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**Gender and Race Representation in Casual Games**

Donghee Yvette Wohn has pushed back against the prevailing, yet outdated, perception of video games as a purely negative influence on the human psyche by calling to attention a commonly ignored branch of video games: Casual Video Games (2011: 198). Supported by the Entertainment Software Association’s annual demographic report: *Essential Facts About the Computer and Video Game Industry (2010)*, Wohn asserts that females gamers are no longer an outlier in the population; accounting for 40% of the player base, females have shortened the gendered digital divide by playing casual games (2011: 199). Thus the higher density of females playing casual video games, compared to the often studied console based games, warrants a closer look.

Wohn’s approach is grounded in Social Learning Theory, specifically Banduras concept of observational learning which describes the media as a source of “social identity formation, gender stereo types, and viewers’ perception of reality” (2011: 200). She suggests that because “images in games can be incorporated in cognitive schema and heuristics” studies of video game “violence, gender stereotypes, and racial representation” are vital to the theoretical understanding (Wohn 2011: 200).

Performed in two parts, the study aims to identify and evaluate the characteristic of casual video games, focusing on gender and race representations. Surprisingly, out of the 200 games included in the study, female main characters (42%) were more common than males (12.5%), race was heavily disproportionate with only 8 games containing non-white human characters (Wohn 2011: 201). Furthermore, female characters were never hypersexualized, 72% of the models were dressed in an “unrevealing” fashion while the remainder was only “somewhat revealing” (Wohn 2011: 203). Gendered personalities were prevalent in most games with femininity being most associated with female characters, however masculine personalities were not found to be of a significant difference between the sexes (Wohn 2011: 203). These findings are a stark contrast to previous academic literature that has found women to be marginal characters mostly used as sexual symbols. In the words of Donghee Wohng, “This study shows that sex representation in causal games is overwhelmingly female and gender representation is non-stereotypical” (2011: 204).

Shortcomings of the Wohng’s work includes, as she mentions, the lack of explanation for why females are more inclined to play casual video games, and how the games’ content affects the individual user (2011: 204). Further research should expand upon this preliminary content analysis by focusing on comparative analyses of casual and console video games, this could shed light on possible characteristics that influence female’s gaming decisions and experiences. Other areas of improvement would be to pin point specific games or categories of games that females frequently play; studies on characteristic differences between video games may produce evidence of influential factors based on the type of game. Though this article fails to answer why or how casual video games influence female users, it presents a strong argument for the rethinking of who a gamer is, and the impact video games have on the social development of the user.

References

Wohn, Donghee Y. 2011. "Gender and Race Representation in Casual Games." *Sex Roles* 65(3-4):198-207 (<http://search.proquest.com.jproxy.lib.ecu.edu/docview/874308152?accountid=10639>). doi: <http://dx.doi.org.jproxy.lib.ecu.edu/10.1007/s11199-011-0007-4>.