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Representation of Characters by Gender across Video Game Covers of Different Ratings

Alexandra Cassidy
Southwestern Oklahoma State University, cassidya@student.swosu.edu

Aaron Cornell
Southwestern Oklahoma State University

Emily Burgess
Southwestern Oklahoma State University

Stephen Burgess
Southwestern Oklahoma State University, stephen.burgess@swosu.edu

Jeremy Evert
Southwestern Oklahoma State University, jeremy.evert@swosu.edu

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Alexandra Cassidy, Aaron Cornell, and Emily Burgess | Dr. Stephen Burgess and Dr. Jeremy Evert | Department of Computer Science and Department of Psychology

Background

This research was in response to the perception that females are under-represented in gaming culture. Pew Research Center (2015) found that both males and females thought more males played video games (60%). However, there is not a statistically significant difference in the percentage of males and females who have ever played video games (50% M 48% F). There is the perception that the advertising and production of video games contribute to the different stereotypes associated with men and women in gaming culture. According to research about gender and video game production, both male and female employees who work in the creation of content believe that women are underrepresented (Prescott & Bogg, 2011). This contributes to the idea of androcentrism, which is the practice of placing a masculine point of view as the center of a culture's, and this is seen in many areas of gaming.

In this project we examined the presence of and representation of males and females on video covers.

Methods

- Video game covers were analyzed as these are typically the first exposure a potential buyer and player has to a game. We analyzed 53 total video game covers from best-selling lists including Walmart, Amazon, Gamestop, and Steam.
- Half the covers were coded by two research assistants to demonstrate inter-rater reliability. A level of agreement of 96% was obtained. Disagreements were resolved by a third rater.
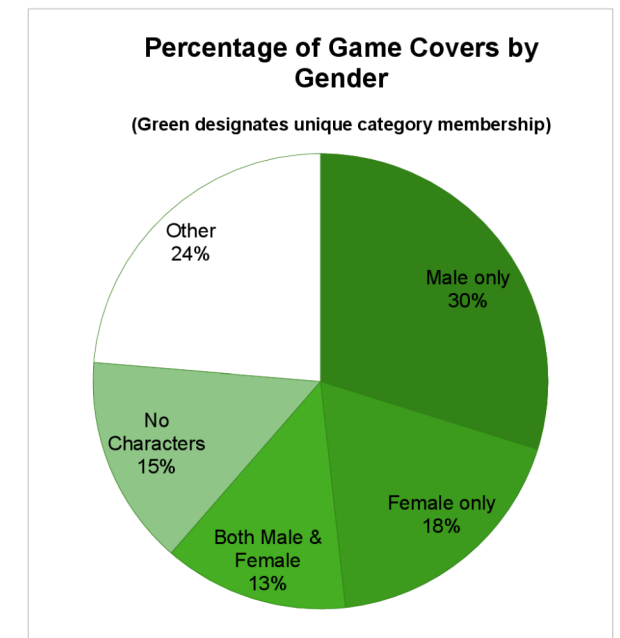
- Games were coded for presence of a human character (Yes, No), number of primary characters, number of secondary characters, gender of primary character (Male, Female, Indeterminate), and gender of secondary character (Male, Female, Indeterminate).

Results

- Hypothesis 1- Significantly more covers would have males than females present. (M 49% > F 32%) This was supported.
- Hypothesis 2- Significantly more males on video game covers would be primary characters. (M 30% > F 26%) This was not supported.
- Hypothesis 3- Significantly more females on video game covers would be secondary characters. (M 13% < F 15%) This was not supported.
- Hypothesis 4- If both genders are present on the cover, the males would be more likely to be primary and the females would be more likely to be secondary characters. If shared cover, males were primary 5/8 (65%) of the time. If shared cover, females were primary 1/8 covers (12.5%) of the time. This was supported.

- There were no covers analyzed that had both females and males represented as primary characters at the same time.
- Hypothesis 5- More female characters would be present on E-rated games. 57% of T-rated games contained a female character compared to 20% for E-rated games and 27% for M-rated games.

Percentage of Game Covers by Gender

(Green designates unique category membership)

Other 24%
Male only 30%
Female only 18%
Both Male & Female 13%
No Characters 15%

Future of the Project

- The video game industry is a multi-faceted area, and the effects of playing video games are potentially complex. Future research is also needed to examine factors that predict the purchase of and play of games. For example does the option of gender and dress of characters affect decision to play a game? Does the portrayal of females in a sexualized manner affect the attitudes of males towards female players or women in general?

Works Cited

- Duggan, Maeve. "Gaming and Gamers." *Pew Research Center: Internet, Science & Tech*, 15 Dec. 2015, www.pewinternet.org/2015/12/15/gaming-and-gamers/.
- Prescott, J., & Bogg, J. (2011b). Segregation in a male-dominated industry: Women working in the computer games industry. International Journal of Gender, Science and Technology, 3(1), 206–227.