Opinion

Just sports: Sydney Sweeney's newest ad shows she chooses a check over women's rights

By EMILY MARQUIS
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Actress Sydney Sweeney has decided to sell sports trading stocks at the expense of just about every woman in sports with her newest advertisement, capitalizing on misogyny and then claiming she isn't the first to do it. As if such a distinction makes her actions any less frustrating.

For those unaware of Sweeney's polarizing marketing campaign with sports trading website Novig, the minute-long advertisement was meant to showcase that Novig, unlike other popular trading apps like Kalshi and Polymarket, is "just sports."

In a "cheeky" display from Sweeney, the visual advertisement depicts exactly that. Whether it's simply a basketball, football pads or goalie gear as Sweeney's clothing, Novig's message of "just sports" is depicted in the most literal possible way, leaving next to nothing to the imagination. Sweeney inserts her own voice-over to the display, repeating the word "sports" in an airy tone. By that point in the ad's runtime, any mention of sports or the product have been completely ignored by fans and critics of the advertisement alike.

To take it at face value, it's a 60-second advertisement that capitalizes on hypermasculinity. Sweeney sells the connection many men wish to see between sports and women, the simple pleasures that all "real men" can appreciate. Keep politics, death and respect for women out of it.

But a controversial advertisement isn't a new concept, especially for Sweeney. Her advertisement for American Eagle in July 2025 shocked viewers to a similar degree. But why is this ad different?



ILLUSTRATION BY LILIANA MIRABELLA

Depending on what corner of the internet has grabbed hold of the advertisement, the analysis of the ad varies. Some are annoyed with the ad itself — people have been frustrated with sports gambling ads since betting companies realized the gold mine they were sitting on by making the practice more palatable to the everyday viewer. Others are frustrated with how public it has gotten — Sweeney's revealing poses toe the line, and with kids swarming every inch of the internet, is that truly safe to put out there at all, let alone add to a billboard in Times Square?

But for me, all of that comes second fiddle to the deeper-rooted issue: how harmful this perception Sweeney has enforced is for women in sports.

Working in the sports industry as a coach, athlete, or other support staff is difficult for women. In a space that was largely built by men with just men in mind, it is hard work carving a place into it where you fit in. Whether it is fighting for equal pay, pushing for equal coverage or simply working to build an environment where female athletes are able to feel safe competing, every step has been a fight.

It becomes even harder when companies like Novig and Sweeney herself sign on to projects like this. I have seen the outcry of support for Sweeney and Novig's decision to greenlight this ad campaign.

But my issue is not with her choice to show off her body. It is her body, and thus it, of course, is hers to command in any way she chooses.

Where my issue lies is that she believes this choice exists in a vacuum, that her actions do not have any consequences. This advertisement has the potential to undo the good that women have fought for in this industry over what? A paycheck? More controversial notoriety? Even the success of Novig — in which she holds an undisclosed equity stake — surely cannot be worth further cementing the deep-rooted misogyny that has taken hold in many male professional sports fans.

Because it's as simple as that for many of these men. A woman in sports is not a person. Sweeney has suggested instead that they are a sex symbol.

Then, if the ad itself wasn't enough, her response to the outcry made it so much worse and further highlighted that Sweeney is one to capitalize first and think critically later. She compares her campaign to the ESPN magazine "body issue." In since-expired Instagram stories, Sweeney posted screenshots of various covers of ESPN's magazines during the "body issue" run — a magazine demonstrating athletes with limited clothing in various poses.

It was a campaign that, at its core, celebrated the athletes. ESPN was not running the magazine to show off a naked individual posing as a sex symbol. Instead, they were telling the stories of each athlete through a unique perspective. The tagline of the run highlights this: "Every BODY has a story."

These athletes were posed in a way that accentuated their athleticism, women and men alike. Although people ogled, the point of the campaign was not to use these athletes as promotion or to cater to a misogynistic audience to capture their awe and attention. It was to tell a story.

The story that Sweeney has chosen to tell is hardly a story at all. It is the result of what happens when someone makes a choice for money, blatantly ignoring any harm it could cause and pointing fingers when people rightfully call out the behavior. I hope selling out a generation of girls in sports was worth the paycheck.

Grand Theft Auto VI marks the end of an era for video game graphics

By MICHAEL MCGRAIL
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At the tail end of the 18th century, artistic Romanticism spread rapidly throughout Europe and the United States. This form of artistic style placed a heavy emphasis on emotion and feeling, diverging heavily from the logic and realism that defined the art of the Enlightenment era. Now in the modern day, we are on the precipice of experiencing a nearly identical shift, only this time in a brand-new medium: video games.

Helmed by the Rockstar Games studio, the Grand Theft Auto franchise has always pushed the envelope in terms of the quality of its in-game graphics. Since the release of "GTA III" in 2001, each successive game they've released has had a major graphical upscale with a huge focus on realism.

The trailers for Rockstar's latest installment in the franchise, "GTA VI," is seemingly their biggest graphical achievement to date. The game's trailers, showing gameplay located in the fictional setting of "Vice City," boast a slew of hyperrealistic visuals that Rockstar has spent the past 13 years developing.

Although "GTA VI's" graphics are a massive achievement in the gaming industry, appearing as visually close to reality as nearly any video game has to date, they do bring up a pressing issue: where does the gaming industry go from here?

For years, essentially dating as far back as the release of the Nintendo 64 console in 1996, high-profile 3D games have been in a graphical arms race. Every large video game conglomerate has spent years in a mad dash to create the most realistic-looking games possible. Decades of game marketing has centered around companies creating better graphics than those of their rival studios and even themselves.

In recent years, this race for graphical superiority has begun to plateau. Games released years ago have an extremely similar level of realism to that of games released mere days ago. Take the 2017 Sony game "Horizon Zero Dawn": its graphics are on a nearly identical level to that of "Wolverine," a Sony game released Sept. 15 of this year.

Both of these games aim for photorealism, and both games land at the same level of visual refinement. There are minute improvements that have been developed in the nine year gap between these two games, yes, but their overall quality is extremely comparable. This similarity is particularly absurd when you compare "Horizon's" $45 million budget with "Wolverine's" staggering production cost of $305 million.

"GTA VI" is simply the nail in the coffin for the era of realism that has dominated the video game industry for decades. Yes, there will be games released after this "GTA" installment that will be technically superior in terms of graphical quality, but any improvements will be far too slim and unnoticeable to be an effective selling point.

To answer the question of where the gaming industry will visually shift after "GTA VI," I believe that all we have to do is simply look to history. More specifically, the shift from artistic Neoclassicism to Romanticism in the late 18th century.

Brought about by disillusionment to the instability of the Age of Enlightenment and as a counter-reaction to the rapid urbanization of the Industrial Revolution, Romanticism offered a larger focus on emotion and imagination compared to the logic and order of Neoclassicism. Color was used more liberally, and artists were no longer afraid to exaggerate certain pieces of their work in order to convey larger emotions.

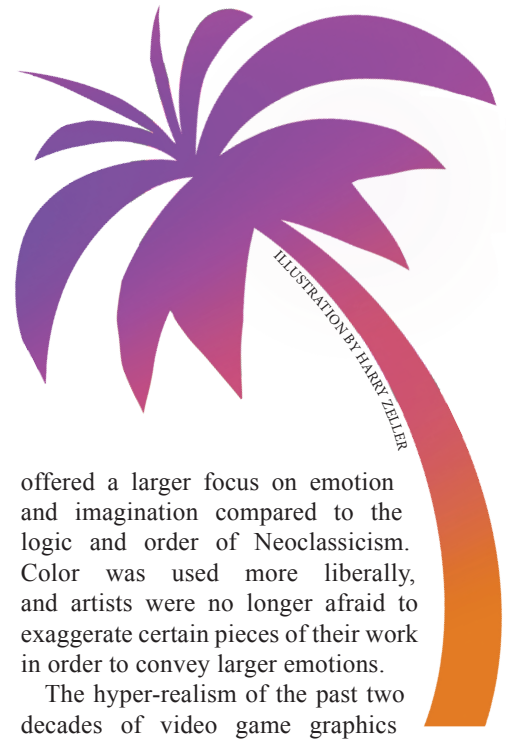


ILLUSTRATION BY HARRY ZELLER

The hyper-realism of the past two decades of video game graphics is essentially the same as the stoic, logical ideals of the neoclassical era of art. Both eras focused on conveying reality through art, and both eras pushed their style as far as it could go. This notion begs another question: what is the gaming equivalent to romanticism?

In recent years, there has been a surplus of games embodying this shift that I believe larger game studios are now facing. Individually produced games, or "Indie" games, are projects created by individual developers or small development teams. Unlike games created by larger studios, Indie games are completely visually distinct from project to project.

Some emulate older graphics, while some blend two-dimensional art with the third dimension. Hell, there are Indie games out there such as "Silksong" or "Cuphead" that are entirely hand-drawn. It's impossible to describe the Indie style, because no two Indie games are entirely alike. As a result, it is nigh-on impossible for Indie games to visually plateau.

This is what I believe the impending Romantic era of big-budget games will hold. Development teams will be given more visual freedom, and graphics will become a tool used to emphasize aspects of a game's playstyle or story rather than being a quality metric used for marketing. It will take some time, but once sales for the next batch of photorealistic games begin to dip, studios will be forced to take action.