Women and Video Games
by Cyberculture
10/05/99

Two professors at M.I.T, Massachusetts Institute of Technology, have recently launched a feministic debate on the subject of women and video games. They believe its important that more girls play video games. It's not just about women and technology, it's a society issue.

Justine Cassell, M.I.T.

"Until 2 or 3 years ago there was a genre of video games which was very violent and active. This genre required a lot from the child playing, to explore the space and use the computer in a rather sophisticated way. It's to easy to say that girls are not attracted by this type of technology."

Henry Jenkins:

"After all what can you expect, we offer a technology where one of the bestsellers is called Gameboy. This pretty much shows which audience we are addressing. In fact, it is a vicious circle, not many women are sensitive to technology as it develops nowadays. As a result, they rarely participate in the development, and inevitably, the games are not influenced by their personalities."

"A century ago books for children were mainly written by women. In fact, the majority of readers were girls. But then people started to realize that this was a real problem and by the end of the 19th century men were writing books for boys. Back then, it was the boys who were getting behind in the development. Today the situation is the opposite, now it's the girls who are left behind."

It is difficult to find a solution to this problem. In fifteen years, very few video games have been produced by women. It's generally by playing video games that girls and boys encounter a computer for the first time. If boys get a better start than girls in mastering computers and computer related technology then it will have an effect on the whole society. In the future, girls will have even more difficulties in getting leading positions in work and politics.

So far only a few video games for girls have been bestsellers. One example is the release of Barbie, in an interactive version. But then this type of games do not please all girls, especially not the Game Grrls. They are a group of girls who mainly play games of combat, and who enjoy fighting with boys online. The Game Grrls are militant, Quake specialists and online fighters in games like Half Line. They would probably never play a game made only for girls.

"The Game Grrls want to create a world where they are in power and where they know how to defend themselves. The ideal game for girls would be a fighting Barbie."

But a fighting Barbie, that's a bit like Laura Croft, isn't it?

"Tomb rider is an example of an opportunist game. Lara Croft was created to be a fighting raw model for girls,

and an erotic character for boys. She manages to combine these characteristics rather successfully."

Games made specially for girls are usually created by small firms run by women such as Purple Moon. But Purple Moon wasn't a success and was recently bought by Mattel, the game company. In many ways, the online game business is still a men's world.

So are there any hope left for girls? Well, the magic word is the Internet.

In many ways the Internet is a killer application for girls, in the sense that it's an activity and technology, that suits girls perfectly.

Maybe with a little encouragement they will start playing video games as well. The debate has definitely served a purpose in bringing this issue into focus. The development of video games with more feminine characteristics are becoming increasingly more interesting for businesses all over the world.