

**GENDER ISSUES
IN GAMES**

ROZIANA IBRAHIM
LEARNING SOCIETIES LAB
ri07r@ecs.soton.ac.uk
<http://zia-ibrahim.webs.com/>
<http://www.ecs.soton.ac.uk/people/ri07r>

INFO6005
GENDER ISSUES IN GAMES

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

INFO6005

GENDER ISSUES IN GAMES

Why the need to understand gender preferences in games?

(Just let me play the game...)

INFO6005

GENDER ISSUES IN GAMES

Economic Impact

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

ABI Research

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.

Economists Inc.

INFO6005

GENDER ISSUES IN GAMES

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

INFO6005

GENDER ISSUES IN GAMES

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

INFO6005

GENDER ISSUES IN GAMES



The Gamer today

All ages, genders, ethnicities

Internet Savvy

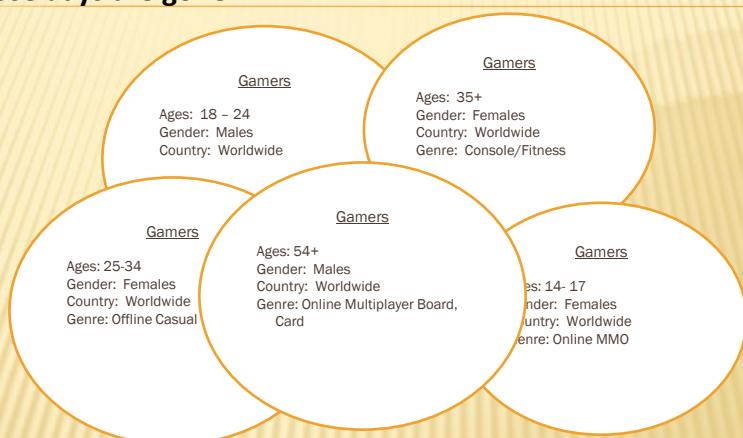
There are games now for pretty much every age, every demographic. More and more women are going online. It comes down to everybody is playing games. Games are just evolving like species in order to fit into every little niche of our lives."

— Jesse Schell, instructor of entertainment technology at Carnegie Mellon University

INFO6005

GENDER ISSUES IN GAMES

Those days are gone



- Gamers**
Ages: 18 - 24
Gender: Males
Country: Worldwide
- Gamers**
Ages: 35+
Gender: Females
Country: Worldwide
Genre: Console/Fitness
- Gamers**
Ages: 25-34
Gender: Females
Country: Worldwide
Genre: Offline Casual
- Gamers**
Ages: 54+
Gender: Males
Country: Worldwide
Genre: Online Multiplayer Board, Card
- Gamers**
Ages: 14- 17
Gender: Females
Country: Worldwide
Genre: Online MMO

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

But unless your game is targeted at that specific type of gamer..

INFO6005

So, what?

GENDER ISSUES IN GAMES

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

INFO6005

An example of a Gadget Girl

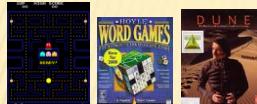
GENDER ISSUES IN GAMES



INFO6005

GENDER ISSUES IN GAMES

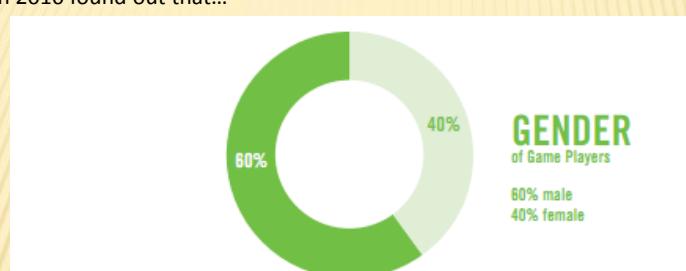
Gadget Girl play games too...

<p>1990s</p> <p>Dune Pacman Word games</p> 	<p>2010</p> <p>Wii Sports 3D City Building Online games Mobile games</p> 
	
<p>2000</p> <p>The Sims SimCity City Building Games Word Games</p> 	

INFO6005

GENDER ISSUES IN GAMES

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



GENDER of Game Players

60% male
40% female

WOMEN age 18 or older represent a significantly greater portion of the game-playing population (33%) than boys age 17 or younger (20%).

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.

INFO6005

GENDER ISSUES IN GAMES

**How do we design for this
market segment?
(Just let me play the game already...)**

INFO6005

GENDER ISSUES IN GAMES



If only there exists just plain gender-unidentified Sack...

INFO6005
GENDER ISSUES IN GAMES



**But gamers are not plain gender-unidentified...
not even in Sack planet**

INFO6005
GENDER ISSUES IN GAMES

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

"I'll just jump right in and see what works!"

"Manual? What manual?!?"





"Hmmm... wonders how this work?"

"Is there a tutorial somewhere?"

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Risk-takers • Exploratory or 'trial & error' attitude 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Want to know how it works first • Model/imitate after
--	--

What research says about ... types of action?

INFO6005 GENDER ISSUES IN GAMES



"I'll send a raiding party and sabotage their supplies"

"I'll fight you to the death or until I lose a toe!"

"I'll exchange your onions for chicken"

"I am sending you this rare rainbow tiger for your menagerie"

- Direct and sometimes aggressive/violent action during competition & conflict resolution
- Diplomacy & negotiations during competition& conflict resolution

What research says about ... failure/error?

INFO6005 GENDER ISSUES IN GAMES



"Kill! Kill! Die! Die! You minions."

"There goes my left hand!"

"Thank you time rewind"

"I can replay my game anytime without restarting"

- Violent or 'death' punishment for error
- Need a forgiving gameplay

What research says about ... challenges?

INFO6005 GENDER ISSUES IN GAMES

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

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



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

What research says about ... communication style?

INFO6005 GENDER ISSUES IN GAMES

"Look at how that head roll off!"

"%@&"\$&*!!!"*

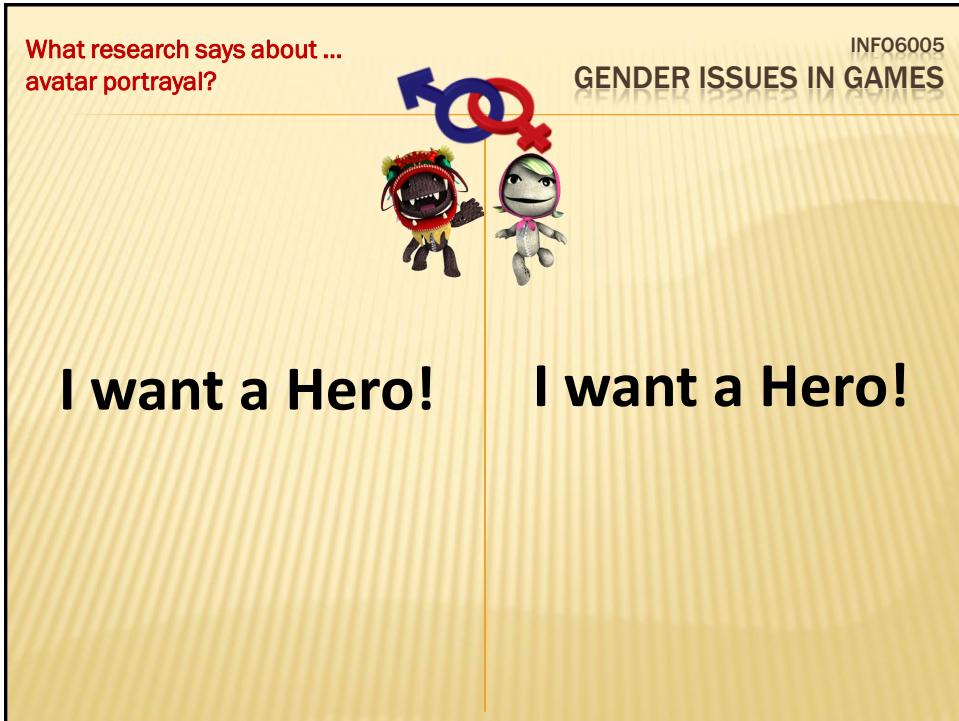
"I like a positive tone please"



- Rough language
- Attempt to dominate through "put downs"
- Use sexual humor
- 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?

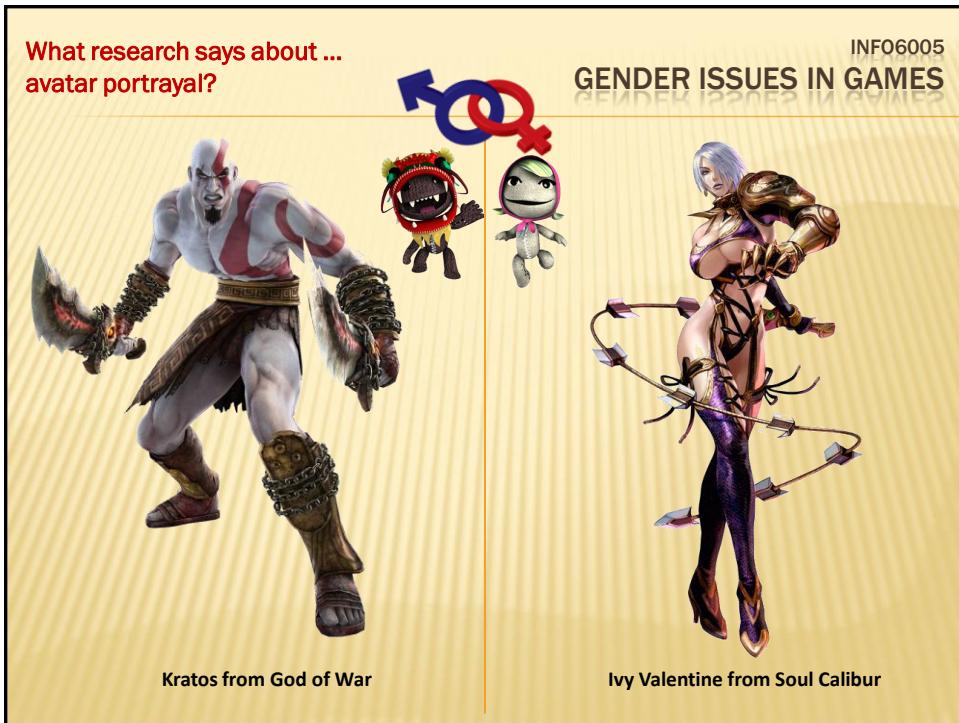
INFO6005
GENDER ISSUES IN GAMES



I want a Hero! I want a Hero!

What research says about ...
avatar portrayal?

INFO6005
GENDER ISSUES IN GAMES



Kratos from God of War Ivy Valentine from Soul Calibur

What research says about ...
violent action?

INFO6005

GENDER ISSUES IN GAMES

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?

INFO6005
GENDER ISSUES IN GAMES

Gender Inclusive Game Design



INFO6005

GENDER ISSUES IN GAMES

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

INFO6005

GENDER ISSUES IN GAMES

How to start?

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

INFO6005

GENDER ISSUES IN GAMES

Learn more:

Kafai, Y., Heeter, C., Denner, J. & Sun, J. (2008) Beyond Barbie and Mortal Kombat: New Perspectives on Gender and Gaming, MIT Press.

Ray, S.G., (2003) Gender Inclusive Game Design: Expanding the Market , Charles River Media

Cassell, J. (2000) From Barbie to Mortal Kombat: Gender and Computer Games, MIT Press.

Essential Facts about the Computer & Video Game Industry by Entertainment Software Association (ESA)
http://www.theesa.com/facts/pdfs/ESA_Essential_Facts_2010.PDF

Video Games in the 21st Century: The 2010 Report
http://www.theesa.com/facts/pdfs/VideoGames21stCentury_2010.pdf

Video gaming attracts larger female audience in 2009
http://www.npd.com/press/releases/press_090629b.html

Game Industry Revenue Expected To Double By 2011
http://www.gamasutra.com/php-bin/news_index.php?story=8205

Future watch: Will the flourishing trend of female-friendly products continue into the next few years?
<http://blog.euromonitor.com/2010/04/future-watch-will-the-flourishing-trend-of-femalefriendly-products-continue-into-the-next-few-years.html>

Increasing Numbers of Women Playing Video Games
http://wiki.media-culture.org.au/index.php/Computer_Games_-_Women_Gamers

INFO6005

GENDER ISSUES IN GAMES

Works related to this topic:

Ibrahim, R., Wills, G. and Gilbert, L. (2010) deGendering Games: Towards A Gender-Inclusive Framework For Games. In: *IADIS International Conference: Games and Entertainment Technologies part of the IADIS Multiconference on Computer Science & Information Systems (MCCSIS 2010)*, July 26th – 28th, 2010, Freiburg, Germany,pp. 127-130.

Ibrahim, R., Wills, G. and Gilbert, L. (2010) A Conceptual Framework for Supporting Gender-Inclusivity in Games. Poster presented at the *Interactive Technologies and Games: Education, Health and Disability Conference*. October 26th – 27th, 2010. Nottingham, United Kingdom.

MORE INFORMATION:

ROZIANA IBRAHIM
LEARNING SOCIETIES LAB
ri07r@ecs.soton.ac.uk
<http://zia-ibrahim.webs.com/>
<http://www.ecs.soton.ac.uk/people/ri07r>