
Ronnie, Millie, Lila— Women’s History for Games A Manifesto and a Way Forward



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The author discusses how, in practice, historians often obscure the effect of women’s lives, work, and contributions on their topic, and she takes special note of video game history. Using both history and film studies as examples, she argues that games historians can and should adopt feminist viewpoints to help ensure a fuller, more diverse accounting of the past. She examines the stories of three women—video game regulation activist Ronnie Lamm, route operator Amelia “Millie” McCarthy, and Exidy executive Lila Zinter—to demonstrate the types of historical information often overlooked in video game history. She concludes that video game historians must use archives, documents, and other research to think more broadly about the purpose and impact of their own work and not allow video game history to be reduced to a highlights reel that captures only the works of a few key players. Instead, their history should capture the depth and diversity of video games and game culture, including the impact of women on the field. **Keywords:** arcade, coin-op games, Exidy, feminist history, Lila Zinter, Millie McCarthy, Ronnie Lamm, women in video games, video game history

THAT VIDEO GAMING has a gender problem has been so well established as to slide into a truism, something that is common sense, an unanchored, ahistorical fact that we just know. This is not to say that there is a dearth of research on the subject. The gender disparities of the video game industry’s labor force have been extensively documented as have the disparities in on-screen representation and among player populations. Scholars like Kishonna L. Gray, Laine Nooney, and Adrienne Shaw have made important recent contributions to our understanding of the topic. And my own book *Coin-Operated Americans* emanated from my interest in exploring questions about gender and games.¹ However, the degree to which the practices of history can easily obscure women’s lives, work, and contributions has been even better documented than the intersections of gender and video gaming.

The feminist turn in film studies during the 1970s was necessary in part

because of the shortcomings of earlier approaches to the study of film and the documentation of its history. Without the critical interventions of feminist scholars, much of what we know about film's labor and production practices would remain obscure. Similarly, game studies constitute a multidisciplinary field, one in which we have several working historians, who were not necessarily trained as historians, who understand that the legwork of history requires not only archival research in all its forms, but also careful consideration of how broader cultural, social, and political systems shape the historical trajectory. In researching and writing the history of games, we have an opportunity to produce a comprehensive history—one that looks at all actors as meaningful rather than documenting merely the most obvious key players. If we do so, we can avoid falling into the trap that many fields of historical study have fallen into, initially neglecting the key role of women in shaping history.

In this article, I begin by offering a brief overview of efforts to document and reclaim women's history particularly in the fields of American history and media history. I argue for adopting and integrating these kinds of approaches into games history while the field is young. As I will discuss further, many of these key works in women's history are responses to the widespread neglect of women's work and contributions. Because video game studies constitute a relatively new field, we are in a position where it is hopefully possible to avoid some of the mistakes of the past as we complete the initial work of documenting and studying this rich cultural form. From this opening conceptualization, I move on to point to some examples of women's work in the coin-op game industry and to advocate for further study of women's contributions in early video gaming. Although I focus here on the hidden histories of women, this is an approach that can and should be applied more broadly, exposing essential histories that are not just women's histories, but the histories of other obscure actors and of the daily function of industry and culture. I argue that the whole of games history becomes more visible if we reassess our understanding about which parts of the industry are important and merit study. In closing, I discuss some areas in which study of women's work in and around video gaming could prove illuminating, and I argue for further research in these areas.

Women in American History and Media History

American history is littered with examples of women pushed to the side or

forgotten, even as they established professional standards, forged social movements, and shaped daily life. Laurel Thatcher Ulrich's groundbreaking and much awarded book *A Midwife's Tale* captures the life of an eighteenth-century midwife living in Northern New England and provides invaluable insights into household and community economies, marriage, sex, and the development of American medicine. As Ulrich documents, women midwives were gradually pushed aside by male doctors, even as these doctors were often less skilled and less knowledgeable about medical practice.² In *Women of the Republic*, Linda K. Kerber documents how women helped lay the intellectual groundwork for the American Revolution.³ Tera W. Hunter provides a compelling portrait of the work of freed black women after the American Civil War, tracing not only their paid labor but also their commitment to building neighborhoods and networks.⁴ Mari Jo Buhle's *Women and American Socialism* demonstrates the significant role women played in early U.S. socialist movements.⁵ Marcia Bonta has written extensively about the groundbreaking contributions of women naturalists.⁶ These are just few examples from an incredibly rich area of research.

Unsurprisingly, women's place in and around media industries has been similarly fraught and has been the subject of much historical study in recent decades. A number of women critical to the development of modern film had been lost to popular memory only to be later recovered through the work of historians or—at least in the case of film pioneer Alice Guy-Blaché and several iconic stars—through their own efforts to establish their legacies.⁷ Further, the work of influential women film editors often remains unsung because the emphasis on directors, who are most often male, has served in part to minimize their contributions.⁸ Lauren Rabinovitz has written about how women shaped the avant-garde film movement in the United States, in part because work in commercial film was largely unavailable to them.⁹ Erin Hill examines the feminized, but vital, labor of casting agents and production assistants in Hollywood, and Trina Robbins has documented more than a hundred years of work by forgotten women cartoonists.¹⁰ As researchers like Angela Y. Davis and Sherri Tucker demonstrate, women have played key roles as musicians and performers even when they have worked in relative obscurity.¹¹ And women's long-running contributions as humorists and comedians have been the subject of several books, even as high-profile men like former Disney CEO Michael Eisner insist that women are not funny, or at least, funny women cannot be pretty.¹²

I am not trying to offer here a crash course on the importance of women's history or the contributions women have made historically. Rather, I want to

highlight the extent to which our understanding of history has been reshaped and refined through the work of numerous scholars invested in preserving and recognizing women's cultural, social, and political contributions. Most of these works are reclamations. They are salvage missions. They are an effort to unearth what has often been buried—either deliberately or through neglect. As the works I highlight demonstrate, women's work is obscure not because it is without value, but because it is systemically devalued. The work completed by the scholars I mention here is foundational for women's history, for media studies, for American history, and I call attention to it in part because I believe it deserves serious attention. But I also imagine a future where these kinds of reclamation projects are unnecessary because the history of women and marginalized people in and around such critical topics is already being written rather than initially ignored.

The history of video games is relatively new, and the historical work in this area is likewise only beginning to come into its own. We have countless examples before us of failures not of history, but of historiography, of our own inability as professional historians to separate ourselves from cultural systems of value that make us disinclined to look closely enough to see the work that, by design or by neglect, goes unseen. We need to do better; we need to document and study, and, more importantly, understand the complex systems and diffuse networks of labor that go into the production of games, the sprawling communities that form gaming culture, and the subcultures and pockets of resistance that work to reform it. To do this we, as historians, cannot repeat mistakes that we should know better than to make. This is a call to all of us to work toward a historical practice that will not demand reclamation, that will conduct those salvage efforts even as we make our first pass, that will think hard about our assumptions about who and whose work is valued and why. There are reasons of decency to do this, there are reasons of politics to do this, but perhaps least contentiously and most importantly, there are reasons of basic professional competency to do this. I am not calling for a feminist history of games, although I welcome one; I am calling instead for a history that is adequate, that seeks both the forest and the trees, that does due diligence. I am calling for a collective history that is at the very least good enough.

I began by mentioning books that have illuminated colonial midwifery, the U.S. socialist movement, and midcentury jazz bands not because these subjects are inherently similar to video games, but because they are all historical projects, and proper historical research should be grounded in an understanding of history, broadly, and of the successes, failures, and methodological legacy of

earlier historians. Game history done well should engage with longer historical trajectories—legal history, national history, business history, women’s history, labor and leisure history, and cultural history, for starters. Even at points where these sometimes tangential topics are not directly related, an understanding of the broader historical context in which the development of video games and game culture have unfolded is essential to historical practice; it is also essential in helping identify areas that have been overlooked or neglected. In my own study of the American coin-op industry and its role as a key player in early video gaming, I was explicitly studying the construction of masculinity. But, in the countless hours spent reading trade journals and newspaper and magazine articles, I came across the names of numerous women—women who have, in many cases, been largely forgotten, or reduced to punch lines. However, several of these women played key historic roles in the development of video gaming both as business and as culture.

Three Women, Three Stories

Consider three examples. The women I consider in this article have helped shape contemporary video gaming, but none of them has been widely studied. This is largely because they were not game creators but industry leaders, business professionals, and activists who worked in the area, intimately shaping the public discourse of gaming and providing a public face for it. Video game regulation activist Ronnie Lamm, for example, became a “wicked witch” in the coin-op industry, which saw regulatory efforts as a threat to business; Lamm’s work led to increased regulation in her own community and also formed the rhetorical basis for much of the national discussion of video games and game regulation.¹³ Amelia “Millie” McCarthy was an accomplished businesswoman who ran two coin-op businesses for a number of years; she was also active in the industry, leading professional organizations at the state and national level. McCarthy advocated for the industry widely, and she regularly served as a public face for industry lobbying efforts. On the production side of things, Lila Zinter worked at Meadows games before she rose through the ranks at Exidy and distinguished herself as one of a very small number of women executives employed in the early video game industry.¹⁴ She also, frequently, represented Exidy in the media, serving as a counterbalance to company founder and CEO H. R. “Pete” Kauffman. Here, I turn to a more detailed look at each of these three women and

their individual relevance for the history of video games. From there I reflect on what we stand to gain by pushing for more inclusive approaches to history.

Ronnie Lamm

Ronnie Lamm, who was active in her local Parent-Teacher Association (PTA) and in her community’s effort to regulate coin-op games, became nationally visible in public discourse around video games and their effects on young players.¹⁵ Interviewed by the *New York Times*, the *MacNeil-Lehrer Report*, and numerous other outlets, Lamm became one of the public faces of game regulation.¹⁶ Lamm, a mother of two who lived in Brookhaven on Long Island, argued that a lack of supervision and regulation meant the games were causing problems in her particular community and implied they were encouraging criminal—or at least liminal—activity among local youth: “The game rooms teach gambling and breed aggressive behavior. . . . And so many are operated by scum coming out of the woodwork, whose only interest is a fast buck. They say that they do not allow drinking of alcoholic beverages, but I have seen bottles in the parking lots. . . . Children snatch purses and gold chains for money to put in these machines.”¹⁷

Lamm had a gift for provocative prose. She was also a compelling interview subject and an effective lobbyist in her local community, an activist who effectively galvanized opposition to coin-op games.

At least one *New York Times* article noted that a number of other PTA members and community activists had signed up for the fight against the games, and at least some of the most visible were women. Barbara Weiss, a member of the Middle Island PTA Council, for example, joined a group of parents and school administrators who supported the push for a moratorium on licenses for coin-op games in Brookhaven and warned about the possibility of addiction: “We must take a stand to protect our children. These games are addictive; you can get hooked on Atari.”¹⁸ In the wake of the campaign waged by Lamm and other community members to curb the increase in coin-op games in their community, the Town of Brookhaven, which includes Centereach and several other communities, placed a six-month moratorium on permits for game rooms. When Lamm first spoke out against coin-op games, Brookhaven considered seventeen applications to open video game arcades along a three-mile stretch of road, but ultimately twelve applications were denied and five were dropped.¹⁹

Lamm was incredibly effective in her own community, but she also helped shape public discourse nationally. At times, she offered direct advice on her tactics to activists in other communities, advising them on strategies like circulating

petitions and mass mailings, speaking to local and regional governments and to community groups, and even calling the local fire department to ask for fire inspections at overcrowded arcades.²⁰ As a PTA member and mother, Lamm made an appealing face for regulation, a fact of which she was well aware: “We find it surprisingly easy, actually. Some of those who want to open these places are the absolute dregs, and they are battling motherhood and apple pie.”²¹ Lamm, demonstrably savvy to the functioning of local politics and national media, had a profound impact on the circulation and regulation of coin-op video games. She ultimately appeared on more than 180 different television shows and three thousand radio programs nationally and internationally.²² A 2009 *Long Island Press* article, reflecting on the possibility that video games might be addictive or unhealthy for young players, interviewed Lamm about her involvement with video games. Lamm, identified as “now a grandmother” reflected on her own history with video games: “It was a very interesting time of questioning. . . . This is something new, something that parents were embracing, possibly for the wrong reason, and school districts at the time had concern about children cutting out of school to go to [play] video games. But our initial concern was the safety of children in bar lobbies, in luncheonettes. Where were these machines? Were they in the backroom? Were they being watched? Children are hanging out here . . . What was their supervision?”²³

Today, Lamm is frequently treated as, at most, a footnote in a celebratory narrative of gaming’s perseverance and well-deserved ubiquity. She appears as a character, for example, in the docu-comic *Bad for You: Exposing the War on Fun*, and she is often mentioned in discussions of early pushes for games regulation.²⁴ But this footnoting does a disservice not only to Lamm, but to our understanding of how early video gaming, and video gaming regulation, developed.

Millie McCarthy

In campaigning against games, Lamm and other moral reformers often pitted themselves against other women. Millie McCarthy (figure 1), for example, served as president of the New York State Coin Machine Association for twenty-five years, a period that regularly put her in the spotlight opposite Ronnie Lamm.²⁵ In one of the many *New York Times* articles that quoted Lamm, McCarthy is also interviewed. She notes that many of the laws used to regulate coin-op video games are in fact quite old, originally enacted to limit access to pinball games and slot machines, but video games had sparked a fresh wave of regulatory fervor: “All of a sudden, resistance to the games just burst out everywhere.”²⁶ That



Figure 1. In the middle of the twentieth century, industry pioneer Millie McCarthy managed several coin-op businesses and served as president of New York State Coin Machine Association and as director of the Music Operators of America, the national lobbying organization for the coin-op industry. Photo courtesy of *Play Meter* magazine.

resistance led in part to renewed calls for professionalization in the industry, and trade journals regularly encouraged operators to join forces through membership in professional organizations.²⁷

It is in part through these organizations that McCarthy distinguished herself. One of a relatively small number of women in what had long been a male-dominated field, McCarthy ran Catskill Amusements, Inc. in Hurleyville, New

York, and the Binghamton Amusement Company. But, in addition to serving as president of the New York State Coin Machine Association, in 1963 she also became the first woman to serve as director of the Chicago-based Music Operators of America, a long-standing national organization that has served as a lobbyist for the coin-op industry beginning with efforts to fight a push to repeal the jukebox royalty exemption in 1948.²⁸ McCarthy herself came to the industry in 1946, and she took over full ownership of Catskill Amusements in 1960 after the death of her husband. By the late 1950s, McCarthy was a long-standing advocate for the industry.²⁹ In a 1975 “coinman interview” with *Play Meter*, the coinwoman said, “The awfully big problem in the industry right now is apathy. It’s like each man for himself. And this is dangerous.”³⁰ Through her work with industry organizations, McCarthy sought to rectify this situation. She regularly spoke to politicians and community leaders as an industry representative. When McCarthy died in 2014, obituaries called her “a forceful presence in the coin machine industry in which she was termed to be an icon and a legend” and “a pioneering operator of music and games.”³¹

Operators like McCarthy played a pivotal role in the early diffusion of video games because coin-op games depended on adoption by operators to reach players. The introduction of video games was a major event in the coin-op industry, since long-established operators faced new, more expensive machines that required new skills to maintain and operate. In working to adapt to the influx of new games in a post-*Pong* (Atari, 1972) era of coin-op, McCarthy and other professionals found themselves championing the games to possible machine locations, to players, and to community leaders who regarded these new amusements with suspicion or outright hostility. Public discourse about coin-op games was not only shaped by regulation advocates like Ronnie Lamm, but also by industry boosters like Millie McCarthy, who presented strong counternarratives of entrepreneurship, civic engagement, and small, family-run businesses.

McCarthy spent years lobbying for the coin-op industry and serving her professional community both regionally and nationally. In doing this, she took on roles of national significance, becoming a voice for the industry during the critical period when video games were reforming the contours of coin-op. Millie McCarthy is a compelling figure—she was known in her life outside of work as an advocate for women’s rights and social justice more broadly, and her professional legacy is profound. But she has also become an obscure actor in the written history of video games. The most thorough and readily available information about her in the historical record comes from obituaries commemorating her

death in 2014. A woman who made groundbreaking contributions to the coin-op industry nationally and who frequently served as a public face and advocate as the industry confronted increased scrutiny because of the wide spread of video games should not be allowed to fade from memory. Industry advocates like Millie McCarthy played a vital role in the early distribution of video games and helped shape our public perceptions of games.

Lila Zinter

While Millie McCarthy worked in the operation of coin-op games, women also worked at coin-op manufacturing companies, including filling roles in early video game companies. The industry was largely male dominated from top to bottom, but a few women did manage to reach high-level positions.

Among these women was Lila Zinter (figure 2) who worked for years at video game upstart Exidy. When Betty Lockhart, who worked in the leadership of Rock-ola, was asked about women working in the industry, she expressed some frustration with the different standards applied to men and women and highlighted the scarcity of women filling high-level positions.

This field is dominated by men, so you have to work even harder. Ask any successful woman, and she will tell you about the hours she spends. They have to do all the work a man does but they have to strive to be taken seriously. Being a woman is more difficult, because first they look at you as a woman, and only after you convince them that you know what you're talking about will they accept you on a business basis. . . . I only know of one other major female executive in the industry and that's Lila Zitner [*sic*] over at Exidy. I imagine that she runs into the same situation I do.³²

As Lockhart suggests, Zinter was a highly visible executive in a mostly male industry. By the time of Lockhart's interview in 1983, Zinter was an industry veteran, having first begun work in coin-op game production ten years earlier.

Zinter joined the team at Exidy in 1977 and served as marketing director.³³ In fact, many women worked in significant roles in marketing, sales, and other areas of the early games industry. However, a focus on game designers and chief executives has helped obscure the influence many of these women exerted. Zinter is exceptional for how highly ranked she became and for how visible she was, which is why I consider her here. Doubtless many of these women made significant contributions to the games industry and shaped popular rhetoric around games.

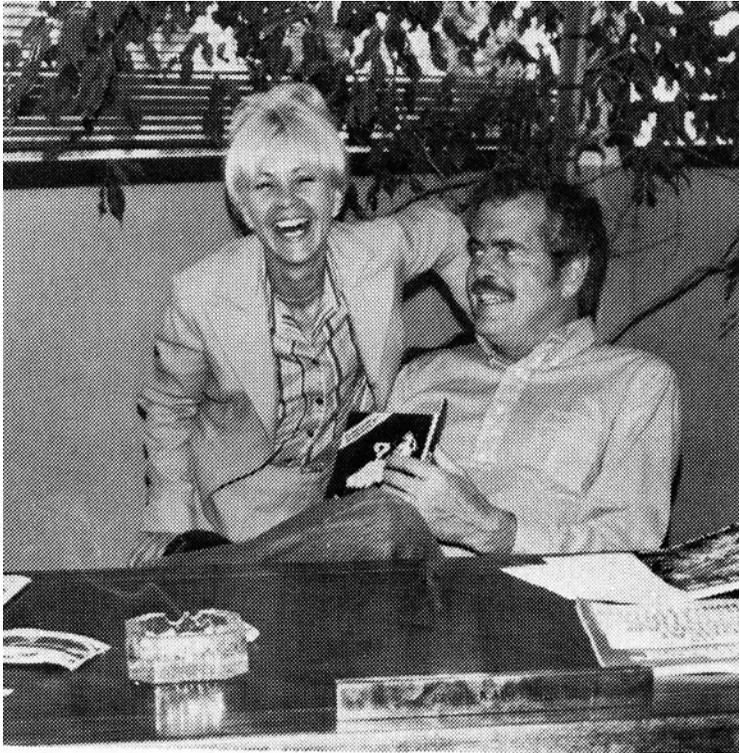


Figure 2. Lila Zinter, an early female leader in the video game industry, served many years as a marketing executive in the upstart company of Exidy. Photo courtesy of *RePlay* magazine.

For much of her time at Exidy, Zinter focused on international sales. A 1980 article mentions her focus on the U.K. and German markets, and a 1983 article again stresses her emphasis on international sales—a challenge as the company’s new product that year, the quiz game *FAX*, required significant localization, and the industry had not yet stabilized in the wake of the recent industry crash.³⁴ Throughout her time at Exidy, Zinter regularly appeared in promotional images and other corporate communications, and she often spoke about the company’s games and brand. For many years, Zinter was an industry icon readily identified with the Exidy brand. In a 1983 *Play Meter* feature on Exidy’s ten-year anniversary, a laughing Zinter appears standing beside a seated Kauffmann, the caption

claiming the pair are “sharing a laugh over some of the humorous questions in *FAX*.” In the same article, Zinter mentions that an “oink” sound effect used in Exidy’s new game *Whirly Bucket* was derived from her voice.³⁵

By 1983 Exidy was one of the few privately held coin-op manufacturers left in Silicon Valley, a locale that had at one point boasted several.³⁶ Reflecting on what had sustained the company, Zinter discussed Exidy in terms of innovation while acknowledging some real limitations: “Exidy is an innovator, but because we lack the big money of an Atari, we have a hard time breaking through the politics and getting a game a fair chance. A game can be at a large disadvantage if the distributor doesn’t like it. A product that does not get to the consumer in sufficient quantity is not likely to get its necessary exposure.”³⁷ As marketing director, Zinter was largely responsible for ensuring that Exidy titles found their way to players. But, she was also uniquely positioned to understand the challenges facing a relatively small company in an industry dominated by then giant Atari—especially as the industry entered a period of significant instability.

Although Zinter was nearly alone at the executive level in the coin-op video game industry, she was not the only woman serving a vital role at Exidy. The company may have been particularly good at attracting and retaining women. An article written as a ten-year retrospective of Exidy mentions and interviews Zinter, but also talks about Exidy senior editor Tricia Cozens, controller Trish Gerving, and Jeneane Harter, who managed licensing, and Mireille Chevalier, who had recently come to Exidy from Atari to oversee credit and domestic sales. Having a highly visible executive like Zinter may well have helped Exidy recruit other women. However, because Zinter was in the spotlight as a representative of the Exidy brand, she occupied a unique position in the industry. Further, the frequency with which journalists for both trade and popular press spoke to Zinter suggests the degree to which positions outside the design department helped shape public perception of games and also influenced design decisions. Zinter was not a game designer, but she was a highly influential figure. Those of us researching the games industry would do well to consider the diverse professional roles within the industry and the degree to which important decisions emanated from departments seemingly removed from game design.

Lamm, McCarthy, and Zinter are just three women who are referenced in archival materials. There are many others. Betty Lockhart, mentioned above, is one example, as are the other women workers at Exidy. Many women worked in sales, marketing, and public relations throughout the coin-op industry. Few reached the prominence of Zinter, but some did. Mary Fujihara, for example,

served as marketing director for Atari Games for at least ten years running through the mid 1980s.³⁸ And, a 1987 company profile of Atari showed several women working in marketing and sales, including customer service manager Elaine Shirley. At the same time, Linda Benzler worked as a product manager.³⁹

Millie McCarthy was a leader in her professional community, but trade journals also give other examples of women who oversaw coin-op routes, owned arcades, or even trained to serve as technicians and repair experts. A retrospective of “Ten Years of Coinmen Interviews” in *Play Meter* cited McCarthy, as well as Louisiana operator Martha Foshee, AMOA president Leoma Ballard, and Philadelphia operator Sharon Harris.⁴⁰ Some of these women worked alongside husbands or male family members with whom they co-owned the family business; some inherited routes from fathers or grandfathers; and some came to coin-op not through family connections but on their own, wading into an industry they saw as an avenue for professional and economic opportunities. Ernestine Tolisano purchased the Treasure Island Fun Center in Treasure Island, Florida, with her husband Jim in 1968. When Jim passed away, Ernestine took over operations in the arcade, becoming “one of the nation’s very few lady operators.”⁴¹ Maxine Cave started out as a posting clerk, tasked with handling invoices, at a distributor in Oklahoma City, and, after a decade in the industry moving steadily through the ranks, she became president of Action Vending in El Paso, Texas. Of the rise of women in the industry, Cave said, “It’s the greatest thing that’s ever happened to it.”⁴²

Women technicians and route operators were rare but not unheard of. *RePlay* contributing editor JoAnne Plein eventually moved into sales but brought with her significant route experience—experience she drew on in an article advocating the hiring of women for coin-op routes. In the article, she argues in part that women would be an asset in coin-op route jobs specifically because of chauvinism as angry male customers often proved less likely to act rudely toward the women with whom she worked.⁴³ *RePlay* highlighted Shirley Black, who in 1979 was the only woman training in the music and games equipment mechanics program at Texas State Technical Institute-Waco Campus.⁴⁴ A 1987 *Play Meter* feature titled “The Lady is a Technician” highlighted Richelle Urbanoski, a pinball technician at C. A. Robinson Co., Inc. who worked alongside nine men.⁴⁵ Women also filled jobs in manufacturing games. At least one article on Atari includes photographs of a diverse group of women working in the manufacture and testing of Atari products.⁴⁶ But, then as now, factory workers in general are largely overlooked in coverage.

Toward a Richer History

My purpose in this whirlwind tour of women working in and around the coin-op industry during video gaming's early glory days is not to make an argument for their individual importance, although I believe all of them are important, in particular Lamm, Zinter, and McCarthy. Rather, I want to make the broader point that there are many compelling stories of women shaping the coin-op industry and our understanding of it. That we know so few of them is not necessarily a testament of their absence—although as several of the *RePlay* and *Play Meter* articles mention, coin-op was a male-dominated industry—but to the kinds of places historians do and do not consider. Much of the work women have done historically, whether as midwives, or jazz singers, or assembly line workers, has been invisible not because the work was unimportant, but because it was not valued, either in the time the work occurred or in the years that followed, or because women made up a small number of workers in male-dominated fields and so became invisible in the formation of generalizations about the labor force.

At times, there may be excuses for this; often such work is less well documented and harder to reconstruct from the historical record. As I have suggested, some kinds of labor, such as factory work or secretarial work, are simply obscure; they take place behind the scenes, and so often remain hidden and unrecorded. However, we have numerous examples of historical research that manages to document and examine thoughtfully just this type of work. Laurel Thatcher Ulrich extrapolated almost all of her Pulitzer Prize-winning book from the diary of a single midwife. Records of individuals, families, and communities, all offer rich resources for productive historical research. More and more primary sources about the coin-op industry and video games are becoming available at institutions like The Strong, Stanford University Libraries, and the University of Texas's Briscoe Center for American History. Libraries both local and national can be key as well; many of the trade journal articles cited here were accessed through the collections of the Chicago Public Libraries. The local newspapers of small towns thrust into the national spotlight because of coin-op regulations or other coin-op news likely covered these events themselves and would be worth exploring. Interviews with those who worked in the industry during this period are vital, including interviews with those who left the industry. What do the histories of the operators bankrupted by the crash of the 1980s look like? What did it feel like to close an arcade?

There are archives to dig into, formal and informal. There are people to

interview through oral histories. There is, in short, so much work to be done using sources both conventional and unconventional. Those of us invested in conducting the work of video game history would do well to avoid reinscribing the invisibility of women by contributing to their obfuscation in our own research. The process by which women's accomplishments are minimized and women are denied professional recognition is itself historical—a result of complex cultural and socioeconomic issues—but it is also historiographic, because it is often constructed through the work of historical research. If we want to find the histories of women, we must look for them, both in the archives and in our communities.

It is easy to focus on game designers, competitive players, and studio founders—most of whom are men. But, it is easy to do so in part because of a historical trajectory that has long prepared us to do so. Projects like the *Influential Game Designers* book series that Jennifer deWinter and I coedit for Bloomsbury and the *Landmark Video Games* series edited by Mark J. P. Wolf and Bernard Peron contribute to a particular discourse of games and game studies. *Influential Game Designers* emerged from a discussion about the potential utility of considering game designers as auteurs; *Landmark Video Games* has at its heart a “great games” approach similar to the concept of “great books.” These approaches are not bad, but they are simply not enough. We cannot rely on a history that cherry picks the most visible titles and individuals and extrapolates from them a picture of the whole. We have seen the effects of doing so, and it obscures the vital work done, not only by women, but by anyone who falls outside hegemonic norms. The work of women's history and other area studies is vital, but we have an opportunity right now to integrate that type of valuable work into the primary work of the field. And it is essential that we do so, not only because it will enable us to produce the most valuable historical work possible, but because at a moment when toxic gaming culture is making headlines, we can intervene by enabling an accurate understanding of the complexities of gaming's past.⁴⁷ We should not produce a general video game history and then a specialized video game history for girls; we should tell all together, demonstrating how essential and important all these stories are.

A proper history of video games cannot be a history constructed entirely of the most readily available records of the most visible historical actors. Such a history is not a history so much as a chronicle, a “greatest hits” of the historical record. Such a history is why fields like women's history, African American studies, Mexican American studies, Asian American studies, and other special-

ized fields have been essential to recovering the American past. On its own, this greatest-hits approach falls short; it necessitates revision and correction in the future. In the emerging field of video game studies, we have opportunities to set a precedent for what this particular history will look like. As historians, we must work toward practices that avoid the need for recovery by, instead, producing a history that does not further obscure the work of key players. We must do this because to do otherwise, and to call ourselves historians, would be a professional failing of the highest order.

NOTES

1. Kishonna L. Gray, *Race, Gender, and Deviance in Xbox Live: Theoretical Perspectives from the Virtual Margins* (2014); Carly A. Kocurek, *Coin-Operated Americans: Rebooting Boyhood at the Video Game Arcade* (2015); Laine Nooney, "A Pedestal, a Table, a Love Letter: Archaeologies of Gender in Videogame History," *Game Studies* 13 (2013); Adrienne Shaw, *Gaming at the Edge: Sexuality and Gender at the Margins of Gamer Culture* (2015).

2. Laurel Thatcher Ulrich, *A Midwife's Tale: The Life of Martha Ballard, Based on Her Diary, 1785–1812* (1991).

3. Linda K. Kerber, *Women of the Republic: Intellect and Ideology in Revolutionary America* (2000).

4. Tera W. Hunter, *To 'joy My Freedom: Southern Black Women's Lives and Labors after the Civil War* (1998).

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