

ABSTRACT

Do Modern Video Games Impact the Cultural Perceptions and Acceptance of Racial Stereotypes? A Qualitative Assessment of Video Game Usage

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Historically, popular culture has been known to serve as a tool to transmit values, norms, and stereotypes from generation to generation. The technology trend that is indicative of the “information age” has created numerous methods to communicate popular culture through television, movies, the Internet, and video games.

Since millions of Americans are playing video games today, social scientists, political entities, and advocate groups like Children Now have voiced concerns regarding the stereotypical characters used in video games. Top selling titles such as Grand Theft Auto are composed of violence, pornography, foul language, and many racial overtones associated with how characters dress, speak, and interact. Games like Grand Theft Auto have generated a growing number of content analyses to evaluate the exact nature and number of stereotypes present in modern day video games.

Do Modern Video Games Impact the Cultural Perceptions and Acceptance of Racial
Stereotypes? A Qualitative Assessment of Video Game Usage

by

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A Dissertation

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Submitted to the Graduate Faculty of
Baylor University in Partial Fulfillment of the
Requirements for the Degree
of
Doctor of Philosophy

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August 2007

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This research study went beyond the content and directly addressed the concerns of how people perceive and accept stereotypes portrayed in video games. In order to evaluate perceptions, a theoretical framework based on Social Learning Theory was used to conduct a qualitative assessment to determine how a person's level of video game usage, stereotype awareness, stereotype perception and impact, and personal experiences with stereotypes may influence their social learning process.

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ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

During my senior year, I was a research assistant for the Center for Community Research and Development at Baylor University in the spring of 2000. I had the privilege of working on a project known as CBIRD or Cross Border Institute for Regional Development with Dr. Corey Carbonara and Dr. Larry Lyon. Dr. Carbonara and the CBIRD project inspired my love for what I call Sociology of Technology. Dr. Tillman Rodabough provided guidance during my graduate studies at Baylor. He has always provided support and advice to inspire me to do my best. Dr. Carson Mencken patiently served as my dissertation chairperson. His support and guidance during this task has been greatly appreciated. Lastly, I would like to thank the people at the Center for Community Research and Development for allowing me to use their facility to conduct focus groups.

DEDICATION

To Dr. Tillman Rodabough:

Thank you for inspiring me to dream and achieve. I finish this final academic work in your honor. Without your support, I would not be here. I can only hope you realize how many lives you inspired as a teacher and a friend. I thank you.

To Dr. J. Larry Lyon:

You are a brilliant man. It has been a privilege to learn and be inspired by you. Thank you for believing in me. Your presence has always brought me to a higher level of perfection. I know if you like it....it's good!

To Dr. Corey Carbonara:

Once CBIRD came into my life, I have known a passion for Sociology of Technology. Thank you for stepping outside the box and bringing all disciplines together. Success is truly about networking all resources. I admire your constant desire to learn and explore. It has truly been a pleasure and inspiration to work with you.

To My Husband:

It seems like it took a lifetime to find you, but I know you have always been with me in my heart. You are my soul mate and the love that inspires me everyday. Thank you for supporting me during this whole process. I will graduate with a smile on my face because for the first time in my life I feel academic, business, and personal success all at once. And WOW, I get to share it all with you forever.

CHAPTER ONE

Statement of the Problem

In 2004, Americans spent more than \$9.9 billion on video games, consoles, and other software accessories (N.P.D. Group, 2005). The high profile video game industry has experienced much scrutiny based on the controversial behavior, language and character portrayal found in some of the top selling video games such as “Grand Theft Auto: San Andreas.” The fifth in a series of games grossing over \$30 million since 1998, Grand Theft Auto is composed of violence, pornography, foul language, and many racial overtones (Marriott, 2004). Lobbyist groups and politicians like Senator Hillary Clinton have brought “GTA” and other games like “Narc” that demonstrate taking drugs or “25 to Life” an urban cops and robbers game, under fire due to their controversial nature (The Economist, 2005). Other popular sellers include sport games like “Madden Football” and “Need for Speed: Most Wanted” which may not contain the same violence as “GTA”, but portray characters with very stereotypically defined racial mannerisms based on speech, attire, body structure, and character role. These and other similar video games generate a growing concern because the medium immerses the user into the content (Leonard, 2002). This method may inadvertently teach stereotypes to

video game users or perpetuate the current cycle of racial stereotypes within our culture.

Popular culture integrates stereotypical thoughts and ideas into our value structure. Each generation passes on beliefs, values, norms, objects, structures and much more to each subsequent generation. Included among those ideas would be how we process and use information about people based on race and gender. Popular culture has used many methods to deliver this information through comics, radio, television, movies, and video games (Browne, 1983). For example, research in the 1970s revealed gender stereotypes in commercials on television to be prevalent. Men were generally shown in occupational roles while women portrayed domestic roles such as homemakers, spouses, or parents (McArthur & Eisen, 1976). In addition, television programs in the 1990s like “King of the Hill” and “South Park” have been notorious for communicating positive and negative values or stereotypes to children as examples of real life (Graves, 1999).

Similar to television, video games have invaded most households, intrigued people of all ages, and developed numerous genres of play to entertain all users. In 1991, there were 32 million households with video game consoles. By 2000, there were 49 million homes with consoles. Access to video games through consoles or the Internet totaled 65 million homes by the year 2000 (Fairfield Research, 2000). In a consumer survey

conducted in 2006 by the Entertainment Software Association, 1700 households were polled to identify the current state of video game usage. In figure 1.1, nearly half of all game players are between the ages of 18 to 49, while 31% were under 18 and 25% over the age of 50. The average gamer is 33 and has played approximately for twelve years. Among all ages, frequent gamers have played an average of ten years for males and eight years for females. The gamers spend an average of 6.8 hours per week playing video games.

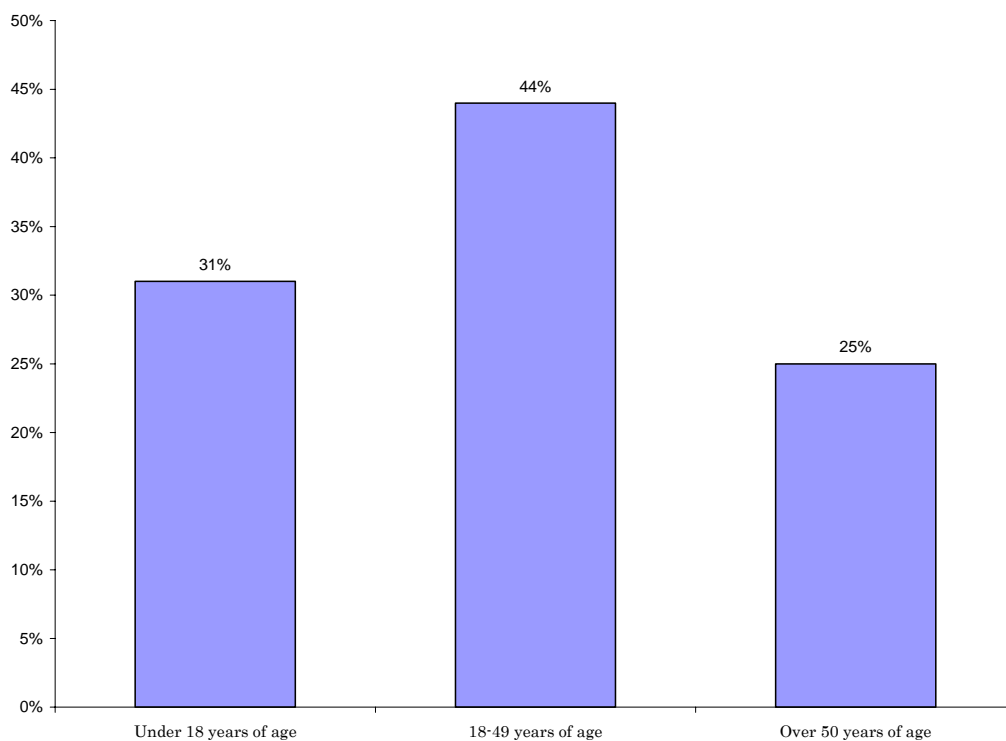


Figure 1.1. Age Distribution of People Who Play Video Games

In point-of-sale information tabulated by the N.P.D. Group in 2006, figure 1.2 shows purchasers of computer games were most likely to buy

strategy, family, shooter, and role playing games while purchasers of console video games bought action, sports, racing, and family games. In

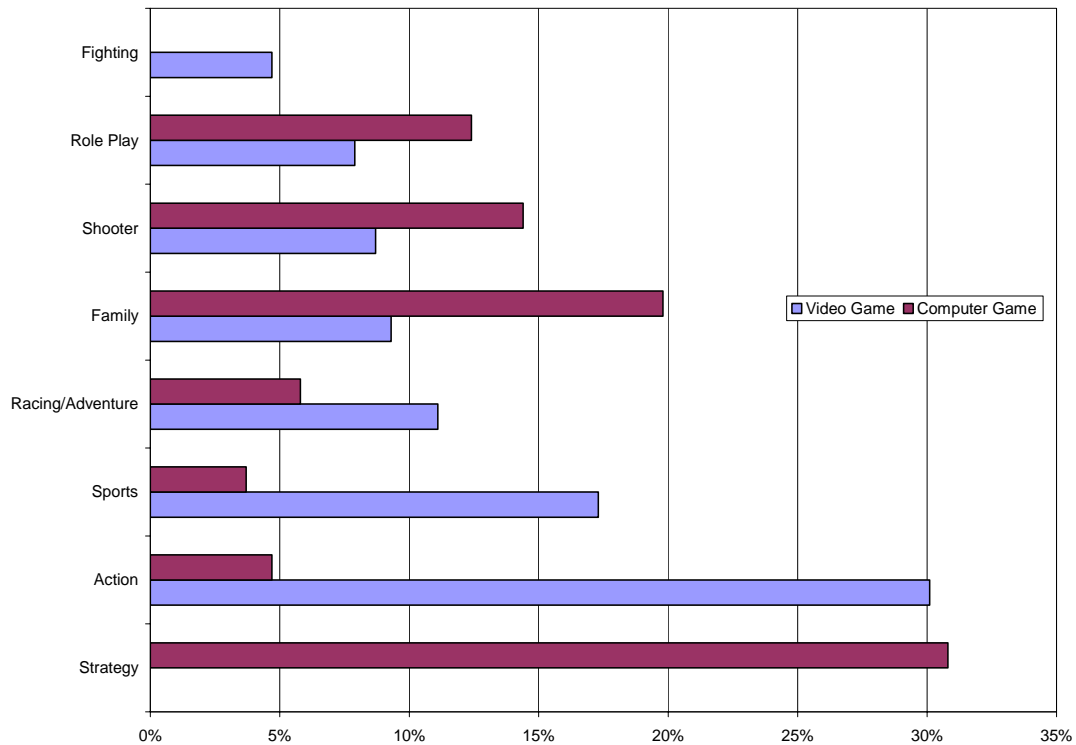


Figure 1.2. Genres of Game Purchases

Table 1.1 top selling game titles included sporting games like “Madden”, shooter games like “Grand Theft Auto: San Andreas”, and strategy games like “Socom 3: U.S. Navy Seals.” The most popular Internet video game title “World of Warcraft” is a game that divides people based on pre-designed races that fight and kill each other.

Video games have permeated every aspect of society. Numerous game genres, whether violent, sport, or strategy, contain some racially motivated stereotype (Children Now, 2001). According to a preliminary

study conducted by the International Game Developer’s Association, 80% of game developers and programmers are white while the majority of

Table 1.1
Top Selling Video Games 2006

Rank	Title	Platform
1	Madden NFL '06	PS2
2	Gran Turismo 4	PS2
3	Madden nfl '06	Xbox
4	NCAA Football '06	PS2
5	Star Wars: Battlefront II	PS2
6	MVP Baseball 2005	PS2
7	SW Episode III: Sith	PS2
8	NBA Live '06	PS2
9	Lego Star Wars	PS2
10	Star Wars: Battlefront II	Xbox
11	WWE Smackdown! '06	PS2
12	God of War	PS2
13	Midnight Club 3: Dub	PS2
14	Star Wars: Battlefront	PS2
15	Need for Speed: Most Wanted	PS2
16	Socom 3: U.S. Navy Seals	PS2
17	Grand Theft Auto: San Andreas	PS2
18	Tony Hawk American Wasteland	PS2
19	Resident Evil 4	GCN
20	Call of Duty: Big Red One	PS2

game players are also white. Game development can be an expressive medium and some researchers feel the games are being developed based on biased ideas and thoughts of these predominantly white creators (MSNBC, 2005). For example, “Grand Theft Auto: San Andreas” is based on a black man named Carl Johnson. “CJ” is portrayed as a criminal who roams the streets stealing cars, shooting cops, assisting rival gang

members in murdering rivals, and pursuing prostitutes (Leonard, 2002). The characters of the game fit numerous cultural stereotypes such as the young black man wearing white tank tops and slouchy jeans or the clean cut white cops they pursue.

Ultimately, researchers fear the stereotypes may be more acceptable through this medium of entertainment since the foundation is fantasy and not reality. The video games allow enthusiasts to become other people while also learning or possibly reinforcing stereotypes (Leonard, 2002). This research will seek to determine whether video games enhance cultural stereotypes or if people are complacent to the media images.

Therefore this study intends to assess the impact of video game media and the cultural stereotypes embedded within their plots and characters. The theoretical review of literature will encompass the definition and origin of stereotypes, the framework of social learning theory, an assessment of popular culture and the relationship to human behavior, and an evaluation of previous and current media research and its impact on human perception and interaction.

The study will directly focus on how we learn through observation and influence of our social environment when it is enhanced by the popular media of video games. This exploration will attempt to examine:

1. level of gaming usage,
2. types of video games familiar to the respondent,
3. recognition of video game character stereotypes,
4. stereotype sensitivity per respondent.

Based on these probes, the following research objectives will be investigated:

1. Does a person's awareness of stereotypes in video games increase or decrease based on frequency and type of interaction?
2. Is a "gamer" more likely to use stereotypes as heuristic cues to facilitate game play?
3. How do people perceive stereotypes in video games and what impact do they have on society?
4. Does a person's stereotype awareness become heightened if they personally experience stereotypes?

These research objectives will guide an exploratory study in which the research will address whether or not video game images do impact the cultural perceptions and acceptance of racial stereotypes. Furthermore, it will consider the influence of gaming frequency, age, and personal stereotype evaluations on their perceptions. Data will be collected in a qualitative assessment of individuals who play video games and individuals who do not play. The data collection will be conducted and analyzed by Lacey Chapman Gillentine.

CHAPTER TWO

Theoretical Orientation

Introduction

This research examines the impact of video games on human perception and stereotype development. It will consider the definition and application of social learning theory and elements drawn from differential association theory and operant conditioning theory. Furthermore, the research will investigate the origin and use of stereotypes and evaluate the influence of popular culture as part of the social learning process. These three elements provide a framework to examine the social and behavioral environment sustained by a billion dollar gaming industry.

Social Learning Theory

Introduction

In the 1800s, a number of theorists contributed to the formulation of differential association theory and social learning theory. Their aim was to properly structure and detail the process of behavioral learning. Since that time, scholars like Albert Bandura, Ronald Akers, Robert Sears, and Julian Rotter have developed variations of Social Learning Theory linking it with elements of Sutherland's Differential Association Theory and Skinner's operant conditioning theory. They sought to explain how people learned from observed

behavior. Each theorist argues that people learn through interaction with their environment. An individual may observe a behavior. The observer may reproduce the behavior depending upon the amount of repetition or reinforcement (Akers 1998; Bandura 1977; Rotter 1954; Sears, 1951).

In order to completely explore social learning theory, this section will outline the work of Albert Bandura, Ronald Akers, and Neal Miller. In doing so, I will explain minor theoretical variations and also discuss application of the theory related to conforming or deviant behavior.

Social Learning: Albert Bandura

According to Albert Bandura, learning occurs in relation to social context: people learn from other people. Human learning results from a continuous interactive cycle between cognitive, behavioral, and environmental influences (Bandura, 1977). We will examine Bandura's Social Learning Theory of behavioral modeling on a four-tier model based on observation, retention, imitation and motivation.

Observation. First, people observe the behavior of others and the outcomes of those actions. The observation allows the individual to process the act or information and then develop a response to the stimulus. The individual may process observational information through physical demonstration, pictorial display, or verbal description. People do not necessarily learn better by having positive or negative reinforcement, rather

it is the combination of environmental factors such as socialization and personality development that may encourage or discourage the reproduction of the observed behavior (Bandura, 1963; Parke, 1972)).

Bandura believed behavior, or more specifically aggressive behavior, is reinforced primarily by parents and the mass media. Parents are the initial source from whom children acquire values, norms, and an overall sense of self (Schaffer, 2006). Moreover, the mass media represents an increasingly important agent of socialization. There is a long history of criticism of the media involving pictorial observation from television and its influence on aggressive behavior (Bandura, 1986).

Despite the origin, the initial observation provides the key stimulation for social learning to occur. The majority of social learning occurs in casual or everyday situations that involve the individual (Bandura, 1977). This process of observation then leads to the next step of information retention.

Retention. In order for social learning to occur, the individual must be able to remember the observed behavior for the process to continue without the original source of the action to guide them. Through interaction, the person observes the action or idea and reconstructs the event based on the received verbal or pictorial sensory stimulation (Bandura, 1977; 1972). Repeated exposure facilitates the recall of such information for later use and interpretation. More importantly, the human brain codes information and enables recall through heuristic images (Geary, 2005). The coded images, or

heuristics, provide people a mental shortcut to allow the individual to process the information quicker (Bandura, 1972). This information retention allows the observer to put the observation into motor reproduction. The process invites the potential for stereotypical values and perspectives about the world to be stored and recalled in later instances when the same stimulus is encountered (Gee, 2003).

Imitation. The imitation stage occurs when the observer processes the new information and then repeats the behavior. Imitation allows the acquisition of conforming tendencies as well the cultural transmission of socialization. Imitation has been linked to gender specific duties where children observe their parents active in certain household roles and then assume the same positions as adults. Young girls who watched their mothers sweep or clean were inclined to pick up similar habits and tendencies (Nash, 1958). In more recent studies, social researchers have linked media violence to aggressive tendencies in children. After viewing violent content on television or in cartoons, children would actively imitate the aggressive movements (Huesmann, 1986)

The reproduction of the behavior is also influenced by a person's cognitive level and his/her physical ability to carry out the imitation. Often the individual will repeat the behavior while actively making corrective adjustments and may also engage in preliminary efforts to complete the task. The initial phases of imitation may involve the person mentally completing

the task before actually proceeding with imitation (Bandura, 1977; 1972).

Thereafter, repeated attempts are reinforced by observed consequences to that behavior. People tend to imitate learned behavior if there is a perceived personal reward for the behavior rather than a negative outcome (Hicks, 1971).

Motivation. Maintenance of social learning through imitation relies primarily on reinforcement. The observed behavior is retained and repeated more often if the observed model receives positive results from the performed task. As indicated later in the infamous Bobo doll research, the model beats and aggressively interacts with a plastic clown doll and is rewarded for the aggressive behavior (Bandura, 1977 & Hicks, 1971). 88% of the study participants later imitated the behavior because they observed positive reinforcement associated with the aggressive actions (Bandura, 1973; 1972).

Bobo Doll Research. Bandura conducted a widely cited study called the Bobo doll experiment. Within this research, he evaluated the four social learning steps outlined in his theory framework: observation, retention, imitation, and motivation. The assessment was used to evaluate the patterns of learning aggressive behavior in children.

During the experiment, Bandura first had the children watch an adult on video violently attack a plastic clown with a hammer, kick the clown with their feet, punch with their hands, and even throw the plastic doll across the

room. The adult pictured in the video also received praise for the aggressive action against the doll. The children were then placed in a room with a variety of popular toys for their entertainment. The children appeared too disturbed to play with the toys which indicated they had retained the observed behavior. The children manifested obvious signs of anger and discontent. Then the children were moved to a room with a plastic clown doll similar to the one observed on video. The room also contained similar tools used to attack the doll in the video. 88% of the children began to imitate the action and abuse the plastic doll in a manner similar to what they witnessed on the video (Bandura, 1973). This research has been a catalyst for individuals who support the notion of the ill effects of media on children and aggressive behavior.

Social Learning: Ronald Akers

Akers' brand of Social Learning Theory is rooted in Sutherland's Differential Association Theory of criminal behavior integrated with normal social behavior patterns (Akers, 1998; 1979). According to Akers (1998), "Deviant and criminal behavior is learned and modified (acquired, performed, repeated, maintained, and changed) through all of the same cognitive and behavioral mechanisms as conforming behavior." He considers four structural parameters for social learning to occur. First, people tend to associate with others who engage in similar beliefs, values, and behaviors. Second, learning involves the application of negative or positive

reinforcement. Individuals tend to associate with people who reward their behavior. Third, a person is more likely to repeat a behavior if it is rewarded in a positive manner. Lastly, an individual cognitively learns to define which behaviors are rewarded as positive and will re-define the act as a norm of behavior (Akers, 1973).

This research will evaluate the following categories: association, reinforcement, repetition, and norm modification of social learning theory. Akers does focus largely on the application of social learning theory to the nature and development of deviant behavior. We will consider his research based on the broad sense of social learning rather than the tendency towards deviance.

Association. During the stage of observation, the individual is susceptible to their social environment. Human beings naturally tend to associate with other people of similar interest and behavior patterns. Consequently, peer associations influence the examples, definitions, and the reward or punishments interpreted by the observer before conforming to a behavior. Learning becomes facilitated by an environment consisting of primary socialization, allowing the behavior to be processed and reinforced faster when the perceived effects are also supported by group pressure. Therefore social learning is supported by the type of association the person has at the time of observation (Akers, 1998; 1979; 1973)

Reinforcement. A person will engage in an observed behavior based on an actual or perceived reward. The individual will evaluate each learning observation based on past and current experiences. They will then decipher the reinforcing factors which will then encourage or discourage the conforming or non-conforming behavior. An observer will be more likely to imitate the behavior if there is a positive reward or perception of reward associated with the behavior. Additionally, instances of repetition will also encourage the imitation of the action performed (Akers, 1998; 1979; 1973).

Repetition. As an action receives positive reinforcement, the individual will be more likely to repeat the behavior in the future. According to Akers (1998), “A person will conform or commit deviant behavior if they have received in the past and anticipate in the current or future situation a relatively greater reward than punishment for the behavior.” Consequently, once a person has engaged in a certain activity, the behavior will be repeated if the necessary stimulation of peer association and influence accompanied by desired reward remains intact.

Norm Modification. After a behavior has been learned through association with a person’s social environment, reinforced by positive verbal, physical, or mental rewards, and then continuously repeated, the act becomes consistent with how the person defines a norm of behavior. The person develops his/her own set of social definitions about the activity to justify the

action, considering it a form of normative behavior rather than an act of deviance. The modification allows the activity to become an element of the person's social orientation and a consistent part of their belief and value structure (Akers, 1998; 1979; 1973).

Research. In order to illustrate the application of Akers' social learning theory, he and other social scientists conducted research known as the Boys Town Study in the late 1970s. The researchers explored the use of drugs and alcohol among adolescents in grades 7 through 12 located in the Midwest. They considered drug use based on the influence of association, reinforcement, repetition, and norm modification.

A self-report questionnaire survey was administered to a spectrum of adolescents, measuring whether they abstained from drug use, were moderate drug users, or were serious substance abusers. A sample consisting of 3067 surveys was collected. The instrument requested feedback on observation of drug use, an evaluation of norm qualities based on peer or family influence, frequency of drug use among respondent's peer group, personal feelings toward the drug use, actual or perceived reinforcement of drug use, and how frequently the respondent used drugs.

In summary, the research validated the social learning principles. Respondents modeled attitudes and behaviors congruent with primary reference groups which included peers and family members. They were more likely to start or continue using drugs if they were associating with other

drug users in their social environment. Additionally, the frequency of use would increase once the perceived drug effects appeared to be a reward for the behavior. For extreme users, the behavior had become re-defined as normative rather than deviant.

Social Learning: Neal Miller and John Dollard

Drawn from Differential Association Theory, Miller and Dollard affirmed human behavior is a learning process. However, their view of social learning theory varies from Bandura and Akers by incorporating the influence of drive to engage in a behavior and the necessary cues to stimulate the initiation. Furthermore, they also include the necessary existence of reward to reinforce the behavior. In summary, Miller and Dollard state:

The drive impels responses, which are usually also determined by cues from other stimuli not strong enough to act as drives but more specifically distinctive than the drive. If the first response is not rewarded by an event reducing the drive, this response tends to drop out and others to appear. The extinction of successive non-rewarded responses produces so-called random behavior. If some one response is followed by reward, the connection between the cue and this response is strengthened, so that the next time the same drive and other cues are present, this response is more likely to occur (1941, p. 17).

Drive and Response. The drive is a very strong stimulus which causes a person to react or exhibit a certain behavior; the stronger the stimulus, the more likely a response. Motivation or drive can be derived from a variety of sources such as pain, social inhibitions, fear, anxiety, and approval. Each of these stimuli develops into perceived social needs. The pain of thirst and the

need to drink, the desire of sex before marriage and cohabitation, fear of not having success and pursuing education, and approval of social primary groups and the need to conform. All of the drives create motivation and reason for action (Miller & Dollard, 1941).

Cues and Reward. A person who has motivation will proceed based on the received cue. Cues will vary in intensity and source which will inevitably determine if the action will occur. Response will depend on three aspects: acknowledgement, strength, and repetition. If the respondent does not notice the cue, it is unlikely to have an impact. However, once the cue has been observed, the strength and frequency will determine a response.

Additionally, the behavior will be repeated if the action receives positive reward. If a behavior achieves relief for pain, food for hunger, or money from hard work, the repetition of the behavior will re-occur based on the same initial cues (Miller & Dollard, 1941).

Research. Miller and Dollard conducted an experiment evaluating forty-two first grade children. Half of the group was placed in an “imitation” group and the other half in the “non-imitation” group. Two boxes were placed on chairs in a room ten feet apart. The contents of the boxes were not visible to children who waited at a chalk line drawn ten feet away. The leader for the “imitation” group was chosen and trained to always go to an assigned box which contained the candy when entering the room. The leader would take

his turn and open the box and find a gumdrop treat hidden inside.

Regardless of which box selected, the leader of the “imitation” group always chose the right box according to the design of the experiment to create a cue. For the “non-imitation” group, the leader was not given a cue as to which box was correct. Selection of boxes with treats was always random and not guaranteed for the leader of the “non-imitation” group. The children went through two trials of box selection. The first group saw their leader always select the box which contained the treat and the second group did not formulate the same pattern. Therefore, when the children participated in a second set of trials, the “imitation” group was 100% successful in always locating the treat by imitating the selection of their group leader. The “non-imitation” group did not improve because the selection was always random and no imitation was cued.

These results demonstrated how children were motivated to open the box to see what was inside, learned to respond to cues or imitation in order to select the right box, and were continually reinforced by candy treats. This simple design illustrates the notion of drive, cues, and positive reinforcement. The children of the “imitation” group learned to pick the desirable box to receive the candy reward (Miller & Dollard, 1941).

Theory Application

As I reviewed classic Bandura, Miller and Dollard, and the modern ideas of Akers, it became clear that can inform my study with these key

learning steps: observation, repetition, perception, retention, and future usage. First, learning from our social environment does occur through association, observation of other's behavior, and cues to drive the behavior. Secondly, the behavior must be reinforced if there is to be any repetition of the action in the future. Third, consistent repetition of the action is facilitated by positive reward. Fourth, the behavior becomes redefined as a norm within the person's value structure. Lastly, the person then retains the information and chooses to utilize it within future social interaction.

These commonalities guide the direction of the dissertation research outlined in Chapter Four. If a person learns by observation, then current research should evaluate modes of behavior that may be impacted by modern media resources available in many family homes. Ideas and actions have historically been represented in a variety of technological ways such as television, movies, internet, and now video games. Technology represents a growing part of our culture and it should be considered as a tool to transmit values, ideas, and potentially stereotypes as part of the social learning process.

Therefore, the scope of this research will involve the theoretical framework of social learning theory. Specifically, it will consider these elements: observation, repetition, perception, retention, and usage.

CHAPTER THREE

Literature Review

Introduction

Since the introduction of the first true video game “Tennis for Two” in 1958, the industry has grown substantially to accommodate nearly a 10 billion dollar industry obsession (N.P.D. Group, 2005). Approximately 92% of children ages two through seventeen currently play video games or computer games and more than half the American population plays some form of a video game (Walsh, Gentile, VanOverbeke, 2002 & The Economist, 2005). These numbers illustrate how the technology has saturated society and become embedded within our culture.

Over the past thirty years, video game technology has quickly developed and changed numerous dimensions of game design, animation, theme, characters, movements, and player involvement. Some of the key developments for this research involve the transition of faceless characters to very racially defined and often stereotyped personalities (Marriott, 1999). Therefore, it raises the question of how significantly these images impact society.

Culture is transmitted from generation to generation and technology plays an important role in this process. Consequently, this research review

will examine the nature and definition of popular culture and stereotypes as well as the development and research of video games. It will attempt to explain how the development of video game technology has become a core element of our popular culture and could facilitate the transmission of racial stereotypes through repetitive player interaction.

Popular Culture

Definition

As defined in “The Popular Culture Reader” by Ray Browne (1983):

Popular culture, in its simplest definition, is the way of life we inherit from the generations before us, use ourselves, and pass on to our followers. It is our attitudes, habits and actions: how we act and why we act the way we do; what we eat, wear; our buildings, roads, and means of travel; our entertainment, sports; our politics, religion, medical practices; our beliefs and activities and what shapes and controls them. It is, in other words, the world we live in.

Popular culture can be divided into four main dimensions: popular mythologies, popular objects and images, popular arts, and popular events. First, popular mythologies are elements found within the human mind such as popular beliefs, values, superstitions, and movements of thought. Popular mythologies include the notion of racial and ethnic superiority and are communicated within the second dimension of popular culture, objects and images of people. The artifacts of life that surround us everyday like homes, clothes, celebrities, villains, and heroes influence, reinforce, or destroy our perceptions of people or groups of people. The images are then reproduced within books, comics, television, movies, and most recently, video games.

According to Albert Bandura, people use these symbols to represent events or ideas that influence their behavior (Bandura, 1977). Third, popular arts reveal the promotion of images, products, and stereotypes through mass media communication. Theater, music, newspapers, movies, television, comics, and video games present a stage to market movements of. Lastly, popular events or rituals enable the participation in the reinforcement of ideas (Geist, 1983).

Societal Application

Popular culture permeates society through the many available forms of entertainment. By the 1980s, there were more radio and televisions than people in the United States (Geist & Nachbar, 1983). Research on television commercials and television shows indicate a strong influence on young people (Media Report to Women, 1995; McArthur & Eisen, 1976). The impact of television was researched in a survey from 1995 that reveals 77% of the subjects witnessed sex outside of marriage and perceive it as okay. Additionally, more than half of the teenage respondents did not believe television exhibited stereotypes which directly contradict numerous pieces of research that show the presence of racial and gender stereotypes. Overall, the researchers concluded that television does significantly shape their values which is a direct example of our popular culture serving as a tool to transmit ideas and values to the current generation (Media Report to Women, 1995).

In 1977, Atari introduced the first home video game which ultimately created the interactivity component between popular culture and stereotypes (Bloom, 1982; Kent, 2001). Researchers remain concerned with the interactive nature of video games and how this form of popular culture may influence or reinforce racial stereotypes (Children Now, 2001). Video games offer a fourth stage element that allows the user to become another person or character which may allow the introduction of stereotypes because they help facilitate a plot or story.

Plot development, in television, movies, or video games, uses stereotypes to keep the action of the story flowing. Media users accept and process the stereotyped character faster allowing the story to create heroes and villains rather than wasting time on unnecessary descriptions (Hoppenstand, 1983). This social categorization is easier for people to recall than uniquely identifying each individual person. Therefore, media themes will develop a stereotype to facilitate a story while exaggerating and exploiting a few attributes of a given group and applies them to all members without distinction (Geist, 1983). This common practice to assist the storytelling portion of the game may inadvertently be helping to promote or reinforce negative stereotypes about certain people or groups of people.

Stereotypes

Definition

Stereotypical thoughts occur when the social categorization of people, or a particular race of individuals, are grouped based on similar physical traits and mannerisms (Hoppenstand, 1983). This arrangement of human characteristics is a necessary function because people simply do not have the capacity to respond to each stimulus separately and uniquely (Brown, 1995; Lester, 1996). Therefore, it is human nature to share these common classifications of people and it can become destructive depending upon how the stereotype is perceived and applied in reality (Geist, 1983; Lester, 1996). Paul Lester further explains in “Images that Injure”:

Stereotyping converts real persons into artificial persons. In our stereotypical acts, we ignore the individuality of people and treat them as proxies for some group we have decided they should represent. We stop treating them as real persons in their own right and treat them instead as artificial persons, which means as extensions of a category we have constructed (1996, p. 10).

Stereotypes originate from two main sources. First, stereotypical notions are embedded within our culture and passed down through each subsequent generation. Culture influences an individual through the socialization of common beliefs, values, and societal norms transmitted through institutions such as the family, the church, the school, or the media. Secondly, the stereotypical thought may have some degree of truth in reality. A group may possess some part of the over generalized characteristic which lead to the original implementation of the stereotype (Allport, 1954; Brewer

and Campbell, 1976; Enteman, 1996). For example, the early newspaper *New York Herald* referred to black Americans as “wooly-headed and thick-lipped” in order to distinguish them separately from the dominant population by over-emphasizing physical characteristics (Kluger, 1986). Once the stereotype develops, it exaggerates and exploits one or two attributes of a given group or class of people and applies it to all members without distinction (Geist, 1983).

Historical Context

The notion of cultural and racial superiority has guided many forms of intergroup relations, such as internal colonialism, the exploitation of a subordinate group by a dominant group, segregation, and even genocide. Unfortunately, this historical ideology has flourished in places like colonial America where colonists searching for political independence from Britain failed to relinquish the idea of superiority and pursued authority by dominance (Rhodes, 1995). America inherited the very same popular culture of its ancestors and used it as a powerful tool to reinforce stereotypes in order to preserve authority (Rhodes, 1995).

Modern Context

Stereotypes in today's world flourish in many contexts such as television, music, comics, movies, and video games. We internalize information from these media sources to ultimately shape our own personal

identities and build a sense of self (Kellner, 1995). Unlike movies or comics, video games create an additional dimension which concerns social scientists and media critics. The game allows the user to become a part of the design by assuming the identity of the main character and interacting with other personalities. The concern is generated by the noticeable presence of enhanced ethnic features and what impact it may have on the player (The Economist, 2005). Numerous studies have already been conducted in the past to confirm the presence of unconscious biases based on racial stereotypes (Wittenbrink, Judd, & Park, 2001). Currently, we need to consider the influence of seeing or becoming characters designed with over exaggerated ethnic and racial characteristics because approximately 80% of those who create the games are white and may be passing on their unconscious biases to all gamers (Leonard, 2003).

Video Game Development

Introduction

In the 1970s, a merger of computers and television produced a new revolution in personal entertainment (Demaria & Wilson, 2002; William, 2002). Video game technology was sweeping the market. From 1975 to 1976, industry leaders saw sales increase ten times the previous year, and the market flooded with games of all types (Buckwalter, 1977). During the past 30 years, the video game industry has grown rapidly from arcade games to

console or personal computer games and simplistic genres to far more intricate storylines (Demaria & Wilson, 2002). This timeline offers a unique historical development of how video games were born and how they have evolved to contain stereotypical images.

1960 to 1970s

Video games became notable in the 1970s (Provenzo, 1991 & Walsh, 1998) while the development of the technology began much earlier (Buckwalter, 1977). Willy Higginbotham, a physicist who designed electronic circuits, developed the first electronic game in 1958 called “Tennis for Two” on his lab’s oscilloscope. The game was intended to entertain visitors touring the lab. However, Higginbotham opted to not follow any patent ideas on the table tennis game eerily similar to “Pong”, a game developed ten years later. In 1961, Steve Russell and other designers created “Spacewar”, the first video game, in order to demonstrate the abilities of a computer at MIT. The game spread to other college campuses igniting a video game revolution.

“Spacewar” consisted of a plain background and two ships that could fire torpedoes at each other. One ship was shaped like a wedge and one like a needle. If a ship was destroyed, it disappeared with no noise or particle explosion to simulate the loss. After the introduction of “Spacewar” by Russell in the 1960s, game development exploded. Numerous programmers and designers worked from the same platform and created new

characteristics for “Spacewar” and it spread into coin-operated games in the 1970s (Demaria & Wilson, 2002).

Atari introduced the electronic table tennis or “Pong” in 1972 while a home version was created to get the games into the households of the consumers (William, 2002). During the 1970s, Atari, Magnavox, RCA, Midway and numerous other companies were developing games for the arcade industry and beginning to market console units as well as creating the games built into the home systems and then as individual gaming cartridges allowing the gamer to play multiple games at home (Provenzo, 1991). “Asteroids”, “Space Invaders”, “Battlezone”, “Galaga”, and “Donkey Kong” were the top manufactured games of the era (Demaria & Wilson, 2002). All of the games possessed simple plots and designs. The strategy games led gamers to a world of defeating aliens, flying spaceships, avoiding asteroids, driving race cars, and deflecting a ball across a screen. As noted in “The Second Self” by Sherry Turkle:

When you play a video game you enter into the world of the programmers who made it. You have to do more than identify with a character on the screen. You must act for it. Identification through action has a special kind of hold. Like playing a sport, it puts people into a focused and highly charged state of mind. For many people, what is being pursued in the video game is not just a score, but an altered state (1984, p. 83).

Companies such as Atari and Midway produced games in the 1970s without the use of human-like victims or characters. The game designs depicted mythical characters such as ghostly aliens in “Space Invaders” or an

inanimate object such as the rocket ship in “Asteroids.” In 1975, Midway ventured from the typical character designs and released “Taito’s Gun Fight” which contained two cowboy characters shooting guns at targets. However, the cowboys remained solid yellow and contained no identifying qualities. Later in 1976, Atari produced the “Death Race” arcade game where players could compete by running over zombie pedestrians. The plot was taken from the movie *Death Race 2000*. The game spawned controversy due to the character illustration and use of violence not found in earlier games. As a result, manufacturers focused on the same sport and strategy games, but also began to target primarily playing games in the home rather than at the arcade (Demaria & Wilson, 2002).

1980s

In the 1980s, home video game console units were flooding the market. Atari 2600 and Mattel’s Intellivision had caught the public’s attention. Graphics were improving and game production was in full effect. Additionally, designers and developers had begun creating games for personal home computers, a revolution important to video game success. This generation produced games such as “Pac-Man”, “Centipede”, “Donkey Kong”, “Frogger”, “Defender”, and many more future classics that hit arcades and home gaming units (Demaria & Wilson, 2002). The plots, themes, and characters of the new games were more complex, colorful, active, and entertaining. However, the main characters only possessed a few human-like

characteristics and centered more on the story of beating the game. For example, “Pac-Man” involved a yellow circle with an eye and a wedge shaped mouth that ate dots and avoided deadly ghosts. In another example, “Donkey Kong” contained a man as the main character who had to beat a monkey throwing barrels. Both characters were animated by blocks of color and did not express racial or gender qualities. The main character of Donkey Kong would later become the famous Mario of “Mario Bros” and would also acquire more distinguishable characteristics when gaming technology incorporated more unique animation (Foster, 2005).

As the 1980s progressed, ideas and technology began to change the face and appearance of video game characters. In 1983, Nintendo released the boxing style arcade game called “Punch Out.” Humans were the main characters, but had cartoon-like animation (Kent, 2001). Many of the boxing players or opponents were human yet with green hair and over-sized heads (Demaria & Wilson, 2002). During the latter part of the 1980s, game development started to transform the animated appearance of characters into more human-like features. This key decision in game design was enhanced by improving technology on the edge of 3D animation and other multimedia functions (Wikipedia, 2006).

In 1986, Capcom released the popular “Streetfighter” arcade game, Nintendo created “Mike Tyson’s Punch Out” in 1987, and Kaneko brought “DJ Boy” to America from Japan in 1989 (Kent, 2001; William, 2002;

Wikipedia, 2006). The characters of these games possessed qualities of specific races and oftentimes, distinct stereotypical exaggerations. For example, the main characters in “Streetfighter” showed visible features which could be easily identified as Caucasian. These characters were the heroes of the game battling monsters to the death (Demaria & Wilson, 2002). The fighters in “Mike Tyson’s Punch Out” still retained exaggerated physiques, but acquired names and features resembling individuals who were African-American, white American, Turkish, French, and even Egyptian. All of the hero characters in “DJ Boy” were white with Caucasian features who battled villains at the end of each level. However, the villains in most cases were black with a hint of “hip hop” or “ghetto” subculture tone (Wikipedia, 2006).

Many of the games released in this era set the foundation for characters with deeper identification to specific races and a multitude of stereotypical thoughts and beliefs. Critics would later see this transition as potentially harmful because of the widespread popularity of video game technology (Economist, 2005).

1990s

In the 1990s, video games evolved in design and character development in conjunction with the release of 16-bit consoles that replaced the older 8-bit versions. These consoles like the Super Nintendo and Sega Genesis could process more bits of information allowing more intricate

animation designs and themes (Wikipedia, 2006; Williams, 2002).

Companies such as Atari and Nintendo released new and improved versions of old favorites like “Pac-Man” and “Metroid.” The innovative “Pac-Mania” and “Super Metroid” brought the old game to a higher platform with obvious improvements in character capability and aesthetics.

Meanwhile, popular games like “Sonic the Hedgehog” by Sega, “Mortal Kombat” by Acclaim, and the personal computer game “Doom” by id Software were released. “Sonic” ignited a fierce battle with “Mario” during the release of Super Nintendo, “Mortal Kombat” stimulated censorship issues based on its gruesome fighting sequences, and “Doom” introduced a new genre, FPS or first-person shooter (Demaria & Wilson, 2002; Kent, 2002).

From 1993 to 1999, gaming soared with 64-bit technology, 3D animation, multi-player functionality, real-time capabilities, and every genre from first-person shooter games to role-playing and simulation. Ultimately, the release of consoles like Sony’s PlayStation and Nintendo 64 allowed the development of games like “Tomb Raider” by Eidos and “Grand Theft Auto” by Rockstar North. These games introduced characters with defined sexual and racial overtones. Lara Croft of “Tomb Raider” represented gender stereotypes for women because the character was a powerful woman with accentuated breasts and a small waste. The roles that females take in video games are usually captured girlfriends or princesses that need to be rescued. Females are also often portrayed as being sexy and seductive, irrelevant

characters, and are very rarely the main character. “Grand Theft Auto” opens the door with a series of video games utilizing violence, gangsters, and a variety of ethnic characteristics as the central framework (Demaria & Wilson 2002). These types of games create a picture for children of how these biases and stereotypes are an accepted part of culture and may be carried over into the real world (Sheff, 1994).

2000

By the 21st century, the video game industry was now a \$7.3 billion dollar market in 2004 and the game design had reached a new level of character development (ISDA, 2005). In 2001, the US organization Children Now conducted an analysis of the most popular games. The study found the majority of heroes were white males (86%) while non-white males were most often in stereotypical roles like bad guys or thieves. These results in combination with the International Game Developers’ Association study which indicated 80% of game developers to be white suggests games of today create an easy medium to transmit cultural stereotypes to the millions of gamers who play them (Leonard, 2003). Currently, games like “Grand Theft Auto”, “Ethnic Cleansing”, “NBA Ballers”, “True Crime”, and “Def Jam Vendetta” provide excellent sources of very racially designed plots and characters. Most often the white people are heroes or affluent characters in a much respected role such as police officers or special agents. However, the

black person will more likely be the sports character or the villain with white tank tops, “hip hop” music, and foul language or behavior.

Critics, parents, and social scientists express concern because video games mimic cinema films, present realistic images, and immerse the gamer into complex storylines. This realism potentially increases the impact of the stereotypes (Economist, 2005). David Leonard writes in *Colorlines Magazine*:

Video games represent a modern, sophisticated, multicultural, virtual form of minstrelsy. In other words, they provide players - a broad cross section of white middle-class suburbanites and young, urban people of color - with the opportunity to be black athletes or Ninjas. In those frequent cases where white heroes rule virtual reality, the enjoyment comes from dominating characters of color, from transporting oneself into a foreign country or environment (2002, p. 38).

Society must consider the effects of racial stereotypes within a growing industry. By 2002, more than 145 million people in America played video games as they have become a mainstream form of entertainment (Economist, 2005; Children Now, 2002). Nine out of ten children dedicate some time to playing video games. In addition, some children spend an average of two hours per day playing video games with 64% of all American children playing at least one hour per day (Sheff, 1984). Such alarming numbers are good cause for evaluation of video games and the potential influence they may cause.

Research

Introduction

To evaluate the impact of video game stereotypes, this research is informed by several previous studies. Since few studies have been conducted to assess the impact of stereotype transmission directly through video game technology, we will consider studies that highlight the presence of racial and gender stereotypes within the media. I will discuss a media study conducted to evaluate gender stereotypes, examine an experiment that used video games to demonstrate how biased thoughts affect reaction, and look at two content analysis studies that explore stereotypes present in video game characters.

Ganahl, Prinsen, and Netzley (2003)

This research assessed the impact of gender stereotypes on television viewers. Research objectives included:

1. Compare gender representation in television commercials to the results of past studies.
2. Determine whether the number of primary acting roles for women or girls have increased since a 1972 study.
3. Determine whether or not character roles within the commercials compare to actual consumer profiles provided by a private research company.

The researchers conducted a content analysis of 1,337 commercials with 5,527 characters. All measures attained at least a 95% probability level of significance when determining character gender or role.

The study yielded results these results:

1. Women are underrepresented in television commercials.
2. Older adults (over 51) and children were underrepresented in television commercials.
3. Men represented 60% of the primary roles in the commercials.
4. Women characters were portrayed more within health, beauty, and clothing ads while food, restaurant, electronics, insurance, financial, and political ads were more likely to portray men.

In conclusion, the research reviews many consumer buying habits to illustrate how the commercials do not market ads appropriately. Women are now purchasers of big ticket items such as computers or cars and the commercials mistakenly market to men mimicking a traditional view of household division of labor. The research supports the notion of television and the impact it has on a typical person who consumes nearly twenty-three hours of TV each week. Children learn how gender fits into society and television provides a medium to communicate those stereotypes (2003).

Wittenbrink, Judd, and Park (2001)

This research team set up this project on the heels of a shooting which took the life of an unarmed West African immigrant in 1999 on his

apartment building door step in New York. The man was shot by police officers who mistakenly thought he was pulling out a gun from his pocket rather than a wallet. The team decided to evaluate the unconscious bias present when making split-second decisions. Research objectives included:

1. Does the normal public show a differential association of violence with blacks and opposed to whites?
2. Is the threshold to decide to shoot lower or higher based on race?

The researchers used adult subjects recruited from college, bus stations, and people off the street. All but one of the participants were white. Participants played video games in order to demonstrate any unconscious bias.

The study yielded results these results:

1. Participants who were only instructed to shoot when the human targets were armed made more errors when the images were black men carrying any type of object (gun, cell phone, camera, etc).
2. Participants were also more likely to fire quickly on black characters with guns than on white characters with guns.

These results support previous studies which indicate hidden stereotypes unconsciously influence our decision making abilities. The presence of racially motivated bias can alter what decisions people make, but more importantly the research illustrates how video game technology can be interpreted or misinterpreted. Video games were used as a testing tool and

they effectively revealed how people respond to the life-like qualities the characters possess (2001).

Robert Parungao (2006)

In a recent and most applicable study from The University of British Columbia, Robert Parungao researched four popular video games: “Kung Fu”, “Warcraft 3”, “Shadow Warrior”, and “Grand Theft Auto 3.” The research objectives included:

1. The evaluation of game content: character portrayal with significance to the Asian race.
2. To assess gamer perceptions of Asian stereotypes in the four video games.

Parungao developed the study after alarming results found in the Children Now 2001 report that stated 86% of heroes in video games were white males, 70% of Asian characters were fighters or martial artists, and non-white characters were typically villains or victims. Parungaos study indicated these results:

1. Characters in the four games generally wore exaggerated Asian costumes, possessed some degree of martial arts capability, and promoted a shift-eyed, angry eye-browed look.
2. Hard core gamers saw the evil gangsters in the games as “obstacles to overcome” and they believed the racism depicted in video games is more tolerable than in movies or television.

3. A few participants thought the racism in games was terrible, but the majority thought video games should not have to be politically correct and society should not take them seriously.

Overall Parungao's results demonstrate that gamers do notice the stereotypes present, but internalize them only for game play. The offensive names, slurs, or physical features depicted in today's video games seem to enhance game play according to Parungao's study. However, numerous critics and children advocates remain concerned about the interactivity of video games and the impact on people who play games (Nguyen, 2006; Jones, 2006).

Children Now: Glaubke, Miller, Parker, & Espejo (2001)

In 2001, *Children Now* in California conducted the *Fair Play* study, a content analysis that evaluated the significance of violence, race, and gender within popular video games. *Children Now* closely examined 70 popular video games. For the purpose of this research, I will only discuss the findings related to stereotypes and not the information on violence. The *Fair Play* research analyzed the character content of popular video games listed in Appendix E. Every character was evaluated and recorded based on race, gender, role, and game genre.

Of the 1716 characters evaluated, 64% contained male figures while only 17% possessed female figures. On average, each game contained at least 17 male characters and only 4 females. The majority of the male characters

would occupy competitor roles while female characters were utilized more as props to the plot or scene of the game.

Gender behavioral and physical stereotypes were highly prevalent in the study. Males (63%) were more likely to engage in physical aggression or hand-to-hand combat while females were more likely to be verbally aggressive or scream and even be helpful or nurturing towards other characters. Men were also more likely to not be affected by violence. In addition, 35% of male characters were excessively muscular while 21% of females had extremely large breasts and small waists, seemingly unrealistic bodies which were often designed to appeal sexually. Ladies could pursue the same mission as men or even be as strong, but were often physically attractive as indicated by 21% with exposed breasts, 13% with exposed buttocks, and 20% with exposed midriffs.

The study also evaluated racial representation of video game characters. It acknowledged the poor lack of racial representation in the media based on previous studies and proceeded to analyze the characters for any stereotypical characteristics, roles, and relationships with violence. First, 56% of all characters were human and white while African Americans made up the second largest group at 22%. Games created only for children contained only white or non-human characters. Second, 87% of all video game heroes were white, Latino characters were only in sports games, nearly 70% of all Asian characters were wrestlers or fighters, and 83% of all African

American characters were sport competitors. The white characters in non-sport games were most likely to use weapons, African Americans were more likely to use verbal aggression with screaming and insults, Latinos were more likely to use aggression without a weapon, and Asians were more likely to use weapons as part of their aggressive behavior. In sport games, nearly 80% of African Americans engaged in physical and verbal aggression unlike only 57% of white characters.

The study's results offers insight to a growing concern. The *Fair Play* study found evidence of glorified violence, a disregard for women in society, an over exaggeration of sexuality, and racial overtones of physical appearance and roles (2001).

Conclusion on Previous Research

Much research has been conducted to evaluate media usage such as television, internet, movies, and now video games. Media sources are repeatedly scrutinized for their stereotypical portrayal of racial and gender characteristics. However, fewer studies evaluate the consumer's interpretation and usage of the stereotypes viewed on television or in video games. I want to evaluate the video game market because it saturates millions of homes all over the world and has created concern since the format engages the user to actively play a role.

My review of the literature shows that prior studies revealed the presence and acknowledgement of racial and gender stereotypes within video

game plots and characters. Most researchers conducted a content analysis to tabulate the frequency or non-frequency of actions typical of people within the most common races or of male and females. The characteristics often involved included dominance, violence, language, submission, leadership roles, etc. However, no studies sought to determine how these images impact our social and cognitive development.

In this study, I will attempt to examine how gamer and non gamer consumers perceive the images within a video game. The methodology will investigate social learning and the influence of observation and game interaction through a qualitative data collection format. The data will directly assess the impact of stereotypes embedded within video game media on the perceptions of gamers and non gamers.

CHAPTER FOUR

Research Design

Methodology

To evaluate perceptions of stereotypical images present in video game technology, I chose to conduct focus group research. This qualitative form of research permitted specific and immediate feedback on the interpretation of images in today's video games by individuals who played video games and individuals who did not. The majority of existing data centered on gender stereotypes rather than race or most studies itemized and evaluated game content. I found no research which directly evaluated perception of the images in relation to race alone. Furthermore, I found no qualitative material to examine society's opinions and thoughts on these images.

The instrument was prepared by utilizing theoretical foundations of social learning, the understanding of popular culture and stereotype transmission, and by reviewing limited research available on the specific nature of racial images embedded within video games. Questions measured frequency of use, knowledge of games, thoughts on the images before and after being shown samples, and a personal assessment of stereotype influence.

The focus groups were designed, conducted and interpreted by the primary researcher Lacey Chapman Gillentine. Each group was held at the Center for Community Research and Development on Baylor University campus. All responses were documented by note takers and then summarized for dissertation research.

Units of Analysis

According to the Entertainment Software Association, the average age of a game player is 33. 44% of all game players are adults ages eighteen through forty-nine (2006). Therefore, the subjects of the research were college students (age 18 to 24) and individuals who had already graduated from college (age 25 to 49).

Each focus group participant was recruited and scheduled by the primary researcher Lacey Chapman Gillentine. The college participants were recruited from Introductory Sociology classes at Baylor University under Dr. Carson Mencken and Lacey Chapman Gillentine, a Social Psychology class at Baylor University under Lacey Chapman Gillentine, and the Business of Media and Technology class under Dr. Corey Carbonara also of Baylor University. The beyond college participants were selected by referrals from Dr. Corey Carbonara, Dr. Carson Mencken, Dr. Jerry Park, and Mrs. Debbie Marable of The Center for Community Research and Development.

Procedure

Upon approval by Baylor University's Protection of Human Subjects Committee (See Appendix A), the focus groups were scheduled from February 1 through February 9, 2007. Primary researcher Lacey Chapman Gillentine recruited and scheduled six to eight focus group participants for eight focus groups. The groups were conducted at the Center for Community Research and Development facility in suite 300 of Robinson Tower on Baylor University Campus. The CCRD offered a very conducive environment by providing a formal meeting area with chairs, table, and a door to close for privacy purposes.

Four focus groups were conducted for each level of analysis: individuals who were in college and individuals who had already graduated from college. Those ranges corresponded to the nearly 50% of game players who are between the ages of eighteen and forty-nine years of age (ESA, 2006). Of those categories, the participants were further divided into "gamers" (people who played often) and "non-gamers" (people who did not play video games). The respondent was allowed to measure their own level game play since the line was very definite. The person either played video games or did not. Two groups per category were utilized to ensure the complete saturation of information.

Each group was provided breakfast or lunch depending upon the scheduled time and took between forty and fifty minutes. The primary

researcher Lacey Chapman Gillentine served as the moderator for the focus groups while selected Sociology major Baylor students from the 4309 Social Psychology course took notes. Two students were present for each focus group to document feedback. The students typed their notes and turned all available materials from the focus groups over to primary researcher Lacey Chapman Gillentine within seven days of the research date. In addition, each group was tape recorded as a back-up resource in case the written notes were lost, misplaced, or needed further interpretation. Each group was verbally informed of the tape recorder prior to the focus group research being conducted. In addition, the group members were given a Baylor University Institutional Review Board approved informed consent document (See Appendix B). All participants were required to read and sign the consent form prior to focus group participation to minimize risk. The form explained the research question, what events were going to take place, how participants were protected from harm, and explained that they could withdraw participation at any time without penalty. All participant responses were completely anonymous. The primary researcher was aware of the participant's name, but all responses were recorded as general statements and not attached to a specific respondent to ensure complete privacy.

Researcher Expertise

The primary researcher has completed doctorate level coursework in focus group research and has personally conducted approximately forty focus

groups between the year 2002 and 2006. Previously conducted focus groups include: video game and violence perceptions, college web site usage among high school students (Baylor University), strategies for college student recruitment (Texas State Technical College), library usage (Baylor University), magazine image evaluation (Baylor Magazine), and operations assessment (Baptist General Convention of Texas).

Instrument

In order to evaluate group perceptions, the researcher designed a focus group questionnaire containing eight questions (See Appendix C). The instrument also contained additional probes, and the method allowed for spontaneous ideas and feedback during the entire session. The qualitative survey contained questions examining the level of gaming usage, the types of video games played or knowledge of video games, recognition of stereotypes in video game images, and the level of personal stereotype sensitivity.

As supplement to the research instrument, images were also displayed for participants to evaluate and discuss their thoughts and feelings toward the video game images (See Appendix D). They were shown images from two popular video games: True Crime: New York City and Grand Theft Auto: San Andreas through the usage of video game media trailers.

Analysis

Each designated notetaker typed and returned all focus group materials to the primary researcher within seven days of documentation. The qualitative responses were interpreted and summarized to evaluate racial perceptions from these probes:

1. level of gaming usage,
2. types of video games familiar to the respondent,
3. recognition of video game character stereotypes,
4. stereotype sensitivity per respondent.

The following research questions were investigated:

1. Does a person's awareness of stereotypes in video games increase or decrease based on frequency and type of interaction?
2. Is a "gamer more likely to use stereotypes as heuristic cues to facilitate game play?
3. How do people perceive stereotypes in video games and what impact do they have on society?
4. Does a person's stereotype awareness become heightened if they personally experience stereotypes?

The results were used in dissertation research. All focus group materials will remain under the direct control of primary research Lacey Chapman Gillentine for approximately one year after research completion.

CHAPTER FIVE

Qualitative Research Study

Focus Group Analysis

Sample and Participant Overview

As of March 1, 2007, eight focus groups had been completed for this dissertation research. Focus group members were compiled based on level of video game usage and age. The research gathered information from two groups of video gamers between the ages of 18 and 24, two groups of non-gamers between the ages of 18 and 24, two groups of video gamers between the ages of 25 and 49, and two groups of non-gamers between the ages of 25 and 49. All groups were completed during the month of February. There was an average of seven participants per focus group. Each session took approximately fifty minutes for completion. Each group consisted of male and females respondents as well as a racial mixture of black, white and Hispanic people. All participants read and acknowledged participation by completing the Baylor University Institutional Review Board approved consent form. The information collected was documented and reproduced by notetakers. All facilitation of the focus groups was completed by primary researcher Lacey Chapman Gillentine.

Data Limitations

Due to the social nature of the topic and the limited availability of qualitative research on stereotype perception within video games, I chose not to pursue a quantitative data collection format. Therefore, I acknowledge the limitation of qualitative research and the inability to generalize the results to a larger population.

This research also recognized the over representation of respondents with white racial backgrounds. The participants were extracted from a college campus and city with a predominantly white population. However, the methodology had not dictated a racially diverse sample because of the qualitative nature.

Instrument

The instrument tool used to assess perceptions consisted of eight general topics for discussion (See Appendix D). These questions were used to summarize results based on video game usage, video game knowledge, video game graphics and the influence of graphics on perceptions, live graphic feedback, and personal stereotype assessments. In addition, the qualitative format allowed probes and spontaneous discussion which were summarized in a miscellaneous feedback category if the information was related to the research topic. Lastly, the responses were summarized into the following categories to facilitate qualitative summarization:

1. Video game interaction
2. Character assessment and stereotype presence
3. Stereotype evaluation from visual aids
4. Personal experience with stereotypes

Gamer Results

Category 1 -- How often do you play? Where? What types of games?

Table 5.1
Video Game Interaction – College

Type	Title	How Often/Where
First Person Shooter	Halo 3	Everyday
Role Playing Games	Madden 2007	1-2 times per week
Online	WWII	When I go home
Racing	Smack Down	When I don't have tests
War	Tiger Woods Golf	At home
Sports	Tony Hawk	With friends/family
	Guitar Hero	

College Gamer. The majority of the group played video games twice a day while a few others played twice a week. Men were inclined to play more often than the women. The gamers played a variety of types including sports (football and basketball), first person shooter, racing, tactical war, and online role playing games (or RPGs). Men were more likely to enjoy the first person shooter or war games and one young white male participant claimed, “I get to beat people up and run them over with cars!” However, women preferred the role play and story fed games. Video games were a form of entertainment

and most people did not have a preference for playing alone or in groups. A few indicated the desire to play sporting games in groups for competition purposes and to play alone during shooting games.

Table 5.2
Video Game Interaction – Beyond College

Type	Titles	How Often/Where
First Person Shooter	Soccom: Navy Seals	Once a week
Role Playing Games	Beach Volleyball	2-3 times per week
Online	NBA	Play in groups
War	Madden 2007	Usually play alone
Sports	Halo 3	

Beyond College Gamer. The older participants played video games about once a week to every few weeks. Their game time was influenced by job and family obligations. The majority of gamers played at home and preferred war games such as Soccom: Navy Seals and sporting games like NBA 2007 or Madden 2007. The participants did play in groups, but played more often alone. One white male in his mid-thirties stated, “I don’t play as often as I used to because of work and kids.”

Category 2 – Do you think the video game graphics allow you to distinguish racial characteristics? Do you feel any of those characteristics are stereotypical?

College Gamer. All of the college gamers recognized the use and presence of stereotypes within video games. The participants acknowledged the extensive use of gender and racial stereotypes. For example, most

gamers were familiar with over-exaggerated body characteristics like large breasts for women or large muscles for men, but they most commonly identified the usage of racial characteristics to make the characters seem more real. As one male noted, "Tiger Woods Golf allows the player to pick eye shape, eye width, cheek bones, jaw line, eyebrow arch and even customize your own tattoo!" Other sports games allowed the selection of physical features like skin tone, eyes, nose, mouth, and body build. The group members used the characteristics to exemplify their own personal appearance or sometimes to portray someone of a different race or gender. A young black man stated, "I like to model a person as similar to me as possible." However, another young white male said, "I like to even be a woman because they jiggle and have very small swimsuits!" In some cases, the qualities involved squinty eyes, larger noses, or any other traits associated with specific races to over-exaggerate a player's chosen character.

The gamers enjoyed overstated traits and higher levels of power when they played their game of choice, but also recognized the potential for an over representation of stereotypes in some games like Grand Theft Auto or Beach Volleyball. For example, one male commented, "The black houses in San Andreas are just ghetto while the nice houses belong to the white people." However, they believed the stereotypes told a story essential to the game's plot, helped to sell the product, and would not be removed or reduced in future game design. "If you didn't have stereotypes, it wouldn't become

appealing and people wouldn't really get into it," one female participant noted.

Beyond College Gamer. The participants said video games allowed them to see all aspects of race plus other physical characteristics such as muscle tone, veins, and beads of sweat rolling off the character's forehead. Older gamers also believed many of the images are stereotypical in the nature of race and gender. They reported countless incidents of black guys killing everyone or women with small waists, large breasts, and long hair. The gamers recognized these images immediately as being extremely stereotypical and serious stereotype reinforcement. "The games just show us what we expect. Black people being a gang banger and white people as the hero," a white male gamer reported.

Category 3 – How do the visual aids make you feel? How do the stereotypes make you feel towards other people?

College Gamer. Most of the college gamer participants recognized the gaming images to be from Grand Theft Auto: San Andreas and True Crime: New York. They were very interested in the video game images and reacted in a very calm manner. After the visual aids were removed, the gamers remained convinced that stereotypes provided a built-in storyline to make the game appealing to buyers. Generally, they believed the stereotypes matched public perception though some of them were not comfortable with the images

or language used in certain games. A white male in his early twenties stated, “The niggers are killing everybody, the vatos are wearing bandanas and driving low-riders. These are images we expect and so these are the images we get in movies and video games.” Overall, the group believed video games used stereotypes for an element of realism. All of the gamers became reported becoming lost in the story at times without consideration of the depicted stereotypes being. However, one black female group member expressed concern about children and their perception of these images. She stated, “My young nephew saw 50cent in a shooter game and said he wanted to grow up and be just like that nigga. He really believed what he saw was a good thing.”

Beyond College Gamer. The gamers recognized the gender and racial stereotypes they mentioned earlier present in the two visual aids. They stated how games of that nature often contained black gang bangers and were less responsive to the images than other focus group categories. The members had played shooter games and were very familiar with Grand Theft Auto: San Andreas and True Crime: New York. The gamers were very nonchalant about the violence or stereotypes, but impressed by the graphics.

All of the participants believed the stereotypes weren’t necessary, but facilitated game play. The extreme graphics allowed a sense of realism which makes a role easier to understand and more fun for the gamer. The stereotypes enhance the plot and were not perceived as real by all

participants. However, they did recognize the potential for certain types of people to misinterpret and reinforce negative racial and gender stereotypes and they recognized the potential hazard for younger players. As one older white respondent indicated, “I see the racist and sexist images, but it doesn’t make me think badly about other people. I think there is some element of truth to them, but I just know it’s a game. The problem is when kids see the images and don’t know the difference.”

Category 4 – Do you have any personal experience with stereotypes?

College Gamer. All of the college video gamers expressed experiencing some degree of personal stereotypes. The stereotypes included racial and financial scenarios. For example, the members felt stereotyped as being financially well off due to the university they attended. Others revealed being mistaken for athletes because they are black or being expected to speak Spanish since they were Hispanic. The majority of the people who felt extremely bothered by their personal stereotype were members of racial and/or ethnic minority groups.

Beyond College Gamer. Most of the group members did not express any strong feelings about experiences with personal stereotypes. A few black members mentioned incidents of being observed or watched more when shopping while a few Hispanic participants expressed distaste for being

expected to know or speak Spanish. All reports of stereotype experiences were mild and not deemed as particularly bothersome.

Non-Gamer Results

Category 1 – How are you familiar with video games? Who do you know that plays? What do they play?

Table 5.3
Video Game Interaction – College

Contact	Familiar Titles
Minimal contact	Battlefield
Played as children	Grand Theft Auto
Played once a month	Halo 3
Siblings play	Sims
Friends play	Madden 2007
	Call of Duty
	Guitar Hero

College Non-Gamer. The majority of all non-gamer respondents reported minimal to no contact with video games. Most participants recalled playing video games when they were younger, but had very little time to play as adults. Some also played with younger siblings or with roommates on occasion. One female participant indicated, “I play when I’m home to see my family, but I don’t have time anymore. It just doesn’t seem that important.” Another female added, “The games are too hard!” Nearly all participants felt the modern video games were too complicated in terms of characters, actions, and goals, and were too violent.

Though all participants did not play, they were aware of different genres such as sporting, war, first person shooter, role playing, and racing games. Of those types, “Battlefield”, “Grand Theft Auto”, “Halo”, “Sims”, “Madden”, “Call of Duty”, and “Guitar Hero” were mentioned specifically as being familiar to the non-gamer.

Table 5.4
Video Game Interaction – Beyond College

Contact	Familiar Titles
Minimal contact	Nascar
No contact	Grand Theft Auto
Played as children	Dance, Dance Revolution
Played once a month	Barrel Racing
Bought for children	

Beyond College Non-Gamer. The older group of non-gamers unanimously expressed no interest in video games due to lack of time and level of difficulty associated with modern video games. Several participants recalled playing simple video games such as Pac-Man or Pong as youths or children, but admitted the games today were far too complicated and hard to understand. One white, older female commented, “The older we get, the less our motor controls work.” On occasion, some members had interacted with their children by watching, playing or buying video games like race, sport, puzzle and war genres. They specifically mentioned their children having the titles of NASCAR, Grand Theft Auto, and Dance, Dance Revolution.

Category 2 – Do you think the video game graphics allow you to distinguish racial characteristics? Do you feel any of those characteristics are stereotypical?

College non-Gamer. Focus group members recognized the presence of stereotypes within games they knew of personally or socially. They recalled many games with racial over tones that portrayed black gangster men, white drug pushers, and Hispanic males with certain types of cars. A male group member recalled, "There's a young black guy named CJ in GTA and he looks like a gangster and steals cars." Furthermore, the participants reported the repetitive use of women with small waists and large breasts, dressed in skimpy clothing while numerous male characters were excessively muscular and aggressive at times. One female said, "The girls look like hoes!" Very few of the participants felt the images were positive and suspected video games were only a method to reinforce current stereotypical thoughts.

Beyond College Non-Gamer. The groups overwhelmingly acknowledged the presence and consistent use of stereotypes and violence in modern video games. The graphics have created a method for people to become immersed in the story being told, and the plots often involve very violent with racist characteristics. For example, they believed black people were often portrayed as violent killers, Hispanics generally had low rider cars or thick accents, and white people were selling drugs or saving the day. "Yes, the blacks have killing images and Hispanics have supped up cars," an older

white lady claimed. All of the members believed the average gamer could play a video game and assume all sorts of racial traits similar or dissimilar to their own, but also buy in to the over-exaggerated stereotypes that were prevalent in the games.

Category 3 – How do the visual aids make you feel? How do stereotypes make you feel towards other people?

College non-Gamer. After exposure to the visual aids, the respondents had two major reactions. First, the focus group members were very captivated by the use of graphics to promote video games. The images were extremely detailed and resembled scenes from a movie. “It interested me. I wanted to know what happened. It seemed like a suspenseful movie,” one unidentified respondent commented. Next, the participants commented on the extreme use of racial stereotypes and violence. All of the images portrayed young black men as gangsters, white people as cops or high level mobsters, and women as victims. The main character of the visual aid, a black male cop, was perceived as a negative character based on his clothes and other environmental details. Another member noted, “You wouldn’t think he was a cop, but rather a gangster.”

The participants indicated the games required stereotypes to increase their marketability. The stereotypes were selling an interactive world of interest. Gang bangers, white heroes, violent black characters, Hispanic low-riders, and scantily clad women sold a world that reinforced modern day

stereotypes. The group members did not believe the stereotypes would disappear, but they were very concerned about the interactivity of the games. They acknowledged the presence of stereotypes in other media such as television and the movies, but video games created a deeper concern due to the interactive component. “Some people will believe what they see in games about the races portrayed. Kids believe life is the way games portray it to be,” remarked a young Hispanic female.

Beyond College Non-Gamer. After the members had an opportunity to see the visual aids from True Crime: New York and Grand Theft Auto: San Andreas, they became even more sensitive to the presence of stereotypes and violence. They found the images disturbing due to the excessive violence and reaffirmed that black people are often portrayed as murderers or gangsters. “The game made it seem okay to be bad and to kill cops,” one concerned female parent mentioned. Many participants felt angry and afraid for their children. They expressed a need for parents to regulate the media content for their children because the video games look like they were glorifying what people in prison have done. Another older female parent indicated, “Seems like they are taking people from prison and putting them on the screen!”

The group did not believe the images were necessary and were concerned about the impact on children who played and interacted with the games on a regular basis. “They make me feel as though that is the way those races are supposed to act and it makes me scared for my children,” a

younger parent commented. In addition, the members thought “gamers” were probably complacent with the images in video games. The group also felt our society was becoming more violent as a whole. “The gamers probably look at it as just a game, but kids are shooting more often in real life,” a respondent added.

Category 4 – Do you have any personal experience with stereotypes?

College Non-Gamer. All of the non-gamer participants had experienced some level of personal stereotype against themselves. A few of the less extreme stereotypes included associations between hair color and intelligence to being a Baylor college student and being rich. However, some students indicated more extreme experiences of personal stereotypes concerning religion and terrorism to racial background and sports scholarships.

Beyond College Non-Gamer. Most of the focus group participants did not possess any knowledge or personal experiences with stereotypes. Two females reported instances of work-related glass ceiling issues while two others had been stereotyped mildly for vanity issues. Overall, the personal stereotype assessment of the group was very low.

Analysis of Research Objectives

Research Objective 1 – To determine whether or not a person’s awareness of stereotypes in video games increases or decreases based on frequency of game interaction.

In order to evaluate research objective 1, the focus group discussion included assessments of the participants’ gaming or non-gaming habits and of knowledge of stereotypes in contemporary current video games. All of the focus group participants acknowledged the presence and reoccurring use of racial and gender stereotypes within video games. The participants represented a clear spectrum from “never playing” to “playing as a child” to “playing on a daily basis.” The frequency of game play appeared to have no impact on the awareness level. Gamers were just as likely as non-gamers to have been exposed to stereotypes within video games.

Research Objective 2 – To determine if the “gamer” is more likely to use the stereotype as a heuristic cue to enhance game play.

In order to evaluate research objective 2, the focus group discussion probed the members to discuss how the stereotypical images made them feel toward other people. In addition, they were asked if the stereotypes were necessary for game play. In support of this objective, the focus group research revealed how older and younger gamers were more likely to accept the use of stereotypes for game enhancement. The stereotypes created a “built-in” plot that required no explanation. For example, the character Carl Johnson from Grand Theft Auto is assumed to be a gang banger, violent,

young black man based on how he dressed, spoke, and interacted with other characters.

Research Objective 3 – To evaluate the respondents' perception of stereotypes in video games and determine the impact on society.

In order to evaluate research objective 3, the focus group examined game visual aids and then discussed how the stereotypes made them feel in general and toward people of other races. Gamers and non-gamers alike indicated an excessive use of racial and gender stereotypes. The majority of respondents believed the games exhibited racial groups in standard stereotypical ways. The gamers were more inclined to not buy into the stereotype as real, but they also acknowledged how the images could be misinterpreted by younger gamers; a feeling shared by the non-gamers. The non-gamers were very alarmed by the modern day images depicted in video games and expressed great concern for the impression left on a gamer of any age.

Research Objective 4 – To see if a respondents' awareness or sensitivity toward stereotypes is influenced by their own personal experiences with stereotypes.

In order to evaluate research objective 4, the focus group concluded by allowing the respondents to indicate any personal experiences with any type of stereotype. As a whole, the younger college groups were more likely to comment on experiencing stereotypes than the older groups. Many college participants recalled instances involving race, religion, and financial

stability, but these personal experiences did not appear to impact the feelings on game stereotypes.

CHAPTER SIX

Conclusion

Qualitative Results

Introduction

This study evaluated individuals between the ages of 19 to 49 and their perceptions of stereotypes portrayed within video game technology. Variables such as level of gaming usage, knowledge of current video games, exposure to video game visual aids, and personal experiences with stereotypes were considered in order to find an influence on stereotype observation, repetition, perception, retention, and usage. These variables permitted the evaluation of four research objectives:

1. Does a person's awareness of stereotypes in video games increase or decrease based on frequency and type of interaction?
2. Is a "gamer" more likely to use stereotypes as heuristic cues to facilitate game play?
3. How do people perceive stereotypes in video games and what impact do they have on society?
4. Does a person's stereotype awareness become heightened if they personally experience stereotypes?

These objectives guided a qualitative exploration which has yielded key ideas not formerly documented in previous research. Other studies have revealed repetitive racial and gender stereotyped characters and behaviors within many genres of games (Children Now, 2001; Parungao, 2006). However, the focus group format encouraged free expression of opinions relating to stereotype observation and interpretation.

Video Game Usage

In order to assess the impact of video game usage, respondents were allowed to participate in focus groups designated as “gamer” or “non-gamer” groups. The individual was allowed to define their gaming parameters and participate in the appropriate group. This method was successful since the research found gamers play everyday or several times a week, non-gamers never played or only played when they were children or around family members who played. The frequency of gamer interaction substantially increased when the respondent defined themselves as a “gamer.”

The respondents were further divided by age. Gamers and non-gamers were placed into college groups, age 18 to 24 or beyond college groups, age 25 to 49. Usage decreased based on the age of the gamer. Younger gamers were more likely to play daily while older gamers had family and work commitments which reduced their game time to weekly. Non-gamers did not play, but younger gamers had friends or siblings who played and older gamers had children that played video games. The gamers did have more

consistent interactive exposure, but the non-gamers had sporadic exposure to video game technology.

All participants were familiar with a variety of video game types, such as: first person shooter, sports, racing, role play, and war/tactical games. The gamers had more knowledge of plot and character usage while non-gamers only recalled clips of games they had seen other people play.

Stereotype Awareness

All group participants acknowledged the presence and use of racial and gender stereotypes within video game technology. Gamers were more likely to recognize the use of stereotypes as a way to facilitate game play. They believed the over exaggerated characteristics enhanced gaming experiences by telling a story. The games seemed more appealing and real to the gamer when they could possess traits unlike themselves. The non-gamer believed the well designed graphics did immerse the gamer into the plot and story, but they focused on the problem with using excessive stereotypes more than gamers. Many non-gamers expressed concern with some of the extreme cases of stereotypes being used to sell and market games such as verbal and physical aggression, enhanced body parts, and clothing only being attached to certain genders or races. Furthermore, they assumed gamers would not notice the stereotypes since they are apart of game play and would be subconsciously reinforcing negative stereotypes.

When broken down by age, the groups had little variation. Younger, gamer respondents probably had seen more examples of stereotypical characters, but as a whole, all participants were aware of stereotype presence in video game media.

Stereotype Perception and Impact

The participants were allowed to discuss their perceptions and awareness of stereotypes in video games. However, respondents were shown visual samples of two popular video games, Grand Theft Auto and True Crime: New York, to obtain immediate perception feedback. Gamers, from both age groups, immediately recognized the samples shown.

All gamer respondents commented on how amazing graphics are today and the essential need for such detail in order to tell a story and sell a game. They did recognize the over statement of certain stereotypes such as black people committing violence, females playing the victim and dressing extremely provocative, or numerous incidents of Hispanic and black characters possessing signature clothing and language to indicate a “thug” presence, an aggressive and violent young criminal. Therefore, the gamers did not see any new material from the visual aids and did not have increased sensitivity to the stereotypes being shown. However, a few of the participants recognized the hazards of such misleading information. As noted in Chapter Five, one college female gamer recalled her younger male nephew idolizing a violent, black character that portrayed violence and the

“thug” image that respondents reported as being commonplace in today’s video games. Furthermore, the beyond college, older gamers recognized the over exaggeration of stereotypes and personally did not feel affected by what they saw, but were concerned about how children might interpret the information.

Only a few of the non-gamers recognized the video game visual aids. They commented on the level of detail in the design of characters, but were more captivated by the extreme use of stereotypes, especially toward black people. They consistently noted the correlation made between black young males and gang membership. These thoughts were based on character appearance, behavior, and speech. Other stereotypes noted were white people portrayed as typically well dressed, Hispanics driving low rider cars while wearing bandanas, and black people engaging in the majority of violence. The older, beyond college, non-gamers appeared more alarmed after the presentation of the visual aid. The parents were disturbed and angry by the images. As the results revealed, the parents expressed deep concern and anger toward the content available to children. They personally felt the images made them believe how other people truly were and they feared the impression left on unknowing youths. In addition, the beyond college non-gamers assumed all gamers were complacent to such images and were unaware of the message being transmitted in the storylines.

Personal Experiences with Stereotypes

Each group member was asked to identify if they have personally experienced stereotypes of any sort. The research intended to relate higher levels of sensitivity to stereotypes to their own personal experiences with stereotypes. However, personal involvement appeared to have no impact on stereotype awareness in video games. All of the younger gamer and non-gamers appeared to have more experiences with racial, gender, religion, and socio-economic stereotypes. The older gamers and non-gamers reported fewer instances of experiencing stereotypes on a personal level. All of the groups had a varying range of sensitivity to the video game stereotypes, but their personal experiences seem to not play the same role as video game usage and or respondent age.

Research Conclusion

What is the Impact of Video Game Stereotypes?

This research was structured around the foundation of Social Learning Theory to understand how people observe, repeat, perceive, retain, and re-use stereotypes communicated through elements of popular culture. Comics, radio, television, and movies have been heavily scrutinized in the past (Media Report to Women, 1995; McArthur & Eisen, 1976). Currently, the interactive, violent, and stereotypical nature of video games has encouraged social scientists, political representatives, and advocate groups like Children Now

to voice concerns toward the negative images being portrayed in titles such as Grand Theft Auto.

As previously discussed in the review of literature, some researchers have conducted content analyses to show how prevalent stereotypes are within modern day video games. This research evaluated the perceptions of video gamers and non-gamers toward the stereotypes being depicted in the games. This inductive methodology utilized focus group data collection to obtain immediate insight to better understand the exact influence of video game images on stereotype transmission.

In completing this research, four clear themes emerged: 1) gaming usage or gaming interaction does not impact stereotype awareness, 2) most people are likely to acknowledge the presence of stereotypes in video games, but gamers are more likely to use the information to facilitate game play while non-gamers are more likely to have a negative reaction, 3) all participants believed the negative stereotypes could influence or impact younger generations who may be consistently interactive with the games, and 4) personal experiences with stereotypes do not effect stereotype awareness or impact when observed in a game. These themes are directly based on personal interpretation of comments made in the gamer and non-gamer focus groups. Furthermore, the themes have been broken down and examined based on the social learning parameters used to assess the impact of cultural

perceptions and stereotype acceptance: observation/repetition, perception, and retention/usage.

Observation/Repetition

The study found that most people consistently played video games, played as children, or had witnessed friends or family members playing games on occasion. Most people with access to a television or a computer had observed some type of video game. This theme indicates that observation does take place regardless of your level of video game usage. The media saturates our society and is almost unavoidable which completed the first necessary step to achieve social learning: observation.

The observation yielded a unanimous awareness of racial and gender stereotype presence in modern video games. Regardless of age or video game usage, the respondent did see numerous examples of stereotypes, from over exaggerated muscles or breasts to black males who were consistently violent and portrayed gang related roles. However, repeated exposure to the stereotypes applied generally to the younger gamers who consistently played video games on a day to day basis.

Perception

All of the study participants acknowledged the presence of stereotypes in modern video games. Gamers and non-gamers reported negative feelings associated with some of the dramatic stereotypes against young black males

or big breasted women. Specifically, younger non-gamers tended to show average levels of concern about how the images may be perceived by younger generations when compared to the older non-gamers who personally felt compelled to believe the strong statements made by the video game images. Gamers tended to perceive the stereotypes as an essential element of the game to generate game play. The stereotypes told a story and served as cues to facilitate the plot without having to build in an explanation of details. The younger gamers appeared to be overall the most complacent to the images. They expressed the least amount of concern for improper interpretation or perception of the images by themselves or others who came into contact with a game. Therefore, the negative perception or awareness of the stereotypes decreased when exposure to the games decreased.

Retention/Usage

All of the focus group participants retained the information they had seen in games. This was evident when they recalled their usage or experience with video games. In addition, most members were confident in their personal abilities to not misuse the stereotypical information obtained from the video games regardless of exposure levels. However, older gamers and all non-gamers expressed definite concern for younger, impressionable children who are currently playing these games or who may play them in the future.

Future Research

In conclusion, this research has found a collective concern toward future generations and their consistent interaction with video games. Modern video games contain numerous racial and gender stereotypes as evidenced by several content analyses conducted by other researchers. This qualitative analysis documented previously theorized concerns about the potential impact of stereotypes portrayed in games and how they are socially perceived by users. This analysis was guided by notions of Social Learning Theory and was structured by these elements: observation, repetition, perception, retention, and usage.

Overall, the results indicated strong observation for all respondents and stronger repetition for younger gamers. Older gamers and all non-gamers showed a high level of concern over the potential risk for misinterpretation of the stereotypes. This group also possessed the lowest levels of game repetition or exposure and expressed further apprehension against improper retention and usage of those stereotypes. However, gamers were likely to use stereotypical information as heuristic cues in order to enhance game play. The stereotypical characters provided built in plots and made the stories more interesting to the gamer.

I demonstrated how respondents are completing the initial steps for social learning to occur. First, all respondents had observed video game technology. Gamers played video games on a weekly to daily basis while non-

gamers had been exposed to games played by their children, siblings, or friends. Second, respondents had consistent contact with video games though gamers possessed the highest levels of repetitive exposure. Third, all respondents developed negative perceptions of the stereotypes used in video games. However, gamers and non-gamers followed two different perception paths which impacted their future retention and usage as shown in figure 6.1.

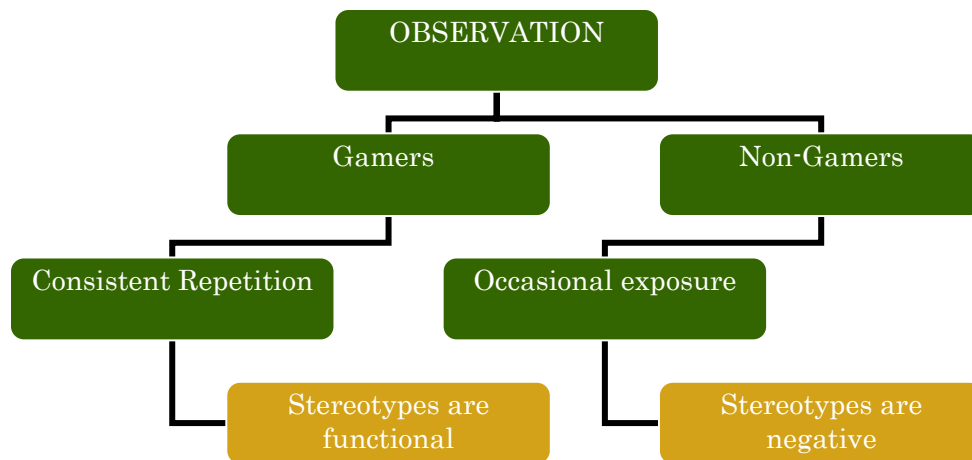


Figure 6.1. Paths of Perception

Gamers engaged in observation and higher levels of game repetition. They tended to accept the stereotypes as a necessary element of the game's plot. Non-gamers witnessed gaming from a variety of perspectives, had lower levels of gaming repetition, and were more likely to perceive the stereotypes in a negative connotation. Non-gamers were very concerned about the influence of negative stereotypes on children. Therefore, the nature of

repetition plays a crucial role in perception development and should be further analyzed

This inductive methodology produced one important hypothesis for future assessment: Are gamers complacent to video game stereotypes or do they subconsciously retain and use the stereotypes in person to person interaction? This research question should be evaluated in a longitudinal format to assess a younger gamer and perception development while maintaining high levels of gaming repetition. Gaming provides an interactive social learning path and future research needs to consider the true nature: complacent or subconsciously biased?

APPENDICES

APPENDIX A

IRB Project #: 200607044

Title of Proposal: How Does Video Game Technology Impact Popular
Culture Perceptions of Race?

Principal Investigator: Lacey Chapman

Notice is hereby given that the Baylor IRB has reviewed your proposal.

The action taken was:

Approved -- Approval period is for twelve months and ends one year from ".Jan 4 2007 12:00AM.". If any untoward events should occur or you need to make any revisions to the research protocol during the conduct of this study, you must advise the IRB. Please see the two forms attached regarding completion/termination of your project and annual reviews required if not completed by the end date. The enclosed consent form with the IRB approval stamp must be used. Please note that federal guidelines dictate that records must be kept for at least 3 years after completion of the research.

Thank you for your cooperation. Please feel free to contact Dr. Matthew Stanford, Chair of the Baylor IRB, or his assistant, Mrs. Nancy Ulman, at 254-710-2811 for more information or if you have any questions.

Dr. Matthew Stanford, Chair, Baylor IRB

APPENDIX B

Informed Consent

How does Video Game Technology Impact Popular Culture Perceptions of Race?

Principal Investigator: Lacey Chapman Gillentine

This form asks for your consent to participate in focus group research. The purpose of the research is to evaluate group perception of characters presented in video game technology. The study will directly focus on how we learn through observation and influence of our social environment when it is enhanced by the popular media of video games.

The focus group will consist of six to eight members who share a similar quality. Groups will include high school gamers, high school non-gamers, college gamers, college non-gamers, beyond college gamers, and beyond college non-gamers. Each participant will be asked to have lunch and participate in discussion about video games and race while the principal researcher Lacey Chapman serves as moderator to facilitate discussion. The focus group will take no longer than one hour of the participant's time. The research will be conducted at the Center for Community Research and Development, Baylor University, Robinson Tower, suite 300 on a pre-scheduled date.

Each response will be recorded by note-takers present in the room. All responses are written as general statements and overall group reaction. No individual response will be extracted from the data collected. In addition, all focus group discussion will be tape recorded to ensure no response is overlooked and to provide a resource if the written notes need further interpretation. All written and tape recorded responses will remain under the direct control of principal investigator Lacey Chapman.

All research data will be shredded one year after the research initiation date. There will be no risks to you. You may elect, either now or anytime during the focus group, to withdraw your participation with no penalty. You should understand that your participation is entirely voluntary.

I have no interest in how a specific individual responds to any conversational probe. You are guaranteed complete anonymity. Your

responses will help me better understand how racial images are interpreted by gamers and non-gamers in society.

Please direct any inquiries to Lacey Chapman Gillentine, principal investigator, Department of Sociology, Baylor University, Box 97326, Waco, TX 76798, phone number 254-829-9755 or to Dr. Carson Mencken, faculty advisor, Department of Sociology, Baylor University, Box 97326, Waco, TX 76798, phone number 254-710-1165.

If you have questions regarding your rights as a participant, or any other aspect of the research as it relates to you as a participant, please contact the Baylor University Committee for Protection of Human Subjects in Research, Dr. Matt Stanford, Chair, Baylor University, PO Box 97344, Waco, TX, 76798, phone number 254-710-2236.

I have read and understood this form, am aware of my rights as a participant, and have agreed to participate in this research.

Signature

Date

APPENDIX C

Gamer Focus Group Instrument

1. How often do you play video games?
 - a. Where?
 - b. What types?
 - c. Alone or in groups?
2. Do video game graphics enable you to distinguish racial characteristics?
3. Do you feel any of the characteristics are stereotypical?
 - a. Gender?
 - b. Race?
 - c. Age?
4. Do the images influence how you feel toward people of other races?
5. What do the images in picture 1 make you feel or think?
 - a. 2?
 - b. 3?
 - c. 4?
6. Do the images help or hinder game play?
7. Are the stereotyped characteristics necessary?
8. Do you personally experience racial stereotypes?

Non-Gamer Focus Group Instrument

1. How often do you play video games?
2. Do you know someone who does?
3. Have you watched them play?

- a. Do you buy them for your children? (for parents)
- 4. Of those video games you have seen, do video game graphics enable you to distinguish racial characteristics?
- 3. Do you feel any of the characteristics are stereotypical?
 - a. Gender?
 - b. Race?
 - c. Age?
- 4. Do the images influence how you feel toward people of other races?
- 5. What do the images in picture 1 make you feel or think?
 - a. 2?
 - b. 3?
 - c. 4?
- 6. Do the images help or hinder game play?
- 7. Are the stereotyped characteristics necessary?
- 8. Do you personally experience racial stereotypes?

APPENDIX D



Figure D.1. Grand Theft Auto: San Andreas



Figure D.2. True Crime: New York



Figure D.3. Grand Theft Auto: San Andreas

APPENDIX E

Fair Play Game Study List

Game Boy Advance

Super Mario Advance
Tony Hawk Pro Skater 2
Castlevania: Circle of the Moon
F-Zero Max Velocity
Rayman Advance
Namco Museum
GT Advance Racing
Iridion 3D
Krazy Racers
Earthworm Jim

Game Boy Color

Pokemon Silver
Pokemon Gold
Mario Tennis
Super Mario Brothers Deluxe
Pokemon Yellow
Legend of Zelda: Oracle of Seasons
Legend of Zelda: Oracle of Ages
Tony Hawk Pro Skater
Donkey Kong Country
Frogger

Dreamcast

NBA 2k1
Crazy Taxi
Phantasy Star Online
Sonic Adventure
NFL 2k1
Shenmue
Tony Hawk Pro Skater 2
Tomb Raider: The Last Revolution

NBA 2k
Tony Hawk Pro Skater

Ninetndo 64

Pokemon Stadium 2
Paper Mario
Donkey Kong 64
Super Smash Brothers
Legend of Zelda: Majora's Mask
Pokemon Stadium
The World is Not Enough
Super Mario 64
Mario Party 3
WWF: No Mercy

Playstation

Gran Turismo 2
WWF Smackdown 2
TonyHawk Pro Skater 2
Driver 2
Special Ops: Ranger Elite
Tony Hawk Pro Skater
Final Fantasy IX
Tekken 3
Driver
Tomb Raider: The Last Revelation

Playstation 2

Madden NFL 2001
NBA Live 2001
Onimusha Warlords
ATV Off Road Fury
SSX
Star Wars Starfighter
Tekken Tag Tournament
The Bouncer
Zone of the Enders
Triple Play Baseball

Personal Computer

The Sims

The Sims: Livin' Large

The Sims: House Party

Frogger

Roller Coaster Tycoon

Black & White

Who Wants to be a Millionaire?

Diablo 2

102 Dalmation Activity center

Comman & Conquer: Red Alert 2

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