



A Damsel in Distress: Study of Princess Peach in Super Mario Bro Series Videogames

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ABSTRACT

Video games have created a huge impact upon the minds of the latest generation, especially children. The Mario franchise is a series of videogames that featured a new lobe interest for Mario, Princess Peach, who was kidnapped by the villain Bowser and had to be saved by Mario. Even though Super Mario Bros has a world wide acclaim, it has portrayed women in the most hackneyed manner. We most often see female videogame characters featured in dresses, skirts or skimmy clothing, wearing bows and makeup, maintaining dainty, delicate or over-sexualized dispositions. Depiction of humans in art, television, music, and toys have always been subjected to stereotyping and unfortunately even video games have been added into this category. The videogame industry has faced criticism from some over-abundance of the concept in games, with it being argued that the trope constitutes sexism. We need to share our disappointment to let them know we want more strong female characters so they can be the heroes of their own adventures.

Key words: *Criticism, Hackneyed, Sexism, Stereotype, Video games*

1. INTRODUCTION

The expansion of 'gaming culture' has been one of the most debatable topics of the contemporary world. Video games have created a huge impact upon the minds of the latest generation, especially children. There is always an increase in the number of kids who spend time playing games and at times, they started identifying with the characters and products associated with the games. The liking for these characters gradually elevated them to the status cultural icons. The first appearance of the concept of videogames was implemented in the Ultima Series Richard Garriot with Dungeons and Dragons as an influence on PC (1981). Shigeru Miyamoto featured Pauline as the first ever Damsel in Distress and Mario as her rescuer. Pauline disappeared almost completely from the Mario franchise and it was not until Super Mario Bros in 1985 that perhaps the most famous videogame Damsel in Distress made her debut.



2. ANALYSING PRINCESS PEACH IN SUPER MARIO BRO SERIES VIDEOGAMES

The Mario franchise is a series of videogames developed and published by Nintendo. This game featured a new love interest for Mario, Princess Peach, who was kidnapped by the villain Bowser and had to be saved by Mario. The story of Princess Peach's kidnapping entailed a story of her magical abilities to return her subjects to normal from Bowser's magic.

Super Mario Bros begins, as does almost every Super Mario title, with Princess Peach becoming a victim who must be rescued by Mario. Just before her ritual kidnapping, Peach invites Mario to her castle and vows to bake him a cake. Upon her release, she kisses Mario. But Super Mario Bros Series relegates its female characters to positions of near helplessness. Peach becomes a playable character only after we complete certain tasks, which makes the women in the game feel like prizes. In this game, the hero, Mario, has to rescue a young lady named Peach, a princess who is kidnapped and trapped in a castle. Peach appears in sixteen of the core Super Mario games and is kidnapped in fourteen of them.

Mario was originally known as Jumpman. However, they were trying to think of a better name in time, they were interrupted by their landlord whose name was Mario Segale, after whom they christened the character. The Super Mario Bros Series, the most successful gaming franchise with a place in the Guinness Records finally came to the world's most popular video game machine which is the iPhone. Nintendo's Super Mario Run went immediately to the top of the App Store charts, above mainstays like Facebook, Snapchat, Instagram, and Youtube.

Even though Super Mario Bros has a world wide acclaim, it has portrayed women in the most hackneyed manner. It sounds intriguing that women has been relegated to a secondary position not only in the field of videogames but also in reality. It would be a sad commentary on the subordinate role of women found as helpless and hapless without any identity of her own. We most often see female videogame characters featured in dresses, skirts or skimpy clothing, wearing bows and makeup, maintaining dainty, delicate or over-sexualized dispositions. These features make any character disadvantaged in race or combat. These characters not only stereotype women, but also send the message that qualities specific to females are limitations to a character's ability. The masculine characters, just as they appeared, were in fact faster and more powerful than the feminine characters. Improving the status of women is regarded as the key to narrowing the gender gap and achieving a better quality of life.

Depiction of humans in art, television, music, and toys have always been subjected to stereotyping. Video games have been added into this category because of modern day technology that has significantly improved visual



graphics. The videogame industry is still a rapidly developing sector and it may experience criticism in many categories such as racial, sexual, cultural and many other controversial issues.

Female characters are often tossed in the appearance of “Damsel in Distress”, with their rescue being the objective of the game. Princess Peach through much of the Mario Series is a paradigmatic example. Like other Mario characters, Peach can float, jump, ground pound, and use slap attacks which is her speciality that her accompanying characters does not possess. While not very strong physically, she makes up for it in technique and skill, and many games reveal her to be fast and agile as well. She is also shown to be graceful, often embellishing attacks and victory scenes alike with elegant movements, twirls and dance.

The main female character in Mario Bros is the Princess Toadstool, Peach. She is waiting for a man to save her so she can bake him a cake. Even if she is believed to have the power to break the curse of the evil Koopa King, she doesn't do anything else than waiting and sending letters of encouragement to Mario. Princess Peach first appeared in the NES classic, Super Mario Bros. She was little more than a Damsel in Distress to be rescued from another castle. She had literally no character other than being thankful at being rescued at the end of the game. Not only is she often the most fun character to play as in the games she is in. She has also often entertainingly been self-aware in recent games, especially in the Paper Mario and other RPG games, where she has said things like: “ I cant believe I got kidnapped...again”

Peach doesn't seem to hate being with Bowser that much as he never hurts her and even lets her write letters to Mario. That way, the princess pretends to be kidnapped to play the Damsel in Distress, creating drama and getting the attention of two men (or man and turtle). This isn't the greatest way to portray a woman.

In Super Mario 64, the story ends with Peach saying, “ Thankyou, Mario! We have to do something special for you...(kisses Mario) Listen, everybody, let's bake a delicious cake...for Mario...” Many interpretations have followed regarding the fact that baking a cake is a metaphor of having sex, which couldn't be said in a game for children. Following this idea, the only female character in the game is still portrayed as a beautiful lady to save in exchange for sex. This is the best thing she has to offer to Mario after he saved her life.

Peach has occasionally been known to take on a heroic role but- as the Princess of the Mushroom Kingdom- she has been repeatedly kidnapped since childhood. One might describe her as the quintessential Damsel in Distress. After all, she has been kidnapped more often than any other girl. With her continual growth in the gaming industry she is slowly incorporating other more independent roles, such as a fighter in Super Smash Brothers Melee and an athletic player in Mario Strikers. Although her role as a dependent woman is decreasing, her sexual image has increased in these games.



She wears a gown, dainty gloves, and a clueless expression, which imply nothing as far as skill and ability, unless you consider her special attack: a dimpled, smiling heart that protects her cart. This is a very basic example of the over-feminized female characters in videogames that are patented by features and abilities that are, in the context of the game, disadvantages to those of male characters. New or old-school, hero or side-kick, female video game characters like Princess Peach are too often designed as stereotypically feminine.

3. CONCLUSION

The videogame industry has faced criticism from some over-abundance of the concept in games, with it being argued that the trope constitutes sexism. It can be argued that while some women are kidnapped, they are usually the most powerful representatives of their games, and are the largest threats to the villains. No one celebrates the heroes that save the Damsel in Distress, they only celebrate her eventual rescue.

The problem is, half of the people on this earth are women and game makers dissappoint them by portraying women this way. Even if we now believe women are equal to men, videogames have been slow to change the cliché. Many developers would rather repeat the same gendered tropes over and over again instead of trying something new. We need to share our disappointment to let them know we want more strong female characters so they can be the heroes of their own adventures.

REFERENCE

[1] *Super Mario Bros.* 12Sep. 1985. Television.