



Gamegirls and Gameboys

Computer games and gender

INFORMATION ABOUT COMPUTER GAMES
FOR PARENTS OF 12 TO 16-YEAR-OLD CHILDREN

**GAME
LIFE**



A TYPICAL SITUATION IN FAMILIES

A teenager is discussing computer games with his mother:

Mother: “Tell me, why do women in computer games always have to be dressed so skimpily and have to look so doll-like?”

Son: “Other question: why shouldn’t it be that way? It’s great!”

Mother: “Women are only judged by their appearance. That is outright sexist!”

WHAT DO MANY PARENTS THINK ABOUT THIS?

Computer games, whether they are played on a PC, a console or the smartphone, often make use of many stereotypes. Boys are the heroes, girls the princesses that must be saved. This often includes different tasks and roles. The real world and gender equality look very different. The goal of many parents when parenting, is to overcome these stereotypes. So, while they try to fight sexism and the depiction of women as sex objects, computer games reinforce it. Therefore, computer games work directly against the parents’ educative ideal. Accordingly, the educational value of these types of games is rated as very low and it is crucial to save teenagers from these harmful influences on their values.

WHAT DO MANY TEENAGERS THINK ABOUT THIS?

When spending several hours with a fictional character in a virtual world, it is natural, that it should have an attractive appearance. Why should you spend a lot of time with a character, that you don't like? Therefore, in games where the looks of the characters can be adjusted, gamers make sure, that the characters match their own ideas of beauty.



Additional information about computer games and „contact risks“ can be found at www.games.jff.de.

WHAT IS IT ALL ABOUT?

Gender images and roles in games: The depiction of gender and role models in computer games often reflects the current social beauty ideal or strongly exaggerates it. This is even true for characters that gamers can design themselves and that are customizable to a great extent. However, this usually only refers to the looks of the characters. Concerning their skills, for example the strength when fighting against each other, male and female characters are usually equal. Stereotypes can be found in the stories of many computer games and when depicting social roles. While male characters are often strong-willed and heroic, female characters frequently fulfill the role of the person that needs to be saved or supported.

Difference between role and the person that is playing: In online games the gender of the other person that is playing is not known necessarily. For the fellow players, however, it might make a difference if they are playing with a boy or a girl. Girls often have the experience that their abilities are downplayed due to their gender. In addition, hate speech such as misogynistic, sexist or homophobic insults can be found time and again.

Teenage identity development: From a developmental psychology perspective, the main goal during adolescence is to develop one's own identity, therefore answer the following question: "Who am I?" This process requires a lot of room to experiment. This is where computer games can offer a large playground: the gamers can slip into a character, try out a new role and test the reactions of their environment to this role. That way, for example, it is possible for male teenagers to play a female character and vice versa.

Room to experiment: During this process the characters in computer games become a high priority for the gamers. The teenagers don't just care about the game itself anymore, they want to have the possibility to assume a completely different role. They spend a lot of time with their gaming characters and can often identify with these. However, young people don't just assume the roles they have in the games in real life. Rather, the objective is to try out different roles. The more divers the experiments are, the broader the learning experience can be for the young people.

Gender differences in the gaming industry: There are differences not just in the games themselves. Firstly, part of the gaming industry, same as in many other technical areas, is heavily male dominated. Secondly, girls or young women often experience devaluation within the e-sports or live streaming business due to their gender. However, the digital gaming culture can only profit from being more inclusive and open to everybody, therefore it is important to fight for equal rights.

WHAT CAN YOU DO?

Question and broaden role expectations: Role stereotypes (what is typical for a woman or a man) are not only found in computer games, they are something we encounter all over the place: in movies, on television or in everyday life in the family, at school, at work or in politics – stereotypes are often demonstrated in many forms, whether by accident or design. Try to view the depiction of gender images and the possibility of trying new roles in computer games as a chance to talk to you children about this topic. The favorite characters are often a good starting point. You can talk to you children about the following questions, for example:



Why did you choose this character? What do you like about it?



Which skills does the character have? Are these due to his or her gender?



Does it make a difference to you, whether you play a male or a female character?

Respect your fellow players: However, you should not stop after taking the first step! Encourage your child to try out different roles and test the possibilities and limitations. Also encourage teenagers to stand up for fairness towards fellow players and to condemn hate speech such as misogynistic, sexist or homophobic insults.

LINKTIPS

Gaming and Hate Speech

The brochure of the Amadeu Antonio Foundation sheds light on the various facets of hate speech and a fair social interaction on the web, e.g. regarding gender.

www.amadeu-antonio-stiftung.de/w/files/pdfs/gaming-internet-1.pdf



Additional information about computer games and „right to play“ can be found at www.games.jff.de.

BROCHURES ON OTHER TOPICS

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free of charge at games.jff.de.

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