

The Negative Effects of Gender Stereotypes in Video Games

Mike Hoback

Southern Adventist University



Introduction

- Today's youth spend more time with video games than any single activity other than sleeping (Roberts, & Foehr, 2008). It is important for parents to understand the negative effects that violent video games have on their children.
 - Violent video games: Contain violence simulators that glorify gang culture, celebrate brutality, lionize crudeness, and trivialize violence toward women (Williams, 2009).
- According to the National Institute on Media and the Family, playing violent video games is not just a concern when it comes to young children. Teenage brains are in the midst of growth spurts, making teens very impressionable (Padilla-Walker, Nelson, Carrloo, & Jensen, 2010). .

Introduction (cont.)

- Violent video games teach children to value violent behavior, vengeance, and aggression (Williams, 2009). Negotiating and other nonviolent solutions are often not options. Women are often portrayed as weaker characters that are helpless or sexually provocative (Ferguson, Cruz, Martinez, Rueda, Ferguson, & Negy, 2008).



Why is it important?

- Over the past three decades, the video game market has developed into a \$10 billion a year industry in the United States alone (Behm-Morawitz, & Mastro, 2009).
- Recent estimates show that children spend an average of about 7 hours per week playing videogames and that 68% of the most popular games on the market contain some act of violence (Williams, 2009).
- 70% of children ages 2 to 18 that live in the U.S. have a video game system in their home (Scharrer, 2004).

Why is it important? (cont.)

- 40% of all game players in the U.S. are female (Behm-Morawitz, Mastro, 2009).
 - The effects of video game play on both men and women should not be trivialized.
 - Much research has been conducted on video games and aggression but the effects of being exposed to the stereotypical manner which females are commonly portrayed has been largely ignored.





My 9 year old daughter

Approximately one year ago an incident occurred in which she was playing a video game while I was in another room. Upon walking in I observed graphic images of women and vulgar language being used in a game that was rated "E" for everyone.

Findings from Studies

- Research indicates that media use has a measurable influence on gender roles and gender based cognitions. Exposure to idealized images of the female body in the media has been shown to negatively affect girls' and women's general feelings of self worth. Specifically, exposure to idealized images of the female body affects self-esteem and self-efficacy (Martins, Williams, Harrison, & Ratan, 2009).

Females in Video Games

Then



Now



Gender Roles

- Male characters are frequently involved in violence while female characters appear to be presented with a strong emphasis on body and beauty, often scantily clad and highly sexualized, with exaggerated breast sizes and tiny waists (Scharrer, 2004).
- Male characters were more muscular than female characters and are usually considered the hero of the game while the female is a secondary character that serves as victims or prizes and they occupy stereotypical gender roles such as brazenly sexualized beings and objects of sexual desire (Martins, Williams, Harrison, & Ratan, 2009).

Images from Grand theft Auto (Best selling video

game in history) Rated "E" for everyone



Body Image Dissatisfaction

- Body image dissatisfaction among adolescent girls and women is considered so common that some researchers claim it is a normative component of life in Western society. Recent studies indicate that 40% to 60% of adolescent girls and women are dissatisfied with some aspect of their appearance. This discontent with body weight is associated with the prevalence of eating disorders: it is estimated that 10 to 15 million women suffer from anorexia or bulimia in the United States alone (Martins, Williams, Harrison, & Ratan, 2009).

Low Self-Esteem

- Recent research has found that when females play a sexualized female video game character it negatively affected feelings of self-efficacy in women (Behm-Morawitz, & Mastro, 2009).
- Studies have also found that video game condition was found to have a significant main effect on subsequent beliefs about gender related capabilities (Behm-Morawitz, & Mastro, 2009).
 - Fight like a girl!!
 - Obtain success through sexual acts.

Grand Theft Auto (Number 1 selling video game of all time) Rated "E" for Everyone.



Attitudes towards Women

- Recent studies have shown that playing a video game with the theme of female “objectification” may prime thoughts related to sex, encourage men to view women as sex objects, and lead to self-reported tendencies to behave inappropriately towards women in social situations (Yao, Mahood, & Linz, 2010).
- Studies have shown that exposure to violent sexual content in which women appear to be responsible for their own victimization or appear to be sexually aroused can result in changes in men’s cognitive appraisal and acceptance of sexual violence (Yao, Mahood, & Linz, 2010).

Societies Treatment of Women

- In another study on female characters in video games, participants displayed strong gender stereotyping when asked to describe what the typical male and female character looked like; the single most often stated characteristic for females was “big boobs”(Yao, Mahood, & Linz, 2010).
- Recent research has also found that playing a sexually-charged video game for merely 25 minutes might increase a self-reported tendency to engage in inappropriate sexual advances and foster a negative view of females(Roberts & Foehr, 2008).

Conclusion and Recommendations

- **Because** video game makers tend to use gender stereotypes when advertising new games in an effort to identify with their audience, **then** it is important for social workers to educate parents about these tactics so they can make a more informed decision about which games to allow their children to play.
- **Because** playing video games that portray woman as sex objects may led to tendencies to behave inappropriately towards woman in social situations, **then** it is important for social workers to educate parents about discussing the inappropriateness of these situations to real life solutions which will also let the child know what your values are as well as to help him or her deal with images that may be troubling.

Conclusion and Recommendations

- **Because** research shows that the roles individuals play in video games affects their own self-perception and influences the way they think and behave after playing video games, **then** it is important for researchers to conduct more research on gender roles in video games and examine their long term implications on both males and females because few empirical studies have examined this aspect.
- **Because** young females make up almost half of the video game players today and they are spending more and more time on games that contain gender stereotyping, **then** it is important for educators and researchers to better understand the cognitive effects these games have on them as they mature, so that they can be prepared to address and possibly treat the possible negative behaviors that may result.

Conclusion and Recommendations

- **Because** 40% to 60% of adolescent girls and women are dissatisfied with some aspect of their appearance and 10 to 15 million women suffer from anorexia or bulimia in the United States, **then** it is important to educate parents about the sociocultural pressure has on body dissatisfaction and disordered eating and that recent video games that portray woman as thin with big breast can have a negative impact on young females as they find it impossible to reach these unrealistic ideals.

Conclusion and Recommendations

- **Because** children may adopt beliefs and standards that are in line with these sexualized portrayals, resulting in the desire to be like the characters and to judge themselves and others based upon the character, **then** parents should not allow their children access to these types of video games.
- **Because** gender portrayals in video games can affect people's beliefs about women in the real world, **then** it's important to inform parents that through their own interactions with their children they can introduce the proper thinking into their home. Parents teach by spending time with their children and children learn when they try and imitate their parents through their own actions and comments.

Conclusions and Recommendations

- **Because** many video game users are young and are in the process of exploring their own identity in relationships to the social world, and are more susceptible to media influence than older audiences, **then** it is important to educate parents about the benefits of playing games with their children. Knowing what your child is being exposed to and how they react to different features in the game can help parents detect early warning signs of inappropriate behavior.

References

- Aarsand, P. (2007). Computer and video games in family life: The digital divide as a resource in intergenerational interactions. *Childhood, 14*(2), 235-256.
- Behm-Morawitz, E., & Mastro, D. (2009). The Effects of the Sexualization of Female Video Game Characters on Gender Stereotyping and Female Self-Concept. *Sex Roles, 61*(11/12), 808-823. doi:10.1007/s11199-009-9683-8
- Ferguson, C. J., Cruz, A. M., Martinez, D., Rueda, S. M., Ferguson, D. E., & Negy, C. (2008). Personality, parental, and media influences on aggressive personality and violent crime in young adults. *Journal of Aggression, Maltreatment & Trauma, 17*(4), 395-414. doi:10.1080/10926770802471522

- Hofferth, S. L. (2010). Home media and children's achievement and behavior. *Child Development*, 81(5), 1598-1619. doi:10.1111/j.1467-8624.2010.01494.x
- King, D., & Delfabbro, P. (2010). Should Australia have an R 18+ classification for video games? *Youth Studies Australia*, 29(1), 9-17
- Krcmar, M., & Farrar, K. (2009). Retaliatory aggression and the effects of point of view and blood in violent video games. *Mass Communication & Society*, 12(1), 115-138. doi:10.1007/s11199-009-9682-9

- Martins, N., Williams, D., Harrison, K., & Ratan, R. (2009). A content analysis of female body imagery in video games. *Sex Roles, 61*(11/12), 824-836. doi: 10.1007/s11199-009-9682-9
- Mitrofan, O. O., Paul, M. M., Spencer, N. N. (2009). Is aggression in children with behavioral and emotional difficulties associated with television viewing and video game playing? A systematic review. *Child: Care, Health & Development, 35*(1), 5-15. doi:10.1111/j.1365-2214.2008.00912.x
- NINIE JIN, S. A. (2011). “MY avatar behaves well and this feels right”: Ideal and ought selves in video gaming. *Social Behavior & Personality: An international Journal, 39*(9), 1175-1182. doi:10.2224/sbp.2011.39.9.1175

- Padilla-Walker, L. M., Nelson, L. J., Carrloo, J.S., & Jensen, A. C. (2010). More than a just a game: Video game and internet use during emerging adulthood. *Journal Of Youth & Adolescence*, 39(2), 103-113. doi:10.1007/s10964-008-9390-8
- Plowman, L., McPake, J., & Stephen, C. (2010). The technologisation of childhood? Young children and technology in the home. *Children & Society*, 24(1), 63-74. doi:10.1111/j.1099-0860.2008.00180.x
- Roberts, D. F., & Foehr, U. G. (2008). Trends in media use. *Future Of Children*, 18(1), 11-37

- Scharrer, E. (2004). Virtual violence: Gender and aggression in video game advertisements. *Mass Communication & Society*, 7(4), 393-412.
- Van Rooij, A. J., Schoenmakers, T. M., Vermulst, A. A., Van Den Eijnden, R. M., & Van De Mheen, D. (2011). Online video game addiction: Identification of addicted adolescent gamers. *Addiction*, 106(1), 205-212. doi:10.1111/j.1360-0443.2010.03104.x
- Williams, K. D. (2009). The effects of frustration, violence, and trait hostility after playing a video game. *Mass Communication & Society*, 12(3), 291-310. doi:10.1080/15205430802461087

Win, J., & Heeter, C. (2009). Gaming, gender, and time: Who makes time to play? *Sex Roles, 61*(1/2), 1-13. doi:10.1007/s11199-009-9595-7

Yao, M., Mahood, C., & Linz, D. (2010). Sexual priming, gender stereotyping, and likelihood to sexually harass: Examining the cognitive effects of playing a sexually-explicit video game. *Sex Roles, 62*(1/2), 77-88. doi:10.1007/s11199-009-9695-4