

## Education Panel and Working Group

Panel chair: [Dorothy Singer](#), PhD, Yale University

Panel presenters:

[Joy Keiko Asamen](#), PhD, Pepperdine University

[Karen Dill](#), PhD, Lenoir-Rhyne College

[Susan McHale](#), PhD, Pennsylvania State University

Summit discussions on education evolved around three areas of concern: how different ethnic groups and diverse cultures are affected by video games, gender concerns and how females are depicted in and affected by video games, and the family context and parental perceptions of video gaming.

### Ethnicity and diverse cultures

Presenter: [Joy Keiko Asamen](#), PhD, Pepperdine University

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In terms of impact on different ethnicities and diverse cultures, video games appear to closely parallel television in content and usage. There are numerous multicultural concerns, including:

- Video games reflect the under-representation of diverse cultures found in general within media content. Similar to television content, video games have a predominant presence of young, white males in the content. The one exception is games developed in Southeast Asia feature Southeast Asian males. As has been observed with other forms of media, when members of ethnic groups are present in video games, the portrayals perpetuate negative images or present stereotyped characterizations.
- Ethnic minorities play more video games. The irony of the predominant white male content is that as a percentage of the population, ethnic minorities tend to have higher usage of media in general and a higher percentage who play video games.
- There is little diversity among video game developers. The video game content, with white males predominant, is a reflection of the game developers, who also tend to be young white males. In order to address multicultural concerns, the video gaming industry needs to develop opportunities and incentives to diversify software developers in video games.
- Media literacy is low, particularly among those most affected by video game effects. Because of the high percentage of video game users among ethnic minority populations, the need for media literacy is even greater. A central challenge in developing media literacy is to adapt the educational material for different ethnicities and to develop outreach programs that are effective in reaching targeted populations.

### Research Citations

[Asamen & Berry \(2003\)](#)

[Berry & Asamen \(2001\)](#)

[Kaiser Family Foundation Study \(2005\)](#)

### Gender concerns

Presenter: [Karen Dill](#), PhD, Lenoir-Rhyne College

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Gender stereotyping is common in video games and is even more exaggerated in video game advertising, which tends to highlight the most dramatic features of video game characters.

Research involving content analysis of video game advertisements identified these stereotypes:

- Depictions of violence are not only the norm for both sexes, but violence is consistently glamorized.

- Female characters were sexualized, scantily clad, objectified, disempowered, subjects of eroticized aggression and characterized in generally demeaning portrayals.
- Stereotypical female shapes were “curvaceously thin” body images, an unrealistic distortion of body types, which were extremely thin with medium-sized busts.
- Male characters tended to be hyper-masculine, portray dominance over female characters and were usually positioned with weapons.

### **Research Citations**

*Dill & Phillips (2006)*

*Harrison (2003)*

### **Family context and parental perceptions of video gaming**

Two perspectives were provided at the Summit on family context and parental perceptions of video gaming. Both presentations posed questions about how families make decisions in purchasing video games, usage of videos as entertainment, and opportunities for improving parental oversight of children’s video game playing.

#### **Family context**

Presenter: Susan McHale, PhD, Pennsylvania State University

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Youth consumers of video games must be understood within the family context, since the family context is a predominant influence on youth behavior. Parents create opportunities and set constraints for their children based on numerous environmental, socioeconomic and cultural influences. This has numerous implications for interventions in youth video game use, including these three considerations:

- Small changes have big influences over time: Parents may not realize the incremental changes in their children’s video gaming, in terms of hours played or access to age-inappropriate video games; although parents may believe that changing their children’s playing habits is hard to do, even small changes in family activities and routines may lead to big differences over time.
- Socioeconomic status may limit access to alternatives to video game playing. Children in unsafe neighborhoods may not have options to play outside. Parents who both work, particularly those working more than one job, may not have time, energy or financial capacity to provide their children with alternative activities.
- Parents may have different concepts of free time, depending on their culture or socioeconomic status. For example, some analyses suggest that higher social class families see free time as an opportunity for growth and skill building, so may be more likely to keep children busy with lessons, clubs and the like. In contrast, possibly because their lives are more stressful, working class families are more likely to see free time as a time to relax and unwind, for example, with “screen-based” activities.

A novel approach would be to develop video game playing that promotes positive development, including academic and social skills:

- Video games could teach math skills, writing, problem-solving and other positive attributes.
- Many parents would support video game alternatives to violent video games.

#### **Parental perceptions of video gaming**

Presenter: Craig A. Anderson, PhD, Iowa State University

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Given the consistent findings that violent video games can have harmful effects on youth, why or how would parents allow their children to have access to age-inappropriate video games?

Although there are numerous influences on parental perceptions, at least three factors lead parents to underestimate the harmful potential of violent video games:

- Parents reject media effects research findings. Parents may be aware of studies that show the risk of harm from violent video games, but choose to ignore these findings because such information is personally threatening. Parents deny their children could be among those youth who are negatively affected.
- Media reports downplay violent media effects research. Despite increasingly strong scientific evidence, news media stories have tended to become weaker over time.
- The video game industry denies media effects. In news media interviews, the designated national spokesperson for the U.S. video game industry association vehemently denies connections between violent video games and youth aggression.

## **Recommendations of the Education Working Group**

The Education Working Group was chaired by the panel chair,  
Dorothy Singer, PhD, Yale University

Members of the Education Working Group included:

Craig A. Anderson, PhD., Iowa State University

Joy Keiko Asamen, PhD, Pepperdine University

Karen Dill, PhD, Lenoir-Rhyne College

Jeanne B. Funk, PhD, University of Toledo

Marjorie Hogan, M.D., Hennepin County Medical Center, Associate Professor of Pediatrics,  
University of Minnesota

Bob McCannon, The Action Coalition for Media Education Susan McHale, PhD, Pennsylvania  
State University

Sheila Miller, Turn Off the Violence

Recommendations for education were developed under three general categories: implementing effective media literacy programs that would educate a broad array of publics about media, educating the public specifically about video games and the effects of violent video games, and diversifying video game development to increase the potential for positive outcomes from video gaming.

### **Media literacy programs:**

- Implement programs that should include evaluative longitudinal measures of both attitudes and behaviors.
- Develop methods consistent with most successful interventions available (involving parents in the intervention).
- Develop media literacy programs that are sensitive to different languages, cultures and reading levels.
- Begin media education as early in child's life as possible (prior to age 6).
- Use children's words in public media literacy campaigns.
- Focus media education on the affective route, with stories and statements that make stronger and longer-lasting impressions on people than cognitive, scientifically framed information.
- Work with teachers of sexual education and health textbook writers for junior and senior high schools to incorporate lessons that address distortions or misperceptions video games convey about sex.

### **Public education on video games:**

- Make the message of harm from violent video game playing more consistent within and among scientists, public health organizations, the video gaming industry, and educational institutions, particularly at the elementary school levels, to help parents and their children clearly understand violent video game effects.
- Reach parents and families in the workplaces and doctors' offices to convey the message about violent video game effects and media literacy.
- In addition to negative effects of violent video games, incorporate into video game ratings information for consumers about the potential beneficial effects of video games that offer positive attributes.
- Rather than focusing solely on restricting access to violent video games, policymakers may want to consider educational options to inspire parents and children to choose a variety of alternative activities.

**Diversifying video game development:**

- Promote educational efforts that will bring greater diversity of video game programmers, which could bring positive changes in video game content.
- Develop incentives for the development of more pro-social video game play and positive portrayals of female characters in video games
- Provide educational training to current video game programmers, who are predominantly male. An outreach program targeting college media departments and computer science programs could be helpful in conveying the ethics, social responsibility, and social effects regarding video games to the future programmers to facilitate the creation of more positive video games.