

Girls game less because they have less free time, study

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Carrie Heeter is a professor of telecommunication, information studies and media. She is co-author of a newly published paper on gaming and gender. Photo by G.L. Kohuth.

(PhysOrg.com) -- A Michigan State University study finds that girls spend less time playing digital games than boys because they have less leisure time, a finding that could have long-term implications on the technology gender gap.

The study of 276 MSU undergraduate students, published in a recent issue of the journal *Sex Roles*, found that female undergraduates spent significantly more time - about 16 hours per week - on jobs, homework and other activities than did male undergraduates.

“Our findings suggest that one reason women play fewer games than men is because they are required to fulfill more obligatory activities, leaving them less available leisure time,” said Jillian Winn of MSU’s Department of Telecommunication, Information Studies and Media, and one of the co-authors of the study.

According to the study, male college undergraduates reported having nearly twice as much free time per week than female college undergraduates - about nine hours per week for men compared to about four hours for women.

The study, which asked the respondents to estimate how many hours they spent gaming not only as a college student but also in middle and high schools, found that students - both male and female - that gamed more at an early age continued to do so later in life.

“Frequent gamers in college,” Winn said, “also tended to be heavier gamers in high school and middle school.”

Overall, the study found that males played significantly more than females at all three stages of life - an average of 266 more hours per year each year of middle school, 305 more hours per year each year of high school and 225 more hours per year in college.

While gaming is associated with less time spent doing homework, it does not seem to have an impact on a student’s GPA.

In addition to [time pressure](#), another possible contributor to girls’ lack of interest in gaming is the lack of females working in the game-design industry. A side effect is games that are better adapted to male needs and interests, said Carrie Heeter, study co-author and a professor of telecommunication, information studies and media.

“Game career studies have shown that 88 percent of game developers are male,” Heeter said.

“Researchers have proposed a ‘virtuous cycle’: If more women were involved in creating games, games would appeal more to women, and they would be attracted to the game industry.”

Additionally, more learning games are entering the classroom as alternative teaching tools, which are thought to be more “fun” and interactive than traditional instruction.

“Games for learning may actually appeal to girls’ interest in multitasking leisure with work,” Heeter said. “Learning games may also turn girls off, if they are created in genres strongly preferred by males. It’s a delicate balancing act to engage both sexes.”

The research also has implications for [game](#) designers who are interested in reaching a wide audience. Women, Heeter said, use the same technologies as men, but studies show that biologically their brains may respond in different ways.

“Games designed to optimally appeal to women might minimize in-game performance pressure, provide real-world benefits such as stress relief, brain exercise or more quality time with family and friends, and be playable in short chunks of time,” she said.

More information: To view a copy of the study, go [here](#).

Provided by Michigan State University ([news](#) : [web](#))

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