

Play like a



Feminist.

Shira Chess

Play like a Feminist.

Playful Thinking

Jesper Juul, Geoffrey Long, William Uricchio, and Mia Consalvo, editors

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Play like a Feminist, Shira Chess, 2020

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This book is dedicated to Charlotte Chess, who I never met.

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On Thinking Playfully

Many people (we series editors included) find video games exhilarating, but it can be just as interesting to ponder why that is so. What do video games do? What can they be used for? How do they work? How do they relate to the rest of the world? Why is play both so important and so powerful?

Playful Thinking is a series of short, readable, and argumentative books that share some playfulness and excitement with the games that they are about. Each book in the series is small enough to fit in a backpack or coat pocket, and combines depth with readability for any reader interested in playing more thoughtfully or thinking more playfully. This includes, but is by no means limited to, academics, game makers, and curious players.

So we are casting our net wide. Each book in our series provides a blend of new insights and interesting arguments with overviews of knowledge from game studies and other areas. You will see this reflected not just in the range of titles in our series but also in the range of authors creating them. Our basic assumption is simple: video games are such a flourishing medium that any new perspective on them is likely to show us something unseen or forgotten, including those from such unconventional

voices as artists, philosophers, or specialists in other industries or fields of study. These books are bridge builders, cross-pollinating both areas with new knowledge and new ways of thinking.

At its heart, this is what Playful Thinking is all about: new ways of thinking about games and new ways of using games to think about the rest of the world.

Jesper Juul

Geoffrey Long

William Uricchio

Mia Consalvo

Who This Book Is For

This book sits at the cross-section of play, video games, and feminism. While this is by no means the first attempt at merging these topics, I have spent a good deal of time thinking about who you are and why you are reading this book.

- *If you identify as a feminist*, but rarely (or never) pick up video games, and worry about the frivolity of your leisure time, this book is meant for you to rethink the value of play and games in various aspects of your life.
- *If you identify as a gamer*, but are not so sure about feminism, this book is meant to help you understand the value of equality, and how embracing feminism might improve video games.
- *If you identify as a feminist gamer*, this book is meant to remind you of many of the arguments you probably already know, and make you think increasingly about improving the play of those around you who may not be there already.

Writing for three distinct audiences is exhausting. Some of you know things that others do not. Some of you might find my arguments obvious, while others might need a broader introduction to certain themes. This book has both footnotes and endnotes.

Endnotes (numbered) are all sources, and footnotes (lettered) are context, commentary, and some additional sources. The footnotes are intended to delve deeper into specific ideas and provide context (both personal and through scholarly research). By the end of this book, I hope that you three distinct audiences will not be so different after all.

A Note about Feminism

Because this feminist book is written, in part, for those who do not necessarily identify themselves as feminists, I want to clarify what the term—often misused and abused—really means. In chapter 1, I break down the definition with more depth, but in brief, as bell hooks writes, feminism is “a movement to end sexism, sexist exploitation, and oppression.”¹ Feminism is not a movement about excluding men but rather about equality for all. Sara Ahmed aptly notes that “to live a feminist life is to make everything into something that is questionable.”² As such, this book is meant to call everything into question and challenge our understanding of play as it relates to larger inequalities.

Acknowledgments

This book was written on the shoulders of giants who inspired me with their scholarship, presentations, and conversations. I have tried to cite as many of you as possible. Thanks to all of you who laid the groundwork for this book. #CiteHerWork

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Thank you to my family for putting up with my fragmented, interstitial time in order to produce a book. Thanks to my parents for a lifetime of encouragement. Thank you to my husband, Wes, for always pushing me at the right moments. And to my son, Oliver, I promise to "play more" from here on out.

Introduction: Why Feminism and Why Play?

Why Should Video Games Matter to Feminists?

This book rides on a few basic premises. The first is this: video games—and play more generally—need to matter more to feminists. Of course, I’m being a bit reductive here; video games already matter to a great number of feminists in a variety of ways. For example, many women and minority game developers who reside in the margins of the industry are endlessly engaged in conversations about why their workplace experiences matter and are indicative of larger issues of toxicity in the tech industry.¹ Similarly, minorities in eSports and competitive gaming are constantly absorbed with debates regarding why video games should matter to feminists.^{2a} And certainly, feminists who play games are already deeply enmeshed in the complexities of gaming culture, and indeed know why games and play matter. In part I write this book to speak to those feminists who are, perhaps, not already on board with the multitude of reasons why

a. In particular, <http://anykey.org> has done exceptional work creating initiatives to foster equality in online communities, competitive gaming, and eSports.

video games and play should matter to their political, cultural, and social philosophies. Simultaneously, my parallel goal is to start a conversation with those within and around the video game industry who may be ambivalent about feminism more generally. I hope here to convince them as to why feminism might matter to video games, improving an already-astounding medium.

In this way, I liken this book to the old 1980s' Reese's Peanut Butter Cup commercials where oblivious adults blithely collide with each other and boldly declare, "Hey, you got your chocolate in my peanut butter!" and "Hey, you got your peanut butter in my chocolate!" to the discovery that they were both right, and the results are "delicious." Just as with the Reese's discovery, I envision video games and feminism as "two great tastes that taste great together" in a way that is naturalized and obvious. Similar to how the dumbfounded actors discover a sweet combination, I imagine the marriage of video games and feminism to be a head-slapping moment. Why have more people not combined these two great things all along?^b Sara Ahmed writes that feminism is "the dynamism of making connections."³ To this end, the Reese's collision can be seen as one full of feminist potential. Similarly, I am connecting play and video games with feminism to demonstrate their *simpatico*.

Because while many feminist video game scholars have made these connections before, they have often gone largely unseen within the larger public discourse surrounding video games for the last two decades. News stories and op-eds typically focus on

b. But of course, many already have! Shout-out to the many feminist game scholars I reference throughout this book.

the negative, sensational, or most toxic elements of the medium, culture, and industry. Thus it feels like myself and many of my colleagues have had to do hard work to break out of this insular bubble. Opinion editorials and news stories frequently galvanize their distrust of the video game medium by concentrating on violent game content, starting with games like the 1976 *Death Race* through the Grand Theft Auto series, or any number of sniper games. It is understandable that this emphasis has seemed to put video games at odds with feminism—in particular when games like *Grand Theft Auto III* allow players to court and then kill prostitutes with no consequence.^c Additionally, much debate has gone into whether video games are addictive (a diagnosis officially decreed by the World Health Organization in 2018); this is a complicated claim, which creates some troubling misconceptions about the medium.^d Finally, in a post-GamerGate world, it is difficult to consider video game culture and industry apart from the toxic forces that have deliberately pushed out feminine influences.^e

c. In fact, my research into video games began from a moment many years ago when a professor asked me to investigate this very thing through a feminist lens.

d. In my experience, when most people call a video game “addictive,” they are using that word instead of “enjoyable.” While I am sure there are people who exhibit unwanted behaviors from playing video games and in some cases there might be actual clinical addiction, most of the time it is players feeling uncomfortable with their own levels of enjoyment.

e. GamerGate is a hashtag campaign perpetrated by the alt-right, deliberately targeting women within and around the video game industry. It began in 2014, and has been discussed and outlined a great deal. There is not enough space to fully unpack GamerGate in this book, but for those interested in the topic I would recommend reading articles by Torill E. Mortenson and Adrienne Massanari that provide a historical context.

GamerGate sits in an impossible position in this book. There is no question that the toxicity of GamerGate is one impetus for its writing. At the same time, by maintaining a focus on the hashtag movement I would inevitably be reifying it and giving it a central position, which makes my stomach turn. This book is forward looking and tries to be positive, but not positivist. From my current position, it is also impossible to ignore that the grotesqueness of GamerGate is quietly shadowed with equally toxic forces in academia.^f In short, there are terrible people everywhere. Or as Adrienne Shaw writes, “The Internet is full of jerks, because the world is full of jerks.”⁴ I choose to use the (small) megaphone of this book to focus on cultivating the potential positives, as opposed to nestling myself in the often-noxious realities.

Any of the aforementioned factors might cause feminists—in particular, those feminists who are not already engaged in the discussion of why video games matter—to push back against the idea that playing a video game can be a feminist activity. But cumulatively, they have created a deep tension wherein many feminist thinkers, scholars, and activists have shied away from the medium. Additionally, the long-standing reputation that these products are designed for intended audiences of men and boys creates a sense that video games and feminism are necessarily, irrevocably, diametrically opposed. This conceit began as partially true—in the 1980s, 1990s, and early 2000s, men and boys were the primary audience for video games. Now, though, roughly half of all video game players identify as female, and

f. This observation was made in a hot tub in Montreal, while soaking with two Adriennes (Shaw and Massanari). Apologies to Judith Butler and Donna Haraway for stealing their footnote.

given that shift, it is important for feminists—both gamers and nongamers—to get on the same page.

Video game audiences have changed substantially in recent years. While from the mid-1980s through the early 2000s, video games *were* primarily designed and marketed to a presumed masculine audience, a combination of technological innovation and the interventions of feminist game players/creators aligned, not only to reshape what is possible in video games, but suggest ways to rethink feminist practices. In turn, rather than looking at video games as a space that only invites negative and violent experiences, it can be one that feminists can better own (or as I argue later in this book, a space that feminists can better PWN).⁸

Yet the “feminist potential” of video games is also complicated. Sarah Banet-Weiser uses the term “popular feminism” to describe consumptive and neoliberal “feminist” practices that reify existing power structures. She writes that “in a capitalist, corporate economy of visibility, those feminisms that are most easily commodified and branded are those that become most visible. This means, most of the time, that the popular feminism that is most viable is that which is white, middle-class, cis-gendered, and heterosexual.”⁵ So as much as I advocate for the nostalgia of a nonchalant moment wherein theoretical peanut butter collides with theoretical chocolate, turning it into a seamless new product, I also recognize that capitalism breeds an understandable amount of cynicism toward the feminist production of mass-market products. Video games are a consumable product in a capitalist system. Advocating that feminism play a

g. PWN is a term I employ in chapter 2 of this book, using common video game lingo to tease out how feminists might find an “epic win” by thinking differently about leisure.

role in this system requires a delicacy so as to not reify the very things that this book is arguing against.

Video games are primed for change. We have seen an influx of women players, and roughly half of all players currently identify as female, although many of those players don't have a strong sense of ownership over the medium.^h If we are to change things, however, it means many of us have to play more.ⁱ The goal of this book, then, is to convince you—all of you, regardless of your gender orientation, biological sex, ethnicity, ability, social class, or stance toward feminism—to spend more time playing as a tool of radical disruption. This book is intended to pull more people into the conversation. Rather than thinking about what is wrong with video games, I want us to start plotting out ways to make them better. To do this, we need to acknowledge that games—and video games in particular—*matter*.

Moreover, in this book I begin with a far more basic argument: that *play* is an issue of equality. Because feminism is not a movement solely about women but instead one about equal rights, this makes play a core feminist issue. Feminism has accomplished much, yet often “play” as a central vector for well-being falls to the wayside. This seems obvious in some ways. *Feminists have work to do. We have too much work to make time for*

h. These statistics are messy, of course. Surveys of who is playing games vary depending on who is asked, what games are considered “games,” and how we define “female.”

i. This applies to both feminist and gamer audiences: feminists who are not already playing video games need to play more, and gamers too need to play more, but perhaps play different—play games outside their comfort zones. Furthermore, gamers can play the games they already do differently in order to interrupt poor practices in online places and make space for better ones.

play. But play, I would contend, affords a quality of life that the work of feminism has largely not remarked upon. In order to live the best possible life and think in clear-eyed ways about equality, we need to find more inroads to play.

This is because, as Miguel Sicart persuasively argues, play matters. It matters in a variety of contexts and toward a myriad of causes. Sicart elegantly writes that play is not necessarily fun, and “is a dance between creation and destruction, between creativity and nihilism.”⁶ In other words, play has power, and in helming that power, feminisms can find new strategies for overcoming political and cultural oppression—not only for women, but for all underrepresented populations. By engaging in radical play, we can work inside and outside of systems in creative ways that push at the margins.^j Play matters, and radical play can improve the lives of players. Video games, I maintain, are one possible trajectory for finding a more playful feminism, for engaging in radical play. It is not the only one, and I discuss several strategies and pathways. But to me, a playful feminism necessitates a rethinking of the power of video games as a medium. To this end, I begin this book by talking more generally about play and ultimately move toward the specifics of why video games matter.

“I Never Knew That Games like That Existed!”

In 2017, I published a book on video games designed for women audiences.⁷ Following the publication of that book, I experienced something unexpected. I was increasingly approached by women from a variety of backgrounds who confided in me

j. “Radical play,” as I use it in this book, is play that is disruptive in big and small ways to the status quo.

their experiences with video games. These moments were distinct from previous points in my life when strangers and friends (women in particular) spoke to me about my research. In the past, I was told, “Oh, I would never play video games. *I don’t have the time for play,*” or “You study video games? They are so violent!”^k Over the last few years, I noticed an abrupt shift. Instead, women—the kind of women who never before approached me in positive ways about my research—confessed their love of or interest in video games.

The things women said to me at these moments vary, but there were consistent themes. Their identities differed wildly in age, ethnicity, sexuality, and perspective. Some of these women wanted to know if I had played a game they loved (“You’ve played *Stardew Valley*, right? I’m so obsessed with it.”). Sometimes students would come to me after a lecture I gave on the topic and confess that they had been long obsessed with *Kim Kardashian: Hollywood*, and felt validated to see *their* culture being talked about. At a birthday party, a mom told me that three generations of her family all played *Clash of Clans* together. Others told me that they tried a new game after I wrote about or recommended it. These responses were the most jarring: “I never knew that games like *that* existed!”

I never knew that games like that existed. This last comment shook me every time I heard it, especially in reference to artful games such as *Monument Valley* or *Gorogoa*—two games that similarly had affected me with their sublime beauty. It began to occur to me that many audiences—women audiences in particular—had

k. I have a distinct memory of telling a dentist what I was studying in graduate school, and while she angrily and violently probed my mouth, she declared that she did not allow video games in her home because they were too violent.

no idea what video games had become or are capable of being.¹ At the same time, I felt certain that if more nongamers started to voice their enthusiasm for these games, they would help to support an emerging market, creating the diversity many of us have so long yearned for in the industry. Just as video games can help feminism, feminism can help video games.

I quickly became a video game evangelist. I began to strike up conversations with women I hardly knew (or didn't know at all!), encouraging them to play more games. I found myself having an increasing number of dialogues that resulted in recommendations. Once, a student reporter came to my office to get a quote on video games and addiction. As she began, she confessed to me, "I don't actually know anything about video games. I don't play them." By the time she left my office, she excitedly held a piece of paper listing the games she planned to download that night. I felt like a doctor prescribing play.

Why Feminism Should Matter to Gamers

I started by asserting what to me seems like an obvious point: that video games need to matter to feminists. This book, however, is also meant to argue the reverse point as well: feminism needs to matter more to video games, both to the industry at large and those individuals who are beholden to that industry. This, again,

1. Many, of course, have argued that games are not actually art (most notably the late Roger Ebert). Felan Parker astutely notes that this public debate has had far-reaching implications for discourses in colloquial discussions about games. Not only is this perspective incorrect; it limits how we move forward with this medium in the future. See Felan Parker, "Roger Ebert and the Games as Art Debate," *Cinema Journal* 57, no. 3 (2018): 77–100.

might feel counterintuitive. To some extent, the video game industry has been at odds with feminism in a variety of ways for some years, whether that is in critique of the absurdly proportioned Lara Croft or in response to the toxicity promoted within GamerGate. Yet it is wrongheaded to think of feminism and video games as being at odds with one another. As Lisa Nakamura deftly states, “This is precisely the moment for games scholarship originating from ethnic studies, women’s studies, queer studies, film studies, and cultural studies to intervene in this ongoing conversation, and to strategize about the future of race, gender, sexuality, and digital media.”⁸ The time is right for an intervention.

Video game audiences have already begun to diversify. In recent years it has been (ironically) the occurrences surrounding GamerGate that has made the presence of feminist gamers obvious. GamerGate has galvanized many of the disenfranchised voices that have been engaging in game culture—both quietly and not so quietly—for decades now. But even more important, an increasing number of feminists are en route to becoming gamers. The medium of video games is still quite young, and the market is still figuring itself out. While it may have previously been acceptable to appeal solely to niche masculine markets, this is no longer going to remain a viable business plan. As the medium continues to grow up, diversity is a glorious inevitability, and one that the industry should wholeheartedly embrace.

But there is more at play in terms of why feminism should matter to video games than simply expanding a market. Thinking about feminism can make video games *better*.

Video games, as a format and medium, are in need of a platform-expanding, metaphysical explosion. There are ruts and assumptions that have, for so long, ruled how things are done. By appealing to a singular audience (or a few, core audiences),

we are missing opportunities for innovation, creativity, and dramatic overhauls of how we think about games and play.^m An example of this is the central premise of Christopher A. Paul's *The Toxic Meritocracy of Video Games: Why Gaming Culture Is the Worst*. Paul's argument is that the philosophy of "meritocracy" is the dominant premise of most video games and consequently a damaging force in video game culture.⁹ Paul links these trends, suggesting that the one hinges on the other. So if we rethink some of the underlying philosophies of video games, and if we invite in new ideological premises that are meant to destabilize and disrupt, what might video games look like? To my mind, they can only look better.

We have already seen hints of this change. While not all women are feminists, and not all feminists are women, the shifting demographics of the video game industry illustrates that new technologies, audiences, and ways of thinking about what a video game can be have only helped push the medium. In 2009, the video game industry was composed of only 11 percent women, and that number doubled to 22 percent by 2014.¹⁰ In that time, we have seen an explosion of new kinds of games and gaming. Some of this, of course, is due to rapid technological developments. Yet technology can only revolutionize so much, and I would argue that the truly innovative and artful video games that we have seen in the past decade are due to the slow but steady diversification of *who* is making video games.ⁿ

m. We can see evidence of these stylistic and structural changes happening, particularly within the indie games movement.

n. To this point, it seems like video game innovation for a long time meant more realistic, faster-rendering graphics. Innovation now increasingly means new styles of games and play.

Video games need feminism just as much as feminism needs video games.

And so if you are someone who already knows the power of digital gaming yet is perhaps dubious about the import of feminism, stick around. This book is for you too. I hope that by the end, I can convince you not only that feminism is an important social movement for everyone but also that you should become an evangelist, trying to convince nongaming feminists to play more. It is my hope to bring you on board, help create safe spaces for feminist gaming, and help us move feminist gaming away from the margins and toward the center. It is not enough for this book to convince feminists to play; we need *you* in the video game industry and culture to help make that play possible as well as accessible.

To this end, radical play toys with what Paolo Ruffino refers to as “Creative Game Studies.” Beyond just thinking about play for the sake of play, Ruffino writes of scholarly interventions as inherently “intuitive, timely, performative, ethical, anti-authoritarian and anxious” in how it engages with video games. To my mind, it is the “anti-authoritarian” mode that positions it as a kind of radical play. Ruffino explains that “Creative Game Studies should produce anti-authoritarian narratives around video game culture, and these narratives should be produced as events of game culture, as timely intuitions that question the other co-existent stories around the medium.”¹¹ The role of the playful researcher is not just to inform; it is to disrupt, produce anxiety around, and influence as a kind of dramatic intervention into the product. My arguments in this book might make you uncomfortable at times, and that is fine. I am here to make you just a little bit uneasy.

Why This Book

This book is meant as a provocation and intervention. It is a book about video games not only meant for those who already play games but also for those who do not. It is a book about feminism, but not only for those who identify as feminists. I begin, however, not with video games but instead with play more generally in order to make this case. In this sense, this is also a book about play for those who are skeptical about playing. The purpose of this is to make a compelling argument as to why you (yes, you!) should care about and engage with play and games as a feminist activity. We need to spend more time thinking about play, and more time disrupting practices of and with play. The value of play within feminist lives is not frivolous. It is an issue that should be taken both seriously and playfully. At the same time, this is a book about feminism, meant for people who love video games. It is my contention throughout this book that video games can only be improved by embracing feminist theory. I am here to convince you (yes, you!) why feminism matters.

There is surely an intersectional issue underlying this interplay between feminism and games—one that I address throughout this book. “Intersectionality,” a term originally coined by Kimberlé Crenshaw, is meant to reference how systems of oppression such as ethnicity, gender, sexuality, and social class should be understood as interdependent phenomena.¹² In other words, questions of oppression in each of these categories do not function in a vacuum, and feminists should not think about gender difference as separate from ethnicity, sexuality, or social class. Given this, we need to talk about how things like social class might create additional barriers to entry for players. If a

person is working several jobs and running a household, talking about the value of leisure and play becomes condescending. If a person cannot afford an iPhone, recommending lists of games they should play—even free-to-play games—is dismissive of the lived realities of their life. And while playing as protest is a potentially freeing idea, one needs time, resources, and other accommodations in order to protest.

But again, this book is an intervention and provocation. It is needfully short, and meant for you to play with a lot of ideas, take them out, and engage others, helping them make their own playful discoveries.^o This book is meant to nudge folks toward rabbit holes and ask them to peer in to admire the depth. I believe that if we find a way to talk about leisure equality, acknowledging not only our personal needs for play and leisure but those of others around us as well, then we can make this world better. I am a white, middle-class woman writing this book, and hold no illusions; many of my readers are likely educated and middle class. As a white feminist, I do not seek to centralize my experiences and needs over those of women of color, financially disadvantaged women, queer women, and disabled women but rather find better ways to advocate for these audiences, for they need more play too.^p I believe that if we think about feminist play as a play of equality, then it can filter into the lives of people who

o. The length of this book is a conceit of MIT's Playful Thinking series.

p. Jessie Daniels writes about the decentralization of white feminism as both necessary and full of risk, but also risk that needs to be taken. See Jessie Daniels, "The Trouble with White Feminism: Whiteness, Digital Feminism, and the Intersectional Internet," in *Intersectional Internet: Race, Sex, and Culture Online*, ed. Safiya Noble and Brendesha Tynes (New York: Peter Lang, 2016), 41–60.

have not read this book. If we think about the things we do in our free time generously and take a stance that we all deserve a certain quality of life, then everyone wins.

To this end, “inclusivity” is a necessary theme in this book, but with caveats. Amanda Phillips warns that representation is only a small part of this puzzle in the quest toward inclusivity. She writes, “Representation and inclusion are important to help us imagine and believe in new spaces of possibility, but they are small steps in a more expansive quest for justice. More often than not, lack of diversity is a symptom of larger systemic problems rather than the cause of inequality.”¹³ Similarly, Larisa Kingston Mann warns that in digital media, we should not “replicate hierarchies of the past” in how we structure scholarship and activism.¹⁴ In other words, in order to look at how video games can be improved and the culture around them can be upgraded, we need to look at broader problems. One of the goals of writing this book, then, is to remain mindful of the larger inequalities and hierarchies structured into our cultural understanding of video game play, and more broadly, academic research. The question, “Who gets to play?” is an important one, but just as important is the question, “Who gets to define play?”^q Inclusivity is part of the narrative, but we need to constantly acknowledge that its lack is due to larger forces of inequity that are structured within multiple layers of culture.

q. By asking, “Who gets to define play?” I am suggesting that we, as academics, need to gatekeep less and acknowledge in our own work that there is not a hierarchy of play.

How This Book Is Organized

Play like a Feminist takes a somewhat discursive path to interrogate inequalities and suggest possible solutions. I begin by considering women, girls, and play more generally. In chapter 1, “Playing like a Girl,” I start by disentangling the insult that one “plays like a girl” from biological and cultural perspectives. The phrase has been deployed as both an insult and term of empowerment, but there are limitations to its rallying cry. I conclude by transforming the phrase into “play like a feminist” as an actionable practice of playful disruption and means of rethinking the value of leisure in feminism.

In the second chapter, “PWNing Leisure,” I move from analyzing play to analyzing leisure. Here I argue for the importance of feminist leisure practices, demonstrating how leisure disparities often seep into gendered behaviors. Leisure, I suggest, needs to be about advocacy for others in addition to free time for oneself. To this end, I repurpose the gaming term “PWN” as a perspective for considering how feminists might be best able to PWN their leisure practices. I offer five major strategies that feminists can use to PWN their leisure.

In the third chapter, “Play to Protest,” I argue for the value of play when approaching activism and protest. The chapter begins with a historical overview of global playful protest methods. Additionally, I propose and discuss the use of pervasive gaming and alternate reality games as a potential mechanism for creating social change. Finally, I consider how combining technology with playful practice might offer modes of lulzy protest for feminisms.

Chapter 4, “Gaming Feminism,” returns to the topic of video games to advocate for readers to think about how, specifically,

video games can become a kind of feminist playground. I begin by talking about the history and culture of games that push back against feminism. Using several games as examples, I discuss how feminist video games can make us rethink ways to tell stories, and how they can become “agentic training tools.” To this end, I argue that we should perhaps consider the destruction of the video game industry as it is currently known, creating a better one in its wake.

All the previous arguments lead up to chapter 5, “Gaming in Circles,” in which I propose “gaming circles” as a means of feminists taking back leisure, play, and video game culture. Gaming circles, as I envision them, function like book clubs for leisure. Using a local gaming circle that I constructed as an example, I discuss the potential of these circles as a kind of actionable practice to realign feminism with play. This chapter both unpacks the experiences of members of my local gaming circle while advocating for ways to sustain it as a broader practice toward playing like a feminist. The appendix of this book offers a blueprint for readers to make their own gaming circle. A companion website (<http://playlikeafeminist.com>) supplies further ideas and suggestions for putting together your own gaming circle.

The goal of this book is not better answers but rather better questions. It follows a discursive path littered with provocations about how we play and how we do leisure. It is not meant to be the final word on these themes but instead a starting point for broader cultural conversations about the role of play and leisure in feminism, and vice versa. Regardless of your identity on arriving here, I hope that this book will help convince you to be a gamer, feminist, and advocate.

Notes

A Note about Feminism

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Conclusion

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