Computer Games Essay, Research Paper

This Christmas, like millions of other parents, I bought my two children, a boy

and a girl, a popular home video game system. I thought they could share it and

when asked if this was OK with them, they replied, ?Sure mom, that would be

great.? So, we planned on installing the little goody onto the TV in the

family room, so that both kids would have an equal chance to play. So, ?What

then?? you may be asking is the problem. The problem arose when we went to

shop for games for the system. They weren?t hard to find. They were in all the

local toy stores and Walmart and Kmart too! But, there weren?t any for girls!

I looked high and low and came up empty handed. Why was this happening? Surely,

girls must want to play video games as much as boys do! Why then, aren?t game

manufacturers producing any video games that feature girls as the main

character? On a recent trip to our local Walmart store, I found over two hundred

video game titles, yes I counted, for our game system, but of these only two had

female main characters. One of them was, you guessed it, Barbie! The other one

was a female warrior dressed in a scantily clad leather outfit. I?m pretty

sure the latter was designed for young men, and not for young girls. Surely, a

big retailer, like Toys-R-Us would have more of a selection. So, off I went on

my merry way only to be once again disappointed. Toys-R-Us had over 300 titles

in stock for our game system and only the same two titles I found at Walmart

were available there with one new addition, which was the Spice Girls CD. It?s

price had been reduced, so I guessed it was left over from last year when the

Spice Girls used to be popular. I ended up purchasing 4 games for my kids to

play. I found a few with cartoon characters as lead characters, that I felt

would be appropriate for kids. I bought Rugrats, Loony Tunes, Grand Turismo

(race cars), and Tetras (puzzle). All, except the puzzle game, had male

characters in the lead, but at least these were rated as non-violent. After some

careful research, I found that video games are a 7 billion dollar a year

industry that out surpasses even the movie industry by 2 billion dollars each

year ( 2 ). Mostly, these games are being sold to boys and young men. Girls

currently represent only about 20 percent of the market, having been pretty much

written off by important manufacturers like, Hasbro, Sony, and Sega ( 3 ). Girls

have extensive buying power though, nearly 84 billion dollars annually, and over

6 million of them live in households with gaming systems ( 3 ). From ages, 6 to

10, girls play video games as much and as often as boys in that same age

bracket, and one survey reports that if there were more games out there that

they enjoyed, 85 percent of girls surveyed would use their gaming systems more (

1 ). Girls don?t seem to like the same kinds of games boys do. Instead of the

violent, time-limited games boys go for, the girls like games that offer strong

narratives, interaction, and creativity. It?s not enough to simply convert or

replace existing software for girls; the basic structure should be changed. A

1995 survey in Children?s Software Review found only 28 of the 344 games with

female characters in leading roles ( 3 ), proof that few producers have created

games exclusively for girls. I believe this is largely so, due to the male

dominance in the whole computer and technological industry. Males are turning

out a product for other males. Then why aren?t women out there designing a

product girls will enjoy? Some are trying, but I have found it a catch-22

situation. Men are leading the technology industry because they are the ones

inviting other males to join their ranks by making only games geared towards

boys and young men. Girls are less likely to deem this area as fun and inviting

and thus, turn their attention to other areas of study once college bound. Some

companies are beginning to look for ways to encourage girls to get more involved

in information technology. Girl Tech is one such group, in hopes of reaching 3.4

million Girl Scouts, they are sponsoring a technology merit-badge program (3 ).

Efforts like this must continue, though more immediate measures need to be taken

in order for girls to become technologically proficient. If for no other reason

than for an increase in earning potential, girls must learn to use and keep up

with the technology around them. Not developing video games for girls, seems to

be a classic example of symbolic annihilation ( 4 ). That is, the media has

traditionally ignored women. In this case, even though girls have money to

spend, their needs still aren?t being met. With the amount of time children

spend playing video games each week, one study says as much as 4 hours by boys

and at least 2 hours by girls, what kind of message are we giving our kids ( 2

)? I know it can?t be positive. I really hadn?t realized the bias towards

girls in the toy department. This has really opened my eyes as a consumer! I am

interested on my next trip to the toy store , to find out if other areas of the

store are as biased as the video game department. It?s already evident that

there is a division of boy isles and girl isles. My children have pointed this

out many of time with cries of, ?I want to go to the girl isle!? from my

daughter and the opposite from my son. What is important here is that, I am at

least aware of the problem now. I wonder how many other mothers with daughters

are aware of what is available to their daughters as consumers. It really is

disturbing when you think about it.