

## **The Image of Amusement Arcades and Differences in Male and Female Video Game Playing**

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Until quite recently amusement arcades—at least as perceived by some persons—appeared to be hangouts, places where persons wasted time, sought sexual and drug contact, or otherwise disported themselves in dubious fashion. In recent years, however, arcades have taken on a new image in large part because of their location in suburban shopping malls.<sup>1</sup> The new image has been deliberately fostered and is designed to convey the idea that arcades are wholesome places of amusement for the entire family. In some arcades, for example, there are signs which state that smoking, drinking and eating are prohibited. Typical of the contemporary mall arcade are the following statements taken from signs posted in several midwestern arcades.<sup>2</sup>

...For the sales clerk, the young boy with adventure on his mind, the middle aged man with adventure behind him, game machines turn a drab existence into action packed adventures....

**And**

**Super Student Special**  
Two free (Game) Tokens for every "A" on current  
Report Card

**And**

**Businessman's Special**  
11 A.M.— 2 P.M.  
Take A Break From The Office  
Just Present Your Business Card  
To The Attendant And Receive  
Free Play On Any 25¢ Machine

These appeals are altogether congenial to American values and are appeals that are designed to reinforce a wholesome and respectable image.

With the recent success of commercial video games which have virtually displaced pinball games the attempt to create a positive image has been more and more evident.<sup>3</sup> What is involved, of course, is very substantial amounts of money and it has been in the interest of those who run arcades to dispel the former negative image and to encourage a positive image. For the amusement industry as a whole and including manufacturers of video games there are millions at stake.<sup>4</sup>

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The attempt to create a positive image where all members of a family might feel comfortable has had to contend with the negative image which in part still hovers over arcades.<sup>5</sup> Recently there has been a strong attempt to restrict patronage among the very young who are seen as wasting both enormous amounts of time and money playing video games not only in arcades but in grocery stores, drug stores, restaurants, ice cream parlors and the like.<sup>6</sup>

Despite efforts made to attract all family members, male patrons still far outnumber female patrons. Female patronage probably does not exceed ten to fifteen percent.

To inquire further into differences between male and female patronage and the relationship between these differences and the image of arcades, the author of this paper observed video play for a period of eight hours at two mall arcades. Records were made of the sex of persons playing two of the more popular video games during heavy weekend play both mornings and evenings. One of the games was *Asteroids*, the most popular game in 1980, and *Pac-Man*, the most popular game in 1981.<sup>7</sup>

These observations revealed that male playing far exceed female playing, about 80% to 20%. Apparently the larger than expected number of females was due to the fact that *Pac-Man* does not deal with violence or war. Furthermore, *Pac-Man* is more easily mastered and controlled than some of the other video games, say, for example, *Asteroids*, which demands considerable more skill than *Pac-Man*. Lest this be considered a sexist conclusion, it should be pointed out that in 1981 a survey conducted by this author of 430 male and female college students, women acknowledged their lower level of skill in video game playing as compared to men—a difference it may be added—that was statistically significant.<sup>8</sup>

The question that arose was why is there this significant difference between male and female participation and to what degree might the negative image which arcades have might contribute to it.

To pursue the question of negative image a questionnaire was administered to 144 college students who were taking a freshman course in introductory sociology. The students were called upon to respond to six items that were designed to elicit their attitudes about arcade respectability.

The frequency distributions of response to the questionnaire items cross tabulated by sex were as follows:

#### 1. Respectable Women Should Avoid Arcades

	Male	Female	
Yes	8 18.6%	11 18.6%	19 18.6%
No	35 81.4%	48 81.4%	83 81.4%
	43 42.2%	59 57.8%	102 100.0%

$$P = > .05$$

2. Arcades Are Sleazy

	Male	Female	
Yes	9 18.4%	6 10.5%	15 14.2%
No	40 81.6%	51 89.5%	91 85.8%
	49 46.2%	57 53.8%	106 100.0%

P = > .05

3. People Go To Arcades To Make Sexual Contact

	Male	Female	
Yes	3 8.1%	3 5.7%	6 6.7%
No	34 91.9%	50 94.3%	84 93.3%
	37 41.1%	53 58.9%	90 100.0%

P = > .05

4. People Go To Arcades to Buy Drugs

	Male	Female	
Yes	9 23.1%	7 15.9%	16 19.3%
No	30 76.9%	37 84.1%	67 80.7%
	39 47.0%	44 53.0%	83 100.0%

P = > .05

## 5. Arcades Are Fun Places

	Male	Female	
Yes	46 88.5%	48 85.7%	94 87.0%
No	6 11.5%	8 14.3%	14 13.0%
	52 48.1%	56 51.9%	108 100.0%

$P = > .05$

## 6. Organized Crime (The Mafia, etc.) Probably Control Most Arcades

	Male	Female	
Yes	7 18.4%	9 18.8%	16 18.6%
No	31 81.6%	39 81.3%	70 81.4%
	38 44.2%	48 55.8%	86 100.0%

$P = > .05$

If one looks at the total number of both male and female respondents, and ignores those who expressed no opinion, it is noteworthy that a large majority of the respondents view the amusement arcade positively, the majority in most instances varying around 80%. For example, Item 1, *Respectable Women Should Avoid Arcades*, elicited a response of 81.4% no and 18.6% yes from 192 respondents. Similarly, of the 106 persons who responded to Item 2, *Arcades Are Sleazy*, 85.8% said no and 14.2% said yes. The responses to the items dealing with fun, sex, drugs and organized crime also were consistent with what may be called a positive image of the amusement arcade. If one assumes that those respondents not expressing an opinion have neither a positive nor a negative image, then on the basis of the combined male and female responses of those who did express opinions one may conclude that arcades are viewed as having a positive image. On the other hand, the range of negative responses, that is from 6.7% for sexual contact to 19.6% for drug contact, suggest that a fair sized minority still views the amusement arcade negatively.

But what of male and female differences? Do males and females view arcades differently and if so, how might this cast light on the image of arcades and might it also be explanatory of the differences in male and female patronage at amusement arcades?

Inspection of the cross tabulations of male and female responses in Tables 1 through 6 reveals that differences are slight. In fact, chi square calculations for all six items yielded not a single statistically significant difference. That is, the slight differences could have occurred by chance. These results suggest that the difference between male and female participation at arcades is not related to the image of the arcade as being sleazy or lacking in respectability but related to something else—possibly having its basis in the differences between male and female socialization and especially with differences in the roles of men and women as these are defined by conventional socialization.<sup>9</sup>

In order to inquire further into the basis for male and female differences in arcade patronage, an open-ended question pertaining to video game playing at arcades was administered to 49 of the college students. Twenty were male and 29 were female. The open-ended question was worded as follows:

The shopping malls in Toledo have arcades where video games and pinball machines are to be found. Usually there are far more males than females. Why do you think more males than females play these games?

Since virtually all contemporary amusement arcade games are video games (with a few pinball games) it was assumed that a question concerning differences in male and female video playing might provide additional understanding about differences in male and female arcade patronage.

In response to the open-ended item the twenty-nine women offered seventy-four reasons for the differences between male and female video game playing in arcades. Some of the reasons were related to the characteristics of men and some to the characteristics of women. The twenty men provided forty-one reasons applying similarly to either men or women.

For women, the reason attributed most often to men is what might be labeled a machismo syndrome, that is, a combination of aggressiveness, competitiveness, challenge and a desire to prove one's self. There were 26 such references of 35% of the female responses. The men ascribed this machismo motivation to themselves fifteen times which came to 36% of the total male responses. Men and women both were apparently alike in invoking the machismo motivation of men. The second most frequent reason cited by women was women's reluctance to waste money. Fifteen references were made to the female disinclination to waste money. Rather, it was claimed, women prefer to shop for—as one respondent put it—"logical material" things like clothing. The men on the other hand seldom made reference to a waste of time or money. Of the three male comments about money, one was a suggestion that "men worry less about money" and two were suggestions that women viewed video playing as a waste of money. Both male and female respondents felt that men were sports minded, liked games and that male and female values differ. And this they attributed to the way males were socialized in contrast to females.

Most salient among women—apart from ascribing the machismo motive to men and emphasizing their own concern about wasting money—was the acknowledgment that women were more concerned with feminine

things, that is, feminine things as conventionally understood. Apparently women—notwithstanding the influence of the contemporary feminist movement—much prefer to spend their time when in a shopping mall in shopping rather than in “foolish” video game playing.

Apart from the machismo motivation which the men ascribed to themselves, there were several additional responses that may help to explain the greater preference for video game playing by men. And these responses also appear to emphasize differences in male and female socialization. For example: “Men are game oriented.” “Men like the machine and science aspect of video games” and “Men are not concerned about what others think.”

On the basis of the returns on the questionnaire it can be concluded that a large majority of the respondents—both male and female—did not view the amusement arcade as having a negative image. The fact that a substantially smaller number of females than males patronize video game arcades appears to be related, not to a negative arcade image but to the way males are reared. Something as trivial as pink blankets for female infants and blue blankets for male infants is elaborated with the passage of time into sometimes contradictory role expectations for females and males. What eventually emerges is different gender identities and role-appropriate behaviors.

Differential treatment and expectations of parents for sons and daughters, peer pressures to conform to appropriate gender behavior and sex role stereotyping in children’s literature and school textbooks—documented so often in research dealing with gender identity—were reflected in the respondents’ “explanation” of why more males than females play video games in amusement arcades.<sup>10</sup> Both male and female respondents attributed the greater preference for video playing by males to the machismo syndrome. On the other hand, females were seen as being more interested in activities conventionally defined as being appropriate to females and revealed especially in the many female references to shopping as being preferable to video playing in mall arcades.

## Notes

<sup>1</sup>Arcades and video game locales have so proliferated that they are found literally everywhere: shopping malls, restaurants, bars, bowling alleys, grocery stores, department stores, airports, drug stores, etc. In this research emphasis is given to shopping mall arcades.

<sup>2</sup>The signs cited were posted in two arcades in Toledo, Ohio.

<sup>3</sup>Attempts to create a positive image have had to contend increasingly with the ostensible negative consequences of video playing especially as manifest in attempts to restrict the video playing of children and adolescents both in this country and abroad.

<sup>4</sup>According to a report by *Time Magazine*, January 18, 1982, p. 51, 20 billion quarters “poured last year into the arcade monsters.” In addition: “while they spent this 5 billion dollars, video game addicts also were spending 75,000 man-years playing the machines.”

<sup>5</sup>For an account of the history of the reputation of arcades especially as associated with pinball games, see Edward Trapunski, *Special When Lit*, Garden City, New York: Doubleday, 1979.

<sup>6</sup>See *Time Magazine*, January 18, 1982, p. 52, for an account of attempts to restrict video play by passage of a municipal ordinance typical of ordinances passed elsewhere in the country.

<sup>7</sup>*Pac Man* was so popular in 1981-1982 that two paperbacks were published providing advice on how *Pac Man* might be mastered.

<sup>8</sup>See S.J. Kaplan and W. Beckham, “Videos: Differences Between Male and Female Players,” *Play Meter*, Vol. 8, No. 4, Feb. 15, 1982.

<sup>9</sup>Differences between male and female socialization are widely documented. See, for example, Kay F. Schaffer, *Sex Roles and Human Behavior*, Cambridge, Massachusetts: Winthrop Publishers, Inc., 1981.

<sup>10</sup>*Ibid.*, ch. 3 and 4, p. 75-145.



Even with the growth of modern shopping centers, the Japanese open air market is still as popular as it was many years ago. A look at this traditional way of shopping is featured on "Open Air Markets/Underground Malls," fourth in the series JAPAN TODAY.

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Music is an important part of a Japanese child's school day. An inside look at Japan's educational system is featured on "Young Jiro: A Day at a Japanese School," fifth in the series JAPAN TODAY.

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