is more intricate and important to the game. The plot involves more than just the character being played with.

Without a strong grasp of the plot, it is virtually impossible to progress very far in the game. Also, the characters are more detailed; they may have likes and dislikes, react differently in a situation than another character in the same game, etc. These characters also develop as one plays, depending on the choices the player makes, whereas in action/adventure games the pace is fast and requires less brainwork. An example of a role-playing game is *Final Fantasy 7*. In *Final Fantasy 7*, one must stop and talk to people to figure out where to go. Characters also gain or lose powers as one moves through the game.

Fighting Game - A fighting game is a game in which the object of the game is to win a one-on-one fight against an opponent. The setting of the game is almost always within a tournament. For example, in the *Mortal Kombat* series the tournament is called Mortal Kombat. An example of a fighting game is *Tekken 3*. In the game, a character, Ling Xiaoyu, for example, competes with others in physical one-to-one combat. The object of a fighting game is to defeat the opponent. Typical each character has his or her own

fighting style, the complexity and variety depends on the sophistication of the game. Ling Xiaoyu's uses the martial art forms of Hakke Ken and Hike Ken as her style of fighting.

Most of the virtual women are found in fighting games. This is because fighting games typically allow for significantly more characters to choose from than the other two game types. The *Street Fighter*, *Mortal Kombat* and *Tekken* series all have over ten characters. Fighting games were also the game type that initially spurred the popularization of the virtual women.

APPENDIX B
Content Analysis

Character	Game	Rating	Type of Game
Aeris Gainsborough	Final Fantasy 7	Teen	Role Playing
Aya Brea	Parasite Eve	Mature	Role Playing
Ayame	Tenchu	Mature	Action/Adventure
Cammy	Street Fighter Alpha 3	Teen	Fighting
Chun-Li	Street Fighter Alpha 3	Teen	Fighting
Claire Redfield	Resident Evil 2	Mature	Action/Adventure
Julia Chang	Tekken 3	Teen	Fighting
Kasumi	Dead or Alive	Teen	Fighting
Lara Croft	Tomb Raider 3	Teen	Action/Adventure
Liei- Fang	Dead or Alive	Teen	Fighting
Ling Xiaoyu	Tekken 3	Teen	Fighting
Nina Williams	Tekken 3	Teen	Fighting
Pai Chan	Virtual Fighter Megamix	Teen	Fighting
Rose	Street Fighter Alpha 3	Teen	Fighting
Sakura	Street Fighter Alpha 3	Teen	Fighting
Sarah Bryant	Virtual Fighter Megamix	Teen	Fighting
Shiva	Mortal Kombat 3	Mature	Fighting
Sindel	Mortal Kombat 3	Mature	Fighting
Sonya Blade	Mortal Kombat 3	Mature	Fighting
Tifa Lockheart	Final Fantasy 7	Teen	Role Playing
Tina	Dead or Alive	Teen	Fighting
Results		71% Teen	70% Fighting
		29% Mature	

Role	Year	Chest Size
A Main Character	1997	Small
The Main Character	1998	Average
A Main Character	1998	Average
Competitor	1993	Busty (Bust size 86 inches)
Competitor	1993	Busty
A Main Character	1998	Average
Competitor	1998	Average
Competitor	1998	Busty
The Main Character	1998	Busty
Competitor	1998	Busty
Competitor	1998	Average
Competitor	1998	Above Average
Competitor	1997	Average
Competitor	1993	Above Average
Competitor	1993	Average
Competitor	1997	Average
Competitor	1995	Busty
Competitor	1995	Average
Competitor	1995	Average
A Main Character	1997	Above Average
Competitor	1998	Busty
		33% Busty 48% Average,
		14% Above Average .5% Small
		Fighting Game-40% Busty,
		47% Average, 13% Above Average
		Role-Playing- 33.3% Above Average,
		33.3% Small, 33.3% Average
		Action/Adventure- 33.3% Busty, 66.6% Average
		1998-40% Busty 50% Average, 10% Above Average
		1997- 50 % Average, 25% Small, 25% Above Average

Skin Color	Weight	Height	Body Type
Light	N/A	5'3	Athletic
Light	N/A	N/A	Athletic
Light	N/A	N/A	Athletic
Light	101lbs	5'5	Athletic Plus
Light	won't tell	5'8	Curvaceous
Light	N/A	N/A	Athletic
Light	54kg	5'4	Athletic
Light	105lbs	5'5	Curvaceous
Light		N/A	Curvaceous
Light	110lbs	5'6	Curvaceous
Light	42kg	5'2	Stocky
Light	49kg	5'4	Curvaceous
Light	48kg	5'6	Athletic
Light	N/A	178cm	Curvaceous
Light	42kg	157cm	Athletic
Light	55kg	5'8	Athletic Plus
Dark	N/A	N/A	Athletic Plus
Light	N/A	N/A	Athletic Plus
Light	N/A	N/A	Stocky
Light	N/A	5'4	Athletic Plus
Light	129lbs	5'7	Athletic Plus
95% Light, 5% Dark			29% Curvaceous,
1998-100% Light			29% Athletic Plus,
			33% Athletic, 10% Stocky
			1998-40% Curvacoues,
			30% Athletic,
			10% Stocky, 10% Athletic Plus

Leg Length	Art	Hair Length
Long/Slim	Japanimation	Long
Long/Slim	Japanimation	Medium
Medium	Not	Medium
Long/Slim	Japanimation	Long
Thick/Short	Japanimation	Short
Long/Slim	Not	Long
Medium	Not	Long
Medium	Japanimation	Long
Long/Slim	Not	Long
Long	Japanimation	Short
Thick/Short	Not	Short
Long/Slim	Not	Medium
Medium	Not	Long
Muscular/Medium	Japanimation	Long
Long/Slim	Japanimation	Short
Medium	Not	Long
Long	Not	Long
Medium	Not	Long
Medium	Not	Long
Long/Slim	Japanimation	Long
Long	Japanimation	Medium
33.3 Medium, 14% Long,	48% Japanimation,	62% Long, 19% Medium,
38% Long/Slim,	52% Not	19% Short,
5 % Muscular/Medium,		75% Curvaceous or Leggy
10% Thick Short		1998-40% Long,
1998-40% Long/Slim,		20% Short, 40% Medium
10% Thick/short,		Before 1998-81% Long,
20% Long, 30 % Medium		19% Short

Face	Attitude	Clothing
3	Heart of Gold	Neutral
2	No Nonsense	Sexy
2	Spunky	Neutral
2	No Nonsense	Sexy/Revealing
2	Childish	Sexy/Revealing
2	No Nonsense	Sexy
2	No Nonsense	1. Sexy /Revealing 2. Sexy
2	Sexy	Sexy
1	No Nonsense	Sexy/Revealing
2	Childish	Sexy
2	Childish	Sexy/Revealing
2	Sexy	1. Sexy 2. Sexy/Rev.
3	No Nonsense	Sexy
2	Sexy	Sexy
2	Childish	Neutral
3	No Nonsense	Sexy
3	Angry	Sexy/Revealing
3	No Nonsense	Sexy/Revealing
3	No Nonsense	Sexy
2	Spunky	Sexy/Revealing
2	Sexy	Neutral
62% are 2, 5% are 1,	43% No Nonsense,	19% Neutral, 81% Sexy,
29% are 4, 0% are 3	5% Spunky, 14% Childish,	43% Revealing
1998- 90% are 2,	19% Sexy, 5% Heart of Gold,	1998- 80% Sexy,
10% are 1	5% Angry	40% Rev., 20% Neutral
Before '98- 54% 4,	1998-40% No Nonsense,	Before '98- 81 % Sexy
46% 2	30% Sexy,	
	10% Spunky, 20% Childish	
	9% Spunky, 18% Childish,	
	9% Heart of Gold	

Victory Action	Fatality or Taunt	Losing Action
N/A	N/A	N/A
N/A	N/A	N/A
1	N/A	N/A
1	2	1
1,2,2	2	2
N/A	N/A	N/A
2	2	1
1	2	1
N/A	N/A	N/A
2	1	1
1	2	1
1	N/A	1
2	N/A	N/A
1	1	2
1,2	1	1
1	N/A	N/A
2	2	2
2	1	2
2	1	2
N/A	N/A	N/A
2	2	2
1	42% are 1, 58% are 2	54% are 1, 46% are 2
56% did a 1,	1998- 20% are 1, 80% are 2	1998- 83% are 1, 17% are 2
56% did a 2,	Before 1998- 57% are 1,	Before 1998- 71% are 2,
43% did only a 1,	43% are 2	29% are 1
44% did only a 2		
1998- 57% did only a one,		
43% did only a 2		
Before 1998- 67% did a 2,		
56% did a 1		

Fighting Method	Special Powers	How She Falls
Uses a Rod	Materia (form of magic)	2
None	Parasite Power	2
Ninjitsu (Ninja)	None	2
Special Forces	None	2
Wu Shu Kung Fu	None	1
None	None	N/A
Various Chinese Martial Arts	None	2
Assassin Style Ninjitsu	None	1
None	None	2
Taikyoke- Ken	None	2
Hakke Ken/Hike Ken	None	1
Aikido	None	2
Ensei- Ken	None	2
Soul Power	Magic Clothes	2
Karate	Shoots Fire Balls	2
Jeet Kune Do	None	2
N/A	Four Arms	2
N/A	Spits Fire, Shreeks, Flys	2
N/A	Shoots Rings	2
Uses a Glove	None	2
Pro- Wrestling	None	2
		15% are 1, 85% are 2
		1998-22% are 1,
		78% are 2
		Before '98 -91% are 2,
		9% are 1

Age	Ave. Age	# of Playable Characters
22	27.6	8
Unknown (20s)	N/A	1
21	23	2
19	N/A	19
29	N/A	19
Unknown (20s)	N/A	2
18	27.4	21
17	24.6	11
31	31	1
19	24.6	11
16	27.4	21
22	27.4	21
N/A	N/A	32
Unknown	N/A	19
Unknown (10-14)	N/A	19
N/A	N/A	32
N/A	N/A	17
N/A	N/A	17
N/A	N/A	17
20	27.6	8
22	24.6	11
Under 30-92%, Over 30-8%, Average Age is 20	Average Age: 26.72	Average: 11.3

Type of Being	Ethnicity
Human	Caucasian
Human	Caucasian
Human	Chinese
Human	N/A
Human	Japanese
Human	Caucasian
Human	Chinese-American
Human	Japanese
Human	Caucasian (British)
Human	Caucasian (American)
Human	Chinese
Human	Caucasian
Human	Caucasian (American)
Human	Caucasian (British)
Human	Caucasian (Italian)
Human	Japanese
Monster	N/A
Creature	Caucasian
Human	Chinese
Human	Chinese
Human	Japanese
91% Human,	48% Caucasian,
4% Monster,	38% Asian, 14% N/A
4% Creature	1998- 50% Caucasian,
1998- 100% Human	50% Asian
	36% Asian, 19% N/A

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