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STEREOTYPES IN VIDEO GAMES AND HOW THEY PERPETUATE PREJUDICE

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ABSTRACT

Systemic research has only recently begun to examine the psychological effects of video games on users. To date, only two studies have examined how the exaggerated stereotypes of minorities in these games affect those who play them. During both studies, game play was found to bring about increases of prejudice, even in users who in screening initially rated low in prejudicial thinking. Taking the theories of how learning and stereotypes work, this paper integrates theoretical approaches into existing research on video games in order to bring about more awareness of the effect of racist images of minorities in the video game industry.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Society is becoming more electronically connected, thanks to advancements in communication technologies such as computers and the Internet. The Internet is used to augment nearly all forms of social interaction (e.g., shopping, dating, business meetings, entertainment and much more). These technologies have not only begun to permeate all aspects of traditional human interaction, but they have also spurred myriad new forms of socialization. The video gaming industry has produced revenues of \$21 billion dollars in sales (Ortutay, 2009), making it more profitable than movies and television. Research shows that forty percent of Americans now regularly enjoy playing video games (Williams, Nicole, Consalvo, & Ivory, 2009).

Video games offer many possibilities for cheap and easy entertainment, ranging from free, to fees of sixty dollars per game. However, as with any such new technology, one must examine the psychological repercussions on players. This paper aims to explore

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how the stereotypes imbedded within video games may create racial prejudice, how these games might lead to overt discrimination against minorities, and how these games might lead to increased levels of verbal and physical aggression against minorities.

Many people have very little understanding of the dangers of racial stereotypes, and yet such stereotypes have large influences on behavior. For example, Devine (1989) showed how prejudices are acquired. In his research participants were “primed” (activating particular associations in memory) by subliminal presentations of stereotypic or non-stereotypic terms associated with the “Blacks are aggressive” stereotype (Devine, 1989). For some of the study’s participants, the terms they were primed with were mostly stereotypic words (e.g., “hostile”, “gangster”, “Black”), whereas for the other participants they were not (e.g., “table,” “TV,” “apple”). After they were primed with the words to which no participants could identify when asked, they were asked to read a paragraph describing a man named “Darryl.” In the paragraph, “Darryl” behaved in a manner that could have been interpreted as either assertive or aggressive (e.g., he demanded his car be fixed the same day it was brought in for service). Then all participants rated “Darryl” on terms consistent with the idea of aggression. Devine (1989) reasoned that because participants were aware of the terms associated with the Black-Aggressive stereotype, they would perceive Darryl to be aggressive. Devine (1989) concluded that participants used this stereotypic information automatically.

It is possible that the same process of being primed with trait terms or images occurs through exposure to certain media, especially video games. Because our memory system is a web of associations, and priming is the awaking or activating of certain associations, priming thought, even without awareness, can influence other thoughts, or even resulting actions (Myers, 2012).

Stereotyping in video games is a relatively new subject in psychological studies, and this topic is beginning to raise many questions about the effect these games may have on human cognition. This paper will investigate what effect these games could be perpetuating in relation to racial stereotypes and prejudice, and inversely, whether the games help to perpetuate a colorblind at-

titude toward White-group privilege. The goal will be to provide an overview to illustrate the need for further research in this area, along with the existing research studies.

Stereotypes, prejudice, and discrimination

According to Myers (2012), stereotyping, in life or in video games, is a by-product of our attempt to simplify and understand the world around us. When we stereotype people we simplify them into groups. Clustering people into fixed categories exaggerates the similarities within a group and their differences from other groups (Macrae & Bodenhausen, 2000). The culture one is born into exerts great influence over an individual's life. Culture ideas transfer from generation to generation, so stereotypes about groups remain powerful. Today, stereotypes in video games have become a popular part of the culture. With that in mind, what are the stereotypes players are exposed to when playing these games?

Unlike television or movies, stereotypes in video games offer a much more dynamic element, for they allow people to pretend to be a different person. Stereotypes in the video games move plotlines and stories and action; by incorporating these stereotypes, the characters develop much more quickly and allow the story to move faster, instead of developing detailed backgrounds for heroes and villains (Hoppenstand, 1983). Stereotypical characters exaggerate the differences between racial groups. For example, research by Karylowski, Nauk, Motes, Curry, & Liempd (1993), used a modification of the Stroop color-naming task to investigate spontaneous, unintentional categorization based on race. Participants were presented with names of African American and Caucasian celebrities. The names were written either in black, white, green, or blue fonts against a background of a different color (Karylowski et al., 1993). The experimental task was to name the font color. Researchers reasoned that because "black" and "white" are terms commonly used in colloquial English as both color-labels and race-labels, they create a spontaneous categorization of African Americans and Caucasians, respectively. As expected, identifying font color as "black" would be faster when the name of an African-American target was presented in that font, than when the

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name of a Caucasian target was presented. Similarly, identifying white font color was also faster when a name of a Caucasian target was presented in that font. Through the process of social categorization, the media will use a stereotype to progress the story by using these exaggerations and exploitation; this forgoes the need to develop a detailed background and story for every character, (Geist, 1983). This is a very common tool for media outlets, and has been used in storytelling for generations. However, this may be perpetuating and promoting the reinforcement of negative stereotypes one may hold against minority groups.

Stereotypical thinking occurs during the social categorization of a group of people (Hoppenstand, 1983). This categorizing is a basic cognitive strategy that allows people to better cope with the vast quantity of information they are constantly being bombarded with at any given moment (Brown, 1995). In the service of mental efficiency, we utilize *schemas* (a more general form of stereotyping) to organize this information (Whitley & Kite, 2010). *Schemas* are cognitive structures that contain a person's knowledge and beliefs about a particular object or social group. Schemas influence our interpretation and interactions with groups (Whitley & Kite, 2010.) One gains this knowledge through various sources, including parents and peers. In modern society, one of the most powerful sources of stereotypes is the media and video games.

Stereotypes used in video games are created from two distinct areas. One area is culture. From generation to generation these stereotypes are embedded into our culture. They come from socialization, beliefs, values, and social norms, stemming from one's family unit, church, school, and most importantly, the popular media (Allport, 1954). The second source explains the beliefs even further. Stereotypes may reflect reality, and a group may indeed have some aspects of the stereotypical belief, and this leads to the common acceptance of the stereotype. This process is known as the "kernel of truth" (Allport, 1954, p. 195).

Stereotypes, like those used in video games, are the underlying biases of prejudice. Prejudice occurs when a person holds a preconceived judgment of a group and its members (Myers, 2012). Negative stereotypes can lead to negative prejudice

(e.g., a person who thinks Hispanics migrate illegally does not like Hispanic waiters), and positive stereotypes can lead to positive prejudices (e.g., a person who thinks Asians are good at math likes working with Asians on engineering tasks (Devine, 1989). People stereotype because doing so is cognitively easy (Myers, 2013).

Stereotypes and prejudices are used, in part, because they are types of *heuristic* reasoning. *Heuristics* are shortcuts to thinking based upon the easy, fit, or message issues. Research on the retrieval fluency heuristic has shown that things that are easy to think of are used more often than things that are difficult to think of when making judgments (Tversky & Kahneman, 1973). One good example of how the availability heuristic works is the finding that most people in the United States believe that gun violence causes more deaths than cancer. However, this claim is false. Cancer causes more deaths. This misperception likely exists because gun related deaths are covered in greater frequency and detail than stories about other causes of death (e.g., heart disease or cancer). This disproportionate reporting facilitates a perception in the minds of many that the gun violence is more prevalent than objective data indicate.

Additionally, information that is more easily recalled to conscious awareness is preferred over information that requires greater cognitive effort (Tversky & Kahneman, 1973). Research by Gabrielcik and Fazio (1984) on the availability heuristic also shows similar results. In their research, participants were asked to identify four words out of forty flashed words, each containing the letter T. Participants primed with T words identified the word presented in each trial and were asked to judge the occurrence of letters (Gabrielcik and Fazio, 1984). Results show that participants primed with the letter T judged that letter to occur more frequently than did unprimed participants (Gabrielcik and Fazio, 1984). Their research also suggests that the mediating process underlying use of the availability heuristic is based on ease of retrieval for frequency estimation. This shows that the more images affect how we think, the more we assume they represent the truth (1984). This can be applied to stereotypes in video games.

Stereotypes frequently repeated in today's modern media, as well as in video games, become internalized. They ultimate-

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ly shape one's identity and help build the individual's sense of self (Kellner, 1995). However, unlike television or movies, video games allow a player to "become" a game character. When one has assumed a virtual identity and interacted repeatedly with other characters, the stereotypes in video games begin to stimulate a new level of racist reinforcement. Interactions between these characters, which include full-fledged exaggerations of group traits, need critical examination, especially when the majority of these games are created by white males who may be building their embedded unconscious biases into the games (Leonard, 2003).

Stereotypes in video games both lead to and underlie prejudices; in fact, a prejudiced thought is a preconceived negative judgment about a group and its members (Myers, 2012). A prejudice is an attitude that generates an action. Easily remembered things are what Myers (2012) calls the "ABC's" of *attitudes*, *affect* (feelings), *behavior tendency* (inclination to act), and *cognition* (beliefs). Someone who is prejudiced may dislike a group member and behave in a discriminating manner, for example, believing the person to be ignorant and dangerous for no realistic reason (Myers, 2012, p. 36).

These prejudices may be accurate, inaccurate, or over-generalized, but when they also lead to a preconceived negative attitude, they may also lead to discrimination. Racism and sexism also refer to individuals' prejudicial attitudes or discriminatory behavior, and may lead to oppressive institutional practices, even if they are not intentionally prejudiced (Myers, 2012). Prejudice exists in subtle and unconscious guises, as well as overt and conscious forms. These lead to institutional practices against subordinate people of a given race (Myers, 2012).

Videogames as Learning and Reward Systems

The way we grow and develop socially is a complex process involving multiple factors such as our genes, physical environment, exposure to chemicals, parental influence (rearing), and cultural influences. The frontal cortices of the brain help us with associative expression, especially in cultural situations (Adolphs, 1999). During video game play the brain releases dopamine,

which plays an important role in both learning and behavior reinforcement (Weber, Ritterfeld, & Mathiak, 2006).

Research by Weber, Ritterfeld, and Mathiak (2006), tried to capture the antisocial effects of violent video game playing by using the combined methodologies of communication (micro content analysis of game play), and neuroscience (micro fMRI analysis of neural patterns during game play). Participants were observed playing a latest-generation violent video game. By using an applied within-subject, event-related, functional magnetic resonance imaging (fMRI) study design, participants' brain activity patterns were matched with the game play, which allowed for distinguishing between actions involving virtual violence and actions in which virtual violence was absent (Weber et al., 2006). Each participant's game play was recorded and content analyzed on a frame-by-frame basis. Comparing nonviolent to violent games, they found an active suppression of affective areas such as the Rostral Anterior Cingulate Cortex and the amygdala, as well as increased activity in the Dorsal Anterior Cingulate Cortex (Weber et al., 2006). Findings from Ritterfeld & Mathiak (2006) revealed parallel neural patterns between highly immersive virtual environments and real experiences. Here, virtual violence is able to activate the same brain patterns that are present when people have aggressive thoughts or a pronounced tendency to act aggressively (Weber, et al., 2006). They indicated that virtual violence in video game playing results in neural patterns that are considered characteristic of aggressive cognition and behavior (Weber et al., 2006). They also speculate that it is possible that the neural patterns of the Anterior Cingulate Cortex represent a mechanism to suppress social emotions (such as empathy), so that the individual can play the game successfully (Weber et al., 2006). As a result, game players can learn to act negatively toward others with natural chemical reinforcement (e.g., dopamine), and without any innate corrections on such behavior (e.g., no social emotions).

Computer video game playing may lead to long-term changes in the reward area of the brain, resembling the effects of substance dependence (Weinstein & Malkiel, 2010). Weinstein and Malkiel examined brain images and they compared

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video game usage between drug users and non-gamers. Their research showed that healthy control subjects displayed reduction of dopamine receptor occupancy of 10.5% in the caudate receptor after playing a motorbike computer video game, compared with baseline levels of binding consistent with increased release and binding to its receptors (Weinstein & Malkiel, 2010). According to the study, former chronic “ecstasy” users showed no change in levels of dopamine receptor occupancy after playing the video game (Weinstein & Malkiel, 2010). This supports the notion that psycho-stimulant users have decreased sensitivity to natural rewards, and computer video game addicts may also show reduced dopamine response to stimuli associated with their addiction (2010). This would also suggest that video games may actually cause people to experience natural rewards, and like those of a drug addiction, regular doses of a game may become less rewarding. This could create the need for more intense game play, or increased playtime. Video game dependency has also been shown to cause symptoms of withdrawal, anxiety, depression, lack of sociability and aggression (Liu, Su, & He, 2001).

A different research study found that younger men were most likely to engage in problematic use of video games, and usage of massive multiplayer online role-playing games (Mentzoni, et al., 2011). Though the majority of high frequency players preferred other game types, the use of video games was associated with lower scores in life satisfaction surveys and with elevated levels of anxiety and depression (Mentzoni, et al., 2011).

Integration of the Literature

The human brain does not reach full maturity until one reaches the age of about twenty-four (Spear, 2000). Stereotypes in video games may impact the cognitive development of an adolescent. There is little research on the long-term effects of video game playing, and any negative research involving video games faces a formidable foe in the multi-billion dollar video game industry. One of the few research studies on stereotypes in video games tested the effects of gaming with the psychological weapons test (Burgess, Dill, Stermer, Burgess, & Brown 2011). What Burgess

et al. (2011) found was that students quickly correlated weapons to black characters, after watching games depicting black characters. Their research is the first to show a direct link between gaming and reality. It should also be noted that none of the participants had shown high ratings of prejudice during screening, and as Burgess et al. (2011) explain, these games seem to create unconscious reactions in players. Because video games contain many of the elements required for a learning tool, they appear to imbed effective learning principles in highly rousing contexts and display the potential to teach skills, such as “systems-thinking, strategic problem solving and interpretative analysis” (Torres, 2006). However, the majority of video games available to the consumer contain violent and racially stereotypical material.

In many games, the minority characters seem to be built around many negative or cultural stereotypes. Research by Burgess et al. (2011), found that after studying over 149 games, one hundred percent of Black males were portrayed as either athletic, violent, or both (Burgess et al., 2011). Research has also shown information in these fictional stories persists in the minds of gamers, indicating that such beliefs are perceived as reality (Appel & Richter, 2007). Over time these stereotypes have the potential to alter the way gamers think and behave offline (Burgess et al., 2011). By simplifying our environment and creating categories on the traits people share, we place them in categories that we call *social groups* (Macrae & Bodenhausen, 2000).

Research by Leonard (2003), shows specifically how characters in these games are represented, suggesting that male characters in video games (63%) were likely to engage in physical acts (Leonard, 2003, p. 2). Female characters could engage in the same mission as men, and may even be equals in strength, but would often be sexualized, with over 21% shown with exposed breasts or buttocks. When evaluating race in video game characters, 56% of all characters were human and White (Leonard, 2003). African Americans made up the second largest group, at 22% (Leonard, 2003). Children’s games contained either white or non-human characters, exclusively (Leonard, 2003). Second, 87% of heroes were white; Latino characters appeared only in sports

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games. Some 70% of all Asian characters were combatants, and 83% of all African American characters were sports competitors (Leonard, 2003).

The white characters in non-sport games were most likely to use weapons, African Americans were more likely to use verbal aggression with screaming, insults and vulgar expressions (Leonard, 2003). In sports games, nearly 80% of African Americans engaged in physical and verbal aggression, unlike only 57% of White characters (Leonard, 2003).

These stereotypes in video games can actually influence offline prejudices, as shown by a study that examined the correlation between racial representations in violent video games and associations towards aggression and stereotyping (Cicchirillo & Vincent, 2010). Participants played one of two games, "Grand Theft Auto: III" or "Grand Theft Auto: San Andreas." "Grand Theft Auto: San Andreas" was deemed to be laden with stereotypical images of African-Americans, and therefore might influence outcomes related to stereotyping more clearly than a game that lacked racial representations, "Grand Theft Auto" (Cicchirillo & Vincent, 2010). An implicit association task (IAT) was used in order to measure whether those individuals who had played "Grand Theft Auto: San Andreas" were primed with stereotypical associations of African-Americans. The IAT results suggested that participants who played a video game with racial representations were more likely to believe stereotypical associations than those who played a game lacking such representations (Cicchirillo & Vincent, 2010).

A study by Dill and Burgess (2012) used video game images, and images of politicians to explore how media exemplars of Black masculinity influence the views and intentions toward other Black men. Their study compared the effects of exposure to Black video game characters fitting the exemplar of "thug" or "street criminal" in "Grand Theft Auto San Andreas," to images of professional Black men, such as political leaders, and evaluations of an unknown and unrelated Black or White political candidate, on pro-Black attitudes (Dill and Burgess, 2012). The results revealed significant interactions of exemplar type and candidate race on favorability and capability candidate ratings, and on pro-

Black attitudes. This research demonstrates the power of mass media exemplars, stereotypes in video games, and of Black masculinity to prime meaningfully different outcomes in viewers (Dill and Burgess, 2012).

Women, despite ethnicity, seem to suffer as well when it comes to stereotypical representation in video games. Research by Williams et al. (2009) found that in forty percent of the games studied no female characters were present; if they did have a role, it was usually a secondary character. Women are overly sexualized in these games and often are endowed with enormous breasts, small waists, and large or exposed buttocks. They are also relegated to background roles, or have no meaningful value as characters in the game (Burgess, et al., 2011).

Online Deviance towards Women

Issues of hyper-masculinity, sexism, and of hostile response by male gamers to the expression of a female identity, or femininity, encourages the privileging of masculinity over femininity, and discourages women from engaging in ungendered discourse within online gaming communities (Salter & Blodgett, 2012). Gray's (2012) research shows that the online community known as Xbox Live offers games featuring the extreme abasement of minority women. Women video game players also experience discrimination when they attempt to enter these gaming communities (Gray, 2012).

Women of color, in particular, face intersecting oppressions when in mainstream video gaming. Gray's (2012) research reveals that female players are linguistically profiled, based on how they sound. Specifically, Latina women in the Xbox Live community experience racism, sexism, and even heterosexism if identified as a sexual minority. African-American women experience sexism due to their race and gender. Gray's 2012 study reveals that these women form groups within the video gaming community by creating their own clans, and restrict membership of these groups to other women. The purpose of such groups depends on the oppressions experienced by the women within the space (Gray, 2012).

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Group Privilege and the Colorblind World of the Internet

Many video games not only perpetuate every major stereotype affecting minorities and women (Burgess, Dill, Stermer, Burgess, & Brown 2011), they also perpetuate a pro-white culture in regards to online social gaming, communally known as *massive multi-player games* (Gray, 2012). Group privilege and white privilege, as defined by Whitley and Kite (2009), is as simple as not having to think about race at all. For members of the dominant group these beliefs are normal. From buying a house, car, or driving around wherever one wants, Whites never have to consider race to be an issue (Whitley and Kite, 2009). Minority groups do not share in this luxury. This group privilege is an unearned, favored state, confirmed on certain races, genders, social classes, and even sexual orientations, and extends heavily into the world not only of video games, but also into the socially connected virtual worlds born from our new modern technologies (Whitley and Kite, 2009). This virtual world not only accepts the fact that these video game developers are blind to these issues of race, they also perpetuate such ideas (Gray, 2012).

Whitley and Kite (2009) describe *colorblind thinking* as the belief that people should ignore racial and ethnic group membership in their dealing with other people, and this belief appeals to traditional American values. Pretending race and ethnicity do not exist allows them to believe there are no problems. This makes race taboo, and by pretending race does not exist, it makes dealing with the related problems to group membership unpopular, only furthering the cause of the dominant culture (Whitley and Kite, 2009). This leads to racially discriminatory behavior. Multiple examples of these interrelated themes have been exposed by past research. The game “Everquest” includes a massive multiplayer online role-playing game, featuring a race called the “Erudites.” The “Erudites” were placed on a segregated continent that was smaller and less appealing than that of the white characters’ continent. When the sequel “Everquest II” was released, the “Erudites” were drastically changed into a skeletal Caucasoid race that was almost extraterrestrial in looks (Higgins, 2009). This change signaled a re-privileged whiteness, giving the narrative the valu-

ation of one race over the other (Gray, 2011). Kolko (2000) was surprised that in online gaming, where aspects of identity such as gender and class were so dramatized, ethnicity was absent altogether. Kolko (2000) points out that the internet is far from a liberatory space; it serves as a cultural map of assumed whiteness. Gray (2011) points out that when there is an attempt to make race and ethnicity present, it is met with resistance.

Player Perception

Gillentine (2007) went beyond video game content and directly addressed the concerns of how players perceive and accept stereotypes portrayed in video games. The participants in his study represented a clear spectrum from those who had “never played,” to those who “played as a child,” to those who “played on a daily basis” (Gillentine, 2007). The frequency of game play appeared to have no impact on the awareness level. Players were just as likely as non-players to have been exposed to stereotypes within video games (Gillentine, 2007). Both groups indicated their awareness of an excessive use of racial and gender stereotypes. The majority of respondents believed the games presented racial groups in standard stereotypical ways. The respondents also acknowledged that the images could be misinterpreted by younger players, a feeling shared by the non-players (Gillentine, 2007).

Non-players were very alarmed by the modern day images depicted in video games and expressed great concern for the impression left on a player of any age (Gillentine, 2007). Only a few of the non-players recognized the video game visual aids. They commented on the level of detail in the design of characters, but were more captivated by the extreme use of stereotypes, especially toward black people (Gillentine, 2007). They consistently noted the correlation made between young black males and gang membership (Gillentine, 2007). These thoughts were based on character appearance, behavior, and speech. Others noted that white characters were typically portrayed as well dressed, Hispanics were shown driving low rider cars while wearing bandanas, and Black people were engaged in the majority of acts of violence (Gillentine, 2007).

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Possible Positive Effects

There are some positive aspects to video games. Theoretically, if minorities were to be displayed in a more positive light, this should also have an effect on players' perceptions of reality. Research by Greitemeyer and Osswald (2010) examined the "prosocial" effects of video games under the hypothesis that playing a "prosocial" (relative to a "neutral") video game increases helpful behavior in players. Participants who played a "prosocial" video game were more likely to help the researcher pick up spilled pencils and were more likely to help an "harassed" experimenter towards the end of the study (Greitemeyer and Osswald, 2010). By using these different types of "prosocial" behavior, they verified that such video games increased both unrequested and requested assistance, as well as low-cost and high-cost helping from players (Greitemeyer and Osswald, 2010). These results were observed when participants played the video games for a relatively brief time period (Greitemeyer and Osswald, 2010). It appears that the behavioral effects of video game play occur primarily through the cognitive route, thus influencing both negative and positive outcomes (Greitemeyer and Osswald 2010).

DISCUSSION

Ideas about minority groups, such as African Americans and women, are often created and sustained by the accessibility of information about the groups. The constructs we form about others are more deeply engrained when they are reinforced repeatedly and often (Leonard, 2003). Thus, stereotypes in popular video games may have a powerful affect on the thinking of White Americans.

Theoretically, a video game that contains extremely exaggerated stereotypes of African Americans, such as "Grand Theft Auto: San Andreas for example," will result in a player becoming more likely to recall negative information about African Americans, when compared to those who play "prosocial" games, such as "Mario Brothers" (Leonard, 2003). Considering the cognitive effects on players (Weinstein & Malkiel, 2010), exposure to racial and sexual stereotypes may lead to the formation of prejudices damaging both to the players and to minorities.

Taking into consideration the results of the above research, it appears that stereotypes embedded within video games do, in fact, perpetuate prejudice. At this time there is only one empirical study done on stereotypes influenced by video gaming, and in that study participants watched only clips from “Grant Theft Auto: San Andreas” and “Mario Brothers” (Burgess et al., 2011). Though it was noted that respondents all demonstrated low levels of prejudice at the outset of play, repeated exposure to stereotypes in video games revealed changes in their attitudes towards minorities (Burgess, et al., 2011).

Stereotypes in video games hinder years of progress toward reducing racial prejudice and sexism. The problem with studying this area, especially in regards to the virtual world that massive multi-player games provides is that it is a quickly changing, enormous undertaking. Because the study of stereotypes in video games is new to the field of Psychology, methods for testing all of the ramifications that these games may have on an individual’s prejudice is going to require a rigorous process. More research must be developed to measure the extent and effect of stereotypes in the development of prejudice. Replication of the studies discussed above should be carried out on a larger scale and applied to other groups, to strengthen the associations found in the results (Burgess et al., 2011; Dill, & Burgess, 2012; Cicchirillo & Vincent, 2010). With video games growing in popularity in today’s society, we must become aware of their repercussions.

The goal of this research was to show that video games influence prejudice, and that existing models of research all seem to support this theory. However, one of the limitations of the research in this current study is that there is no current empirical study that examines the long-term effects of video games on prejudice. An experimental study that examines video game users over a long period of time would be a valid course of action within this subject. If such a study were to be conducted, perhaps on non-players, it can be theorized that the stereotypes within a game such as “Grand Theft Auto: San Andreas” would, in fact, increase players’ own prejudicial attitudes. Thus, it is important that research in this area continues.

The first step to changing a stereotype is awareness, and the same can be said for group privilege. The video game industry

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has an ethical responsibility to address these issues. With this in mind, companies that develop and publish video games may wish to hold seminars for their workers, to raise awareness of how their work may affect minorities in everyday life. Ultimately, however, responsibility lies with the consumer for any real change. Public outcry can lead to change. First, however, attention must be focused on the effects of stereotypes in video games and the repercussions of these effects.

CONCLUSION

Stereotypes in video games are very likely to play a role in the attitudes that many Americans hold about minorities in the United States. While the video game industry is a business and dollars drive it, one needs to explore the ethical issues of the industry. Bringing about awareness is the first step, and perhaps mandating developers to undergo sensitivity classes, and to be held accountable for their work, could help bring about some change. Ultimately, it is up to players and non-players alike to push the industry to change.

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