

Online role-playing games hurt marital satisfaction, study says

February 14 2012

Online role playing games negatively affect real-life marital satisfaction, according to a new Brigham Young University study to be published February 15th in the *Journal of Leisure Research*.

The study reports that 75 percent of spouses of sword-carrying, avatar-loving gamers wish they would put less effort into their guilds and more effort into their marriage. The researchers, led by graduate student Michelle Ahlstrom, and recreation management professor Neil Lundberg, studied 349 [couples](#) to learn how online role-playing games such as World of Warcraft, affect [marital satisfaction](#) for both gamers and their spouses. And in some cases, gaming even increased satisfaction.

"It's common knowledge that many couples experience challenges around gaming," Lundberg said. "Particularly when husbands are heavy gamers, it clearly has a [negative impact](#) on their marriages."

What the researchers found confirms popular opinion, with some interesting new details. The study revealed it's not the time spent playing games that caused [dissatisfaction](#), but rather the resulting arguments or disrupted bedtime routines. These issues can cause problems such as poorer marital adjustment, less time spent together in shared activities and less serious conversation, the study reports.

"It's not the hours that make a difference," Lundberg said. "It's really what it does to the relationship-- whether or not it creates conflict and

quarreling over the [game](#)."

The study showed that gaming is dominated by men, but there is a contingent of women gamers who play with their spouses.

"We didn't realize that there was a whole group of couples who game together," Lundberg said. "In those gaming couples where the marital satisfaction was low, the same issues existed. For example, if they argued about gaming and bedtime rituals were interrupted, even though they gamed together, they still had lower marital satisfaction scores."

However, the study found that for couples in which both spouses play, 76 percent said that gaming has a positive effect on their marital relationship. Interestingly, for those who do game together, interacting with each other's avatars--their online persona—leads to higher marital satisfaction. However, both must be satisfied with their mutual participation, especially the individual who plays less.

"Not all video games are bad," said Ahlstrom, the graduate student. "Some are fun leisure pursuits that when played together may strengthen your relationships with others. With any type of gaming, consider the content of the game. Consider what you are doing in the game, how much time it is taking, how it is affecting you, your schooling, work, sleep, body and especially how it is affecting your spouse and marital relationship."

The researchers believe the problem could be more severe than the study shows because they found many dedicated gamers were not willing to participate in the study. The average age of the respondents to their nationwide survey was 33, and the average marriage length was 7 years. Of those couples in which only one spouse gamed, 84 percent of the players were the husbands. Of those couples where both gamed, 73 percent of those who gamed more were husbands.

"This study really does verify that gaming has an effect on marital satisfaction," Lundberg said. "It's not just a random occurrence that a few couples are dealing with. Based on the large number of married gamers – 36 percent of multi-player online role-playing [gamers](#) report being married-- we can assume this is a widespread issue."

Provided by Brigham Young University

Citation: Online role-playing games hurt marital satisfaction, study says (2012, February 14) retrieved 27 April 2024 from

<https://phys.org/news/2012-02-online-role-playing-games-marital-satisfaction.html>

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