

Source:

Jones, S. (2003). "Let the games begin: Gaming technology and entertainment among college students". Retrieved March 3rd, 2010, from <http://www.pewinternet.org/Reports/2003/Let-the-games-begin-Gaming-technology-and-college-students.aspx>

Surprisingly, slightly more women than men reported playing computer and online games (approximately 60% women compared to 40% men) while about the same number of men and women reported playing video games. Part of the reason more women than men play computer games may be that video games are generally focused on action and adventure (often violent in nature), while computer games are typically traditional games (*e.g.* solitaire, board games). Video games are also often rigid in their game options and narrative structure. In most video games the types of characters one can choose are pre-set by the game designers, and gender roles are stereotyped and exaggerated. Computer games generally do not require the player to choose a character. Online games may be more popular for women than men partly because gender can be disguised and manipulated in an online game, and because online gaming sites specifically designed for women can provide a comfortable gaming environment. The racial profile of college student gamers is roughly similar to the overall college student population, with a slight skew toward non-white students playing games in comparison to the overall population (Table 1).

Computer games held a slight edge in popularity (Table 2) compared to computer and online games. When asked which they play the most, 30% said video games, 27% said computer games, and 14% said online games. But when asked which they played at least once a week, 37% said computer games, 31% said online games, and 27% said video games. The differing responses likely have to do with the technologies involved and college students' whereabouts. While computer games may be played anywhere there is a computer (*e.g.*, most computer operating systems

Table 1. Racial characteristics:				
	Overall	Video Gamer	Computer Gamer	Online Gamer
White	72%	63%	63%	61%
African-American	11%	9%	11%	12%
Asian	6%	14%	14%	13%
Hispanic	9%	9%	8%	10%

Source: Pew Internet & American Life Project College Students Gaming Survey, n=1162. Margin of error is $\pm 3.5\%$.

Table 2. Do you ever:	
Play computer games	71%
Play video games	59%
Play online games	56%

Source: Pew Internet & American Life Project College Students Gaming Survey, n=1162. Margin of error is $\pm 3.5\%$.

include some games as part of their standard installation), online games require Internet access, and video games are generally played in the home on gaming consoles like the ones made by Nintendo, Sega and others. This assertion is further supported by students' own reports that they play video games most at their parents' or friend's houses and play online games at a school computer lab.

Computer games have an edge over video games and online games when time-use is considered. Just over one fourth (27%) reported playing video games once a week or more often, and slightly more (31%) reported playing online games once a week or more often. But over a third (37%) reported playing computer games once a week or more often. Daily, twice as many college students play an online (14%) or a computer (13%) game as play a video game (6%). The computer's prominence as a tool related to gaming is illustrated by the finding that nearly half (45%) of college students reported going

online simply to play or download games.

Table 3. First started playing this type of game during:			
	COLLEGE	JR. HIGH / HIGH SCHOOL	ELEMENTARY SCHOOL
Video games	2%	15%	69%
Computer games	9%	49%	28%
Online games	22%	43%	6%

Source: Pew Internet & American Life Project College Students Gaming Survey, n=1162. Margin of error is $\pm 3.5\%$.

Students' commitment to gaming comes as little surprise considering their long history of interaction

with video and computer games. By high school 77% of our respondents had played computer games, and just over two-thirds (69%) of them had been playing video games since elementary school. Table 3 illustrates the trend over time – college students first encountered video games as children in elementary school, and are just beginning to discover the relatively recent phenomenon of online games in high school and college. The fundamental point, however, is that gaming is a part of growing up in the U.S., and by the time the current cohort of college students graduates virtually all of them will have had some kind of experience with gaming. And although only 14% of college students reported that online gaming is the game format they played most, the continuing saturation of wireless technology (particularly in cell phones, and personal digital assistants) with gaming capabilities, along with the availability of broadband connections, will likely affect these numbers significantly in the future and allow college students to maintain and even increase their online gaming activities once they leave the college environment.

Gaming and College Life

College students have readily accepted online gaming into their lives and have adapted gaming activities to the unique environment of college life. College students are notorious "night owls" due in part to all night study sessions and regular (if not continual) socializing, and their gaming activity reflects this. Close to half (41%) of college gamers reported playing after 9 p.m. Only 8% reported gaming before noon, while another 37% play between 5 p.m. and 9 p.m.

In our observation of college students in campus computer labs it was common to see students who appeared to be stopping by their dormitory computer lab for a post-class/pre-dinner gaming session. The atmosphere in the labs was usually very relaxed during these hours, and the types of computer use by students, including gaming, seemed to provide relaxation. In observations of computer use in public computer labs on college campuses it was found that that male students more frequently than female ones often had online games open on their computer's screen alongside their schoolwork (typically written papers).

However, the games most commonly seen were billiards, solitaire, crossword puzzles, poker and other arcade and card games, rather than multiple player games. These are readily available via the web, and many students had browser windows open with such games, to which they would turn to take a break while writing a paper. Among the reasons those games are most common is that they are not intended to be a lengthy distraction from work, they are easily accessible on the Internet and do not require fast processors, bandwidth or sound, and they do not require installation of specific programs on the computer.⁹ A number of students were seen quickly entering a lab, playing some games in an apparent effort to kill time, and then leaving. The manner of some such students suggested a routine, perhaps an after-class relaxation ritual. We sometimes observed students sitting next to one another and playing an online game together on different, but adjacent machines. In most all cases gaming was one of several simultaneous activities and rarely the sole thing to which a student paid attention.

Further observation showed a distinct difference between types of campus computer labs. In residence hall, or dormitory, computer labs, students were directly observed playing various online and offline games on public computers. These students typically had no class materials around them and seemed to be visiting the lab purely for entertainment reasons. Gaming in labs located in academic buildings was much less frequently observed. Public settings, such as school computer labs, the library and Internet cafes lack appeal for student gamers, with only small numbers (5%, 2% and 2% respectively) citing these locations as their favorites for gaming. Reasons for this may include restrictions on the types of computer use allowed on public machines. Although most college students (66%) were unaware of restrictions on playing games in campus or dormitory computer labs, the 16% who were aware of use restrictions reported that campus computer labs had more rules regarding gaming, downloading programs, or looking at pornography than computer labs located in dormitories.

Although college students have access to many settings that can accommodate gaming, including campus computer labs and dormitories, they tend to make their home the primary gaming environment (Table 4). Comfortable surroundings and accessibility to gaming equipment (i.e. TV set, gaming

Table 4. Where do you play games the most?	
Parent's home	31%
Friend's home	27%
Dorm room	23%
Source: Pew Internet & American Life Project College Students Gaming Survey, n=1162. Margin of error is $\pm 3.5\%$.	

⁹ During one observation a student was seen trying to load a multiple player online game onto a computer. After several unsuccessful attempts, likely due to security software on the computer, he gave up and left.

consoles and accessories, computers, and the Internet) appear to be important features in for college students when choosing a place to play games. This suggest that gaming is placed alongside other entertainment forms in their residence, and that it likely forms part of a larger multitasking setting in which college students play games, listen to music and interact with others in the room.

Gaming vs. Studying

According to students, gaming has little impact, either positive or negative, on their academic lives. About two-thirds (66%) felt that gaming had no influence on their academic performance. However, in response to another question close to half (48%) of college student gamers agreed that gaming keeps them from studying "some" or "a lot." In addition, about one in ten (9%) admitted that their main motivation for playing games was to avoid studying. Nevertheless college student gamers' reported hours studying per week match up closely with those reported by college students in general, with about two-thirds (62%) reporting that they study for classes no more than 7 hours per week, and 15% reported studying 12 or more hours per week.

While some educators have noted the possible benefits of gaming as a learning tool, most gamers (69%) reported having no exposure to video, computer, or Internet gaming in the classroom for educational purposes. However, one third (32%) of students surveyed admitted playing games that were not part of the instructional activities during classes.

Impact of Gaming on College Students' Social Lives

Students felt that gaming had mostly positive, and few negative, effects on their social lives. Most college student gamers seem to associate positive feelings with gaming, such as "pleasant" (36%), "exciting" (34%), and "challenging" (45%). Fewer students reported feeling frustrated (12%), bored (11%), or stressed (6%) by gaming. Specifically, students cited gaming as a way to spend more time with friends. One out of every five (20%) gaming students felt moderately or strongly that gaming helped them make new friends as well as improve their existing friendships. When asked if gaming has taken away time they might spend with friends and family, two-thirds of respondents (65%) said gaming has had little to no influence in this regard. Gaming also appears to play a surrogate role for some gamers when friends are unavailable. Nearly two-thirds (60%) of students surveyed agreed that gaming, either moderately or strongly, helped them spend time when friends were not available.

Based on college student responses, video and online gaming seem especially well suited to their social nature, while computer gaming appears a more solitary activity. Nearly half (46%) of video gamers reported playing multi-player games, while only 1 in 5 (20%) of them reported playing online games. During our observations of computer use in public settings, some students were seen sitting at neighboring computers directing each other to interesting games and entertainment on their terminals, and sharing "war stories" about victories and defeats in particular games. Some were also seen typing into instant