At the end of this lesson, you should be able to:

- Justify the need for understanding gender issues in games
- Discuss the categories of gender issues in games
- Discuss ways to incorporate gender inclusivity in game design
Why the need to understand gender preferences in games?

(Just let me play the game...)

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**Economic Impact**

The video game industry is expected to double in sales from 2005’s $32.6 billion to $65.9 billion in 2011.

**Growth** – From 2005 to 2009, the entertainment software industry’s annual growth rate exceeded 10%. Over the same period, the entire U.S. economy grew at a rate of less than 2%.

**GDP** – In 2009, the entertainment software industry’s value added to the U.S. Gross Domestic Product (GDP) was $4.9 billion.

**Employment** – For the four-year period of 2005-09, direct employment grew at an annual rate of 8.6%. Currently, computer and video game companies directly and indirectly employ more than 120,000 people in 34 states. The average salary for direct employees is $90,000, resulting in total national compensation of $2.9 billion.

*ABI Research*

*Economists Inc.*
The traditional target market of males ages 15-25 is not growing as fast as the games industry.

But female gamers increased by five percentage points among Console Gamers, from 23 percent in 2008 to 28 percent in 2009. *NPD Group*

And women worldwide currently control £12.1 trillion in annual spending power, and the study predicts it could rise to around £17 trillion by 2014. *Boston Consulting Group*

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**In the beginning things were easy**

Throw a rock at a group of U.S. 18 – 24 males, hit a gamer, hit *five gamers*...

18 – 34 Male

Technically Savvy

The Gamer we used to know
The Gamer today

All ages, genders, ethnicities
Internet Savvy

Those days are gone

You’ll still hit a gamer if you throw a rock...

But unless your game is targeted at that specific type of gamer..
So, what?

Implications:

• The gaming audience has changed
• Emerging trend ~ Gadget Girls, Cyber Mums
• Bigger segment of the game market
• New type of audience/gamer
• New and creative ways to design games

An example of a Gadget Girl

Tablet  E-book reader  Media player  Laptop  Game Consoles  SatNav  Netbook  Smart phones  Digital Camera
GENDER ISSUES IN GAMES

1990s
- Dune
- Pacman
- Word games

2000
- The Sims
- SimCity
- City Building Games
- Word Games

2010
- Wii Sports
- 3D City Building
- Online games
- Mobile games

Gadget Girl play games too...

The Entertainment Software Association (ESA) in 2010 found out that...

The average gamer is 34 years old and has been playing for 12 years.

Who are the ESA? Atari, Microsoft, Electronic Arts, Sony, Ubisoft, Her Interactive, Nintendo, Epic Games, SEGA, Warner Bros.
How do we design for this market segment?
(Just let me play the game already...)

If only there exists just plain gender-unidentified Sack...
But gamers are not plain gender-unidentified... not even in Sack planet

What research says about ... risks taking & learning?

“I’ll just jump right in and see what works!”
“Manual? What manual?!”

• Risk-takers
• Exploratory or ‘trial & error’ attitude

“Hmmm... wonders how this work?”
“Is there a tutorial somewhere?”

• Want to know how it works first
• Model/imitate after
What research says about ...

types of action?

“‘I’ll send a raiding party and sabotage their supplies’”

“‘I’ll fight you to the death or until I lose a toe!’”

• Direct and sometimes aggressive/violent action during competition & conflict resolution

• Diplomacy & negotiations during competition & conflict resolution

“I’ll exchange your onions for chicken”

“I am sending you this rare rainbow tiger for your menagerie”

What research says about ...

failure/error?

“Kill! Kill! Die! Die! You minions.”

“There goes my left hand!”

• Violent or ‘death’ punishment for error

• Need a forgiving gameplay

“Thank you time rewind”

“I can replay my game anytime without restarting”
What research says about ... challenges?

“I got extreme super demi-god kick & punches X100!”

- Challenges from physical strength/power
- Challenges from solving puzzles or resource management

“What research says about ... communication style?

“Look at how that head roll off!”
“%@*"&"$&*!!!”

- Rough language
- Attempt to dominate through “put downs”
- Use sexual humor

“Now, where can I find that 231th piece of puzzle?!?”

- Formal language
- Build rapport through questions
- Ceased to communicate when faced with sexual humor that contained female put-downs
What research says about ... avatar portrayal?

I want a Hero!

Kratos from God of War

Ivy Valentine from Soul Calibur
What research says about ... violent action?

Hypersexualized & Hypermuscularized
- Large Shoulders
- Slim waists
- Slim hips
- Overly large muscles
- Exposed body parts
- Typical role as soldier, tyrant, saviour
- Aggressive, violent, strong and likely to use a weapon

Hypersexualized
- Large breasts, lots of cleavage
- Slim waists
- Round buttocks
- Long, thick hair
- Exposed body parts
- Typical role as damsel in distress, hostage, bystander
- Submissive, weak and likely to use verbal ridicule

Because these avatars represent “heroes”, male and female avatars will often exhibit exaggerated physical signals of youth, strength, and fertility/virility.

So, how to minimize/avoid these stereotypes?

Gender Inclusive Game Design
How to start?

Know your audience
- Clearly defined targeted audience statement that states you intend to design for females as well as males.
- Get more women in the team
- Seek out qualified female candidates

Gameplay & content
- Actions that include negotiations & diplomacy
- Game support to allow for different learning styles
- Consider forgiving gameplay for error rather than punishment
- Make female avatars attractive, but not hyper-sexualized
- Provide a wide range of roles & personality traits
GENDER ISSUES IN GAMES

Learn more:


Essential Facts about the Computer & Video Game Industry by Entertainment Software Association (ESA)

Video Games in the 21st Century: The 2010 Report

Video gaming attracts larger female audience in 2009

Game Industry Revenue Expected To Double By 2011

Future watch: Will the flourishing trend of female-friendly products continue into the next few years?

Increasing Numbers of Women Playing Video Games

Works related to this topic:


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