

## Games and Gamer Types

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The two games chosen for this module are 'Mary-Kate and Ashley – Crush Course' (M+A) and 'Metal Gear Solid 2: Sons of Liberty' (MGS). These two games are set in completely different genres and are aimed at totally different buyers. During this text, I will be talking about what makes these games unique in being able to attract their target audience. First of all I will provide you with a brief overview of each game.

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### Mary-Kate and Ashley – Crush Course

Playstation 1 - 2001



The whole game is based on M+A getting to a beach party that some 'totally cute' boys have invited them to. However, the map they intend to use to reach this party has been torn up. The main objective is to find all the pieces of the map so you can get to the party on time. This is achieved by overcoming the challenges in the game that take place in a high school, golf course etc. The game consists of small tasks such as mini golf, cheer leading and photography (plus more). This game and story is aimed towards younger female gamers.

### Metal Gear Solid 2: Sons of Liberty

Playstation 2 - 2001



During this game you take on the role of Solid Snake – a trained infiltrator and spy. A large part of this game is based on stealth. Your objective is to infiltrate a tanker/ship in order to gain information about a new nuclear weapon (Metal Gear). The game consists of gun fights, military like missions and anti-terrorism – something that is stereotypically aimed towards males. The story involves a lot of violence, action and weaponry – something that most females don't seem to be very fond of.

#### Attracting their target audience

##### Mary Kate and Ashley

The first obvious thing about M+A is that it is aimed towards young females. There's a really cheesy piece of text on the front cover for the game. The text says "He doesn't even know I'm alive..." Which is replied with "But he's soooo cute!" My first impressions on this game were that I wasn't going to enjoy it at all.

After inserting the CD into the Playstation, the first screen that comes up says "Real games for real girls". The designers definitely know who their target audience is. Before you get to the main menu screen, a short FMV plays. This shows activities such as skating, cheer leading, basketball, modeling, mini golf and dancing. Not bad seen as it's a game for girls. Basketball and mini golf can go down well with male players.

There are a few different menus available before you start the game. One of the menus is called “Meet the boys”. At this point I’m thinking “Why the hell did I choose this game?!” If you select this menu, a number of different boys can be seen. Some of their names are Chad, Bruce, Brandon, Brett and Aaron - the type of names you would expect to appear in high school chick flicks. The more I explore this game the ‘cheesier’ it gets.



You start the game off in Mary-Kate and Ashley’s bedroom. The text on the screen informs you that you need to get dressed for school or you will miss the bus. You simply have to press the left button to change Mary-Kate’s outfit and the right button to change Ashley’s outfit (As you probably already know, picking the right outfit is stereotypically a big thing for girls. So the game already relates to female players). Once you are happy with the clothes they are wearing you need to press X to advance in the game. Even though these are simple controls; there is text on the screen telling you how to use them. Simple controls are better for female gamers because they are not as skilled with a controller as male gamers (due to the fact that they don’t play games as much).

### **Metal Gear Solid**

I found the FMV at the beginning of the game very appealing. It includes the military, guns, fighting, a lot of action and quite a lot of violence. This is totally different from the intro to the M+A game. This video excites me a lot more. The music in the intro plays a big part. It has an anthemic sound which adds a sense of power to the game. When I first heard this music I became emotionally involved with the game straight away – something that M+A didn’t do.

At the main menu screen, you have the traditional options such as new game, load game and options. However, there is another menu called special. In here, you can find tutorials on how to use the control system. The difficulty ranges from beginner to advanced showing how each control method is carried out. The control system in this game can get quite tricky.

MGS has film like aspects to it. Before you start playing the game, there is an intro sequence that explains what’s happening. Its running time was 10-15 minutes long. This is quite bad – if I wanted to watch a film, I’d buy one.

### **General Gameplay**

*Interactivity is the essence of what you are selling.* – Chris Crawford.

Lately, I’ve been reading Chris Crawford on games design. Chris explains that the more interactive a computer game is, the more successful it will be. I agree with him on this and I think these two games show us a perfect example. The MGS levels are highly interactive.

Objects that don’t necessarily interfere with the main objective of the game can be interacted with. E.g. Snake has the ability to shoot at lights on the ceiling that obviously go out afterwards. This changes the gameplay slightly. If the area is too dark, snake and his enemies find it harder to see each other. Therefore, this makes a battle scene a lot more tense and exciting for the player. Another exciting interactive element within the game is the guards AI. They have the ability to see shadows around corners and to follow wet footprints if snake has been outside. These are the little things that make the game a lot more enjoyable.

There isn't much interactivity within the Mary-Kate and Ashley worlds. Basically, all you can do is run around, talk to certain people and strictly stick to your goal. This could be one of the reasons why it wasn't such a big hit. The game doesn't really allow you to do much. For instance, the entrance doors to the school are locked. What if I wanted to go outside? There's no option for it. The game needs to react to the players' wonderment more.



## 400 project

I have chosen to look at a few a few rules of the 400 project to see if my chosen games actually consist of them.

### 1:

One of the main rules within games design and one of the most important rules within the 400 project is *"Provide Clear Short-Term Goals"*.

In M+A the goals are pretty obvious. There is only one for each level and they are shown to you before you start. I don't think the goals should be complicated and confusing for young female gamers. Females don't play games as much as males. They might not be familiar with the actions of gameplay that are 'burned into' male gamer's brains. E.g. At the start of MGS, you are told to take photos of the machine and that's it. It's then up to the player to work out how to achieve this goal (exploring the area, finding the right route etc.) In M+A each goal is pretty straight forward.

The goals in MGS are provided through cut scenes. A lot of people think this is a bad thing. As I said earlier, some gamers don't want to watch endless minutes of cut scenes. They just want to play the game. The fact the goals are supplied through the cut scenes makes it even worse for these gamers because now they have to watch minutes of something that doesn't really interest them.

The target audience, or anyone for that matter, may leave the game due to the way the goals are specified. This is a bad way to keep your target audience involved in the game.

### 2:

Another rule that stood out to me is *"Let the player turn the game off"*. It basically means that the player should be able to save the game at any point if he/she wants to exit the game. I personally love this rule. I find it very annoying when you've been playing a game for hours and you can't find anywhere to save your progress.

If there isn't a certain place in the game to save, players may switch the game off. This is bad because the player now has to repeat the levels/objectives they may already have done. They may feel they "can't be bothered" to do these again which results them leaving the game for good. This happened to me a number of times during M+A.

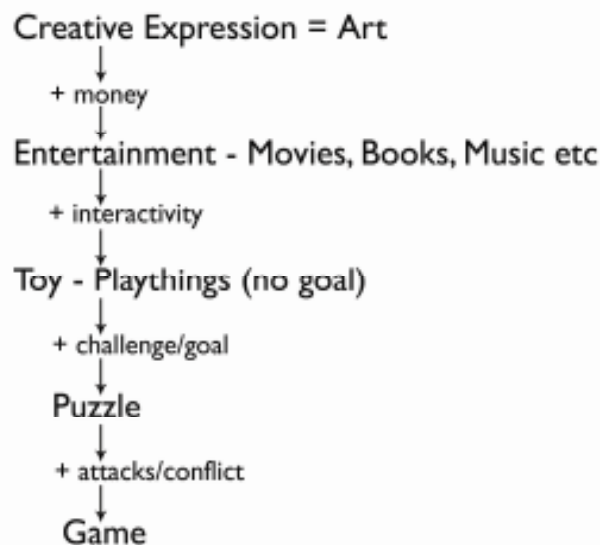
M+A only allows you to save once you have completed a class/level. Even though the game is for young females, I found the challenges rather hard! Not once did I complete the levels first time. The "save later" feature is rather annoying in this game. I'll use the mini golf level as an example. You could be doing amazingly well on the first 3 holes (no score over par, getting birdies etc), however on the last 2 holes you may completely miss hit the golf ball which later gives you a terrible score. Overall, this results in you failing the class because you done badly in the last 2 holes. Now you have to do it all over again.

In MGS, you have the option to save when you wish. You simply call one of the characters on your codec/phone and they quickly save the game for you, Halleluiah! No more repeating levels/missions here! However, some people don't seem to like this rule. Some gamers say that having the option to save at anytime dilutes the challenge in the game. They feel there is no sense of risk where 'dangerous' events are about to take place in the game. They don't like the fact that you can save right before the boss for example, and simply restart the game if you die.

3:

Two similar psychological rules are "Make the Player Feel Special and Powerful" and "Make the player feel smart". This is a good rule to compare these games. When you're immersed in MGS, you feel proud and clever after you've sneaked past an army of soldiers. However, M+A isn't that rewarding. It's quite the opposite. Three of the levels consist of you picking up ALL the rubbish off the beach. I thought to myself, "Why the hell am I playing a console version of a trash collector?" Even worse, you have to do it 3 times! This makes you feel kind of stupid which is what the 400 project says to avoid.

Whilst reading Chris Crawford on game design, I came across this chart.



Chris basically breaks down what a game actually is. Even though most people would say M+A is structured as a GAME, according to Chris Crawford's theory, it is only a puzzle. M+A doesn't involve any attacks or conflict. I find this really interesting. It always feels like your playing a game but if you go by Chris's rules, you're only playing a glorified puzzle.

This is quite possibly the reason why I don't like this game so much. Conflict makes the challenge interesting and personal. When you play M+A, you don't really feel like you're carrying out the task/mission like in MGS. There isn't a great sense of achievement when you complete a level. Where as, when you successfully defeat an enemy/boss in MGS, you feel proud of yourself.

Overall, I think both games attracted their audiences well. However, that doesn't mean the audience will like the games. Metal Gear Solid 2 is a great game, but it definitely has flaws. The long cut scene feature being the main one. As a male gamer, there was a pretty good chance I wasn't going to enjoy Mary Kate and Ashley from the beginning. Although, I can see why young girls would enjoy that game (well...now we know it's only a puzzle).