The Social Impact of Gender and Games

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INTRODUCTION

An increasingly important area of gender and information technology is that of Internet, computer, and video games. Besides women increasingly playing conventional entertainment-oriented or role-playing games, there are a number of pertinent developments in gaming. They are adver-games, casual games, games for change or “serious” games, and games aimed at women and/or developed by women.

Computer and video games are a significant area of interest for a number of reasons. In the United States, games generate substantially more annual revenue than motion picture exhibition, totalling over $11 billion for three consecutive years from 2002 to 2004 (Hollywood Game Daemon, 2004; Traiman, 2005). Research by the Entertainment Software Association indicates that:

half of all Americans play computer and video games, with women making up the second largest (demographic) group of gamers. Games are steadily becoming a dominant way that people spend their leisure time, often stealing time away from traditional media, like television. (Games for change mentioned at NYC Council Hearing, 2005)

In addition, games often reinforce traditional gender roles (Cassells & Jenkins, 2000) and reproduce negative racial and ethnic stereotypes, even as male players comfortably assume female identities (Baker, 2002). As greater numbers of consumers spend time gaming, the advertising industry has taken notice and is following the population into the game world with advertising. The game enthusiasts comprise a desirable target, freely spending on games and other products. Gamers spend an estimated $700 a year per capita on games (Gamers are spending 700 dollars a year, 2005).
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