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Even When You Lose, You Win

By Richard Leader

Although feminist magazines such as *Ms.* with their “No Comment” section and websites such as About-Face.org regularly pick commercials out of the mainstream media for closer inspection, this advertisement for a videogame is perhaps the most iconic self-depiction of patriarchy that has ever been produced. The videogame industry is sexist—a hardly contested fact—but no more or less so than other industries. What it is, however, is far more honest: its ostensibly trivial status (even if fans of the medium like to cook numbers and brag that it is larger than the film industry) affords it a certain amount of rogue agency, permitting it to not have to put on that same false veneer of adult professionalism that bankers, stock brokers, and other industrialists (all equally sexist and racist institutions) are often forced to don in today’s political climate. The fact that videogame developers and publishers are allowed so much freedom makes it easier for those in more stodgy industries to bear the tightness of their own collars, as they are allowed to both vicariously enjoy the fruits of the sexism endemic to the games that are produced, but also the benefits to their own businesses which are seen as increasingly respectable when there are more obvious targets in place for critics of sexism to discuss. This is similar to how all men are rewarded by a culture in which women live in fear of rape, whether or not those individual men themselves choose to perpetrate that rape.

This section of a two page advertisement for the PlayStation 2 game *Rumble Roses* was published in several genre magazines in late 2004; the content was later consolidated into a single page for subsequent printings. The title itself received middling reviews as the wrestling action itself was clumsy and Western male audiences had a harder time appreciating the emphasis on extraneous characterization (a trait of Japanese entertainment commonly referred to as “fan service”), as American men tend to prefer their gratuitousness straight-up in a more “gonzo” fashion. The second page, following the main graphic and the headline “Even When You Lose, You Win,” had the statement:

They’re on top of you. You’re on top of them. Does it really matter? All female wrestlers. 10,000 polygons per character. And hardcore wrestling gameplay. It’s Rumble Roses and it’s definitely a win-win situation.

When female fans of videogames complain of how girls and women are commonly represented, they are routinely told that it is just fantasy and that the hulking images of male heroes are equally objectifying in that they also promote a standard that no man can live up to (though rather than going on to combat such imagery, those who employ this rhetoric merely use it to silence female critics and abandon it after it has served that purpose), only men need not live up to such a standard to benefit from its existence: after all, even when they lose, they still win. This cannot be said of women and their unassailable standard of physical vulnerability disguised as attractiveness.

The honesty of the headline itself has far reaching implications beyond the scope of videogames. As more and more feminists themselves begin to focus on the “intersectionality” of oppressions—which is often an excuse for white women to tear into each other, painting one another as more complicit in one crime or another, to the benefit of white males

who are thus removed from the bitter infighting—it is important to remember that even when males lose, they still win. This goes for “male-to-female” transsexuals, minority men both here and in nations being bombed by the United States, and even the male victims of genocide (always perpetrated by other males), all of whom win vis-à-vis females in their respective communities, even when they lose: the life and death risks taken by males in patriarchy, risks both voluntary and not, are chances that females are often not allowed to take and even then their survival is no guarantee of any reward at all.

Thus radical feminists (“radical” from the Latin word for “root”) see sexism as the most basic, fundamental, and perhaps oldest form of oppression. When one focuses on men losing, no matter how disenfranchised they might be (or increasingly how disenfranchised they might “feel”), it becomes easy to forget how that losing is an artifact of the gambles they take when trying to win and how even in defeat they are better off than their female peers. Now that radical feminists are themselves being branded as racists for pointing out that fact, accusations often hurled by those who consider themselves to be feminist, it becomes more apparent that even when men lose—they win.

