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## THE DEVELOPMENT OF TOYS AND VIDEO GAMES WITH ANIMALS: WHICH CONSEQUENCES AND SIGNIFICATION?

**Abstract** This article attempts to demonstrate that specialized video games concerning animals or animal care, especially for girls, may lead to virtual activities and /or real care of animals, which may later cause some girls to consider a profession in animal care.

In order to test our hypothesis, in 2009 we conducted – through the reading of toy-catalogues in supermarkets and toy stores (randomly selected) – a statistical study with the regards to the number of male and female characters shown on the packages of video games (for computers, Nintendo, and television) which were related to animals, horse-riding and/or the profession of veterinarian (vet’), in order to find out if these games were more particularly intended for girls.

We completed this study by examining the packaging (i.e. boxes) – their color and the title of the video game. Furthermore, a qualitative analysis was conducted on the characteristics and roles played by boys and girls in the video games examined, in order to determine what roles are assigned to each sex in these games concerning animals.

**Key words :** Gender, toys, video games, profession of vet.

### 1. Introduction

Numerous studies have highlighted the gendered nature of children’s toys. Among the toys given to young girls, there are four categories relating to roles they are expected to play as adult women : the mother (through babies and dolls); housewives (play-dinner, cookers, ironing board, vacuum cleaner, etc.); the seductive woman (makeup, hair, fashion); and love (playing Princesses waiting for Prince Charming).

The games offered to boys are mainly related to technics (craft games, building games, science experiments); conquest (knight, cowboy, pirate); power (Action Man, Spiderman, Hulk); and war (fantasy war such as “star wars”, or more

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realistic war with the castle and knights). These toys are directly involved in the development of masculinity. In video games, we find the same topic differential in games for girls and boys.

Not only toys and video games but the media as well is directly involved, and from a very young age, in the development of femininity and masculinity, stereotyped patterns, and professional occupations “for women” and “for men”. Hutchings (1997) reminds us that “it is also through activities that children take a source of inspiration for occupational models”. She adds that “the majority of girls referred to female occupational models, and boys to males. This is predictable from research showing that gender identity is learned; children from an early age are aware of gender marking of activities and interests and actively affirm their own gender in their choices of toys, clothes, activities...”

In France, for the last fifteen years toys and video games concerning animals have been mainly developed for girls. Consequently, we may hypothesize that toys and specialized video games concerning animals or animal care, specially tailored for girls, may lead them to virtual activities and/or real care and care of animals, which may later cause some girls to consider a profession in animal care.

When the grade levels attained by these girls allow them to consider selective and difficult studies, they can turn to the profession of vet. If their grades do not allow for such an ambitious orientation, they have the opportunity to switch to different occupations such as veterinary assistant, animal selling, or riding instructor, a craft which in France is now practiced with women in the majority. Veterinary studies tend to be increasingly feminized, with girls comprising 72.6% of those engaged in this vocational education in France (EACEA, 2009).

Our survey entails work on student guidance (Guichard 1993 & 2006...), socialization (Darmon 2006), and occupational representations among teenagers (Mosconi & Stevanovic 2007).

As far as we know, only a few studies have been carried out on the gendered nature of video games, including the new media (Nintendo DS, PC and Wii), and the recent development of these games concerning animals.

## 2. Methodology

Through the reading of toy-catalogues in supermarkets and toy stores (randomly selected), in 2009 we conducted a statistical study with the regard to the number of male and female characters shown on the packaging of video games (for computers, Nintendo and television) which were related to animals, horse-riding and/or the profession of vet, in order to find out if these games were more particularly intended for girls.

We completed this study by examining the packaging and presentation of the boxes: the color and the title of the video game. Furthermore, a qualitative

analysis was carried out on the characteristics and roles played by boys and girls in the video games listed above, in order to examine what roles are assigned to each sex in these games concerning animals.

We also focused on toys related to horse-riding, animals, and the occupation of vet, which are listed in the five catalogues examined under the heading “Girls,” and examined the topics developed in the 60 games on offer.

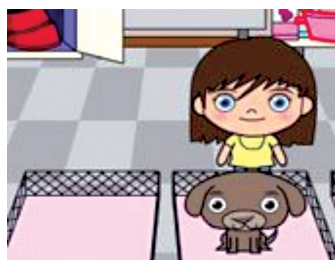
To carry out this research, we adopted the method used for textbooks (Panissal & Fontanini 2008; Bruillard 2005; Brugeilles & Cromer 2005; Rignault & Richert 1997).

### 3. Results

Since the advent of video games (on computer, on Nintendo, on television) in families, it has been established that boys play more than girls (October 2005). However, in recent years girls’ use of video games in different media has also been noted. The manufacturers of these games realized that in order to reach the female population, they had to offer them specific games. Beginning five years ago, Nintendo has been available in several colors: pink, blue, white and black. The games „for girls” are often visible by their pink cover.

There are also games “where animals are raised,” which can be found directly on the internet.<sup>1</sup> According to the group “Against sexist toys” (2007), “the Web has become a space where girls meet up for virtual feminine activities”. At present, we can also find “veterinary games”:

**Illustration 1.** Vet game



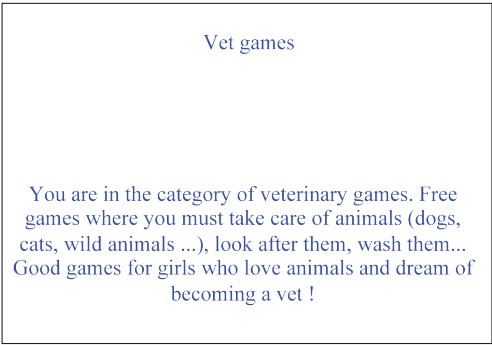
Source: <http://www.jeuxpourlesfilles.fr/jeux-de-veterinaire/jeu-de-veterinaire.html>

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<sup>1</sup> For example: [www.kochonland.com](http://www.kochonland.com) where we have fun raising a pig or litter of piglets, manage a farm to produce cutlets; [www.equideo.com](http://www.equideo.com) where we raise a horse, or manage a horse-riding school...; [www.myefarm.com](http://www.myefarm.com) where we raise chickens, rabbits, cows and learn to manage a farm; [www.neopets.com](http://www.neopets.com) where we can create fantastic animals; <http://fr.safaristory.com> where we look after the animals of the savannah....

This is a little veterinary game where you have to take care of sweet little animals. You incarnate a young girl vet who has just moved into her medical center...

Illustration 2. Vet



Source: <http://www.sudokuz.eu/jeux/jeux-pour-filles/la-clinique-veterinaire.html>

Firstly, we found 101 games among the five studied catalogues which appeared “destined” for girls. Our clues were: the presence of girls on the boxes and/or the pink color of the cover, or the title of the game which contains, for example, a female name, such as “Lea, journalist passion”.

The most widely represented topic in these video games concerns animals: 73 out of 101, if one uses the category of vet + horse-riding + animals. Girls are widely over-represented on the boxes compared to boys – 56:14. These games are recent additions on the toy-market (one of the oldest is dated from 2000 and is called: “Barbie Pet Rescue”.

Some titles are unambiguous with regard to the intended recipients of these games, often by using the first name of a girl: “Lea veterinary passion”, or “Barbie Pet Rescue”.

Table 1. Topics of video games “proposed” to girls

Topics	Number of games	Number of humans on the box		Miss discovery collection	Only animals on the box
		girls	boys		
1	2	3	4	5	6
Vet	9	8	3		0
Horse-riding	36	33	2		6
Animals*	28	15	9	5	14
Subtotal	73	56	14		
Fashion/beauty	12	27	3		

**Table 1.** (cont)

1	2	3	4	5	6
Singing, dancing	2	5	4		
Aventures/riddles	6	13	3		
Magic	2	5	0		
Look after a baby	1	1	0		
Cooking	2	1	0		
Discovery of true love	3	4	2		
Total	101	112	26	5	20

\*Except horses and ponies.

Some games encompass several topics, so we added them into each topic.

Among the nine games of the veterinary profession, there is no box where only a boy appears. For three games showing a boy, there is also a girl. We noticed that, in “Vet Mission, I look after the farm animals”, the man is a professional but not the girl, who shows affection towards the animal which she carries in her arms.

**Illustration 3.** Vet mission

Source: <http://www.rue-montgallet.com/prix/photo,mission-veterinaire-3-je-soigne-les-animaux-de-la-ferme-pc,517261>

In “Vet Mission”, (Ill. 3) we noticed that this time the vet girl is in the foreground but she shows more affection for the dog which she carries in her arms than the male vet for the parrot, which is just resting on his arm. In addition, the male vet wears a professional tool, the stethoscope.

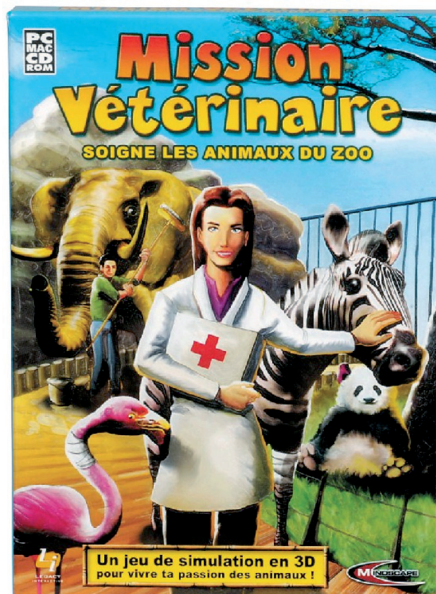
Illustration 4. Vet mission



Source: [http://www.amazon.fr/dp/B000WD7404/ref=asc\\_df\\_B000WD740410036632/?tag=j euxvideo\\_fichesjeux-21&creative=22950&creativeASIN=B000WD7404&linkCode=asn](http://www.amazon.fr/dp/B000WD7404/ref=asc_df_B000WD740410036632/?tag=j euxvideo_fichesjeux-21&creative=22950&creativeASIN=B000WD7404&linkCode=asn)

On other boxes only girls appear, such as “Vet mission, look after zoo animals”.

Illustration 5. Vet mission



Source: <http://www.priceminister.com/offer/buy/116202351/sort0/filter20/mission-veterinaire-jeu-pc.html>

For horse-riding games, girls are always shown as experienced riders. They are even identified as champions.

**Illustration 5.** Alexandra Ledermann

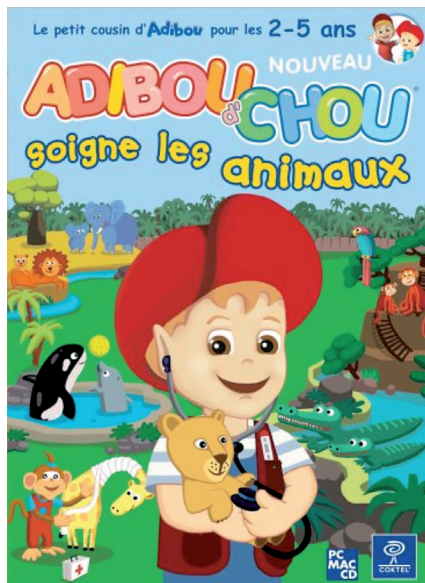


Source: <http://www.jeuxvideopc.com/jeux/boite-11711-alexandra-ledermann-8-les-secrets-du-haras.php>

On the boxes with reference to animals where boys appear, they are young children, such as “Adibou’Chou looks after animals”, or at least adolescents, as in “The Sims 2 Pets and Company”. Besides, on this box, it can be noted that the young woman has the cat in her arms while the young man is holding a stick in his hand to play with the dog. Activities with pets don’t seem to be the same on the box between the two characters.



Illustration 6. Adibou



Source: <http://www.amazon.fr/Mindscape-5390102485207-AdiboudChou-soigne-animaux/dp/B000VQFS78>

Illustration 7. SIMS



Source: [http://fr.sims.wikia.com/wiki/Les\\_Sims\\_2:\\_Animaux\\_%26\\_Cie](http://fr.sims.wikia.com/wiki/Les_Sims_2:_Animaux_%26_Cie)



Next we examined the presentation of each game with animals on the boxes, i.e. the veterinary profession and horse-riding, to find which activities are proposed for children.

**Table 2.** Activities offered to children in video games concerning animals

Activites	Vet profession	Horse-riding	Animals	Total
Care	9	9	11	<b>29</b>
Diagnosis	4			<b>4</b>
Discovery of vet profession	5			<b>5</b>
Devotion	1			<b>1</b>
Beauty Grooming		1	2	<b>3</b>
Training		7	2	<b>9</b>
Competition		8		<b>8</b>
Animal training		4	6	<b>10</b>
Displays of affection		3	5	<b>8</b>
Adventure/ riddles		7	1	<b>8</b>
Knowledge about horses, animals		4	2	<b>6</b>
Rescue of animals			3	<b>3</b>
Riding		2	4	<b>6</b>
Games			4	<b>4</b>
Gift of good life			6	<b>6</b>
Buy toys			4	<b>4</b>
Other		2	3	<b>5</b>
<b>Total</b>	<b>19</b>	<b>47</b>	<b>51</b>	<b>119</b>

It should be noted that the most common proposed activity in these games for girls is animal care (29), followed by activities, particularly for horse-riders, such as training, coaching and competition (26), including knowledge of horses and riding.

By examining the presentation of the boxes of each game concerning animals, the occupation of vet, or horse-riding, and while listing the activities offered to children, we noted that the most widely featured activity (most of them being girls-orientated) is animal care.

“Making the animals happy” is one of the relatively often suggested activities (18) in these games, where “showing affection”, “games” and „providing a pleasant living environment” are lumped together. We may wonder if these games are

not partly responsible for the humanization of animals, a concept which is being more and more developed in our industrialized western societies.

We found four mentions of the activity “buy toys for the animals”. Is it not an introduction for girls to the consumer society, and connecting happiness with material belongings, when for example we can read : “Buy everything you want from the pet shop to make your puppy happy” (Pet Pals, animal doctor – about Dalmatians and Labradors).

Throughout these games concerning animals, horse riding and the profession of vet, proposals (mainly) for girls include:

- **Looking after, treating, rescuing animals and giving them affection:** an extension of the ‘female’ activity of providing excellence for humans from birth to death based on self-denial, self-sacrifice, and dedication, which finds its legitimacy in the love of others. According to the group *Against sexist toys* (2007): “Through the mothering dolls as well as animals [...], girls appropriate the language of feelings and sensitivity”.

- **Role-playing as a girl rider:** riding has become a very feminine sport over the last thirty years (74.4% of graduates of horse-riding programmes were women in 2002, and 71.4% were under 20 years of age; Tourre-Malen 2006). This feminization is in part a result of the democratization of horse-riding, but it also connected with the evolution of the image of a horse, which is increasingly seen as a pet (its economic value has almost disappeared). Besides, according to October (2005), “when parents wish a sport for their daughter, it is [...] a sport in developing aesthetic activity [...] or in connection with animals such as horse riding”.

In fact equestrian activity consists as much of caring and grooming as riding horses. We thus find both treating and caring for animals included in horse-riding activities.

- **Playing at being a vet:** learning how to care for animals.
- **Improving the looks of horses by brushing, washing, and braiding horses’ manes** – this fun activity is exactly the same as brushing and washing a doll’s hair...

According to the group *Against sexist toys* (2007) :

The love of animals, preferably cute, is mainly a women’s activity after a certain age. The cult of cute through the effigy figurines of animals more or less fancy, combines both mothering tenderness and emotional attachment to what is pretty. [...] The Empire of feelings, vested for girls, is in fact an institution of sentimentality as a form of relationship with others and the world. Thought, reflection, critical thinking, science, knowledge of the world around them ... seem totally absent from the girls’ world such as it exists in toys.

In addition to the games concerning animals, there is also a wide-ranging and large assortment of toys on animals in the “girls” toy catalogues. The topics and themes in these toys are the same as those in video games (mostly for children from three years old).

**Table 3.** Topics proposed in toys “for girls”

Topics	Number
Horse-riding	12
Animal care	6
Look after animals (food, grooming)	9
Displays of affection	4
Play at being a vet	6
Beauty of animals	4
Rescue of animals	5
Baby play	2
Various	13

**Illustration 8.** Barbie Vet



Source: <http://www.amazon.fr/Mattel-Barbie-Poup%C3%A9-Coffret-Clinique/dp/B003FZAAMU%3FSubscriptionId%3D0DWX0HJVE7AWX9HF4X82%26tag%3Dpeut-21%26linkCode%3Dxm2%26camp%3D2025%26creative%3D165953%26creativeASIN%3DB003FZAAMU>

Various offers for girls, always related to animals, are added to these toys:

- “Pet shop accessories”, such as an alarm clock, sleeping bag, duvet cover + pillowcase, fleece, hat, scarf, vanity belt, pet shop, play dough, puzzles; creative package: jewels, scoubidou, customized bags, brooches, diary, notebook + pen, gift bag, box of secrets, pyjamas...

- Relaxing leisure activities concerning horses such as horse box stationery (letters, envelopes...), horses’ diary, horses’ organizer, stickers horses’ package, horses’ sketchbook...

In addition, with these objects girls can stay in an animal world comprised of cute, touching activities that “can cultivate positive emotions and expression of the so-called maternal instinct.” (Collective, *Against sexist toys*, 2007).

**Illustration 9.** Pet Shop Alarm



Source: [http://www.google.fr/products/catalog?q=r%C3%A9veil+pet+shop&hl=fr&qsrc=1&rlz=1T4ADBR\\_frFR311FR311&prmd=imvns&bav=on.2,or\\_r\\_gc\\_r\\_pw\\_r\\_qf.&ion=1&biw=1280&bih=856&wrapid=tlif134980221202510&um=1&ie=UTF-8&cid=2510506360036427857&sa=X&ei=3lh0UP7pGoT80QWc1oCwCA&ved=0CFQQ8gIwAA](http://www.google.fr/products/catalog?q=r%C3%A9veil+pet+shop&hl=fr&qsrc=1&rlz=1T4ADBR_frFR311FR311&prmd=imvns&bav=on.2,or_r_gc_r_pw_r_qf.&ion=1&biw=1280&bih=856&wrapid=tlif134980221202510&um=1&ie=UTF-8&cid=2510506360036427857&sa=X&ei=3lh0UP7pGoT80QWc1oCwCA&ved=0CFQQ8gIwAA)

We also observed animal-related games offered to boys, and first noticed that they are much fewer in number than those intended for girls, and in addition are very different. In fact, when boys play a game featuring animals, the aim is always to fight or rescue animals using a lot of practical tools (flying or wheeled vehicles). These games allow young boys to learn how to be brave and take risks... the opposite of what girls learn!

**Illustration 10.** Playmobil Vet

Source: <http://www.cdiscount.com/juniors/jeux-et-jouets-par-type/playmobil-veterinaire-avec-4x4/f-120060203-pl4345.html>

In one of the few occurrences of a boy-vet, he is represented with farm animals (not with a pet, as is the case for the girl-vet in this collection). Doesn't this infer that women are more able than men to care for "cute" pets at a veterinary clinic (inside), whereas men can look after big and dirty animals in the countryside (outside)?

## Conclusions

We can say that these toys and video games bring girls into contact with care for and taking care of animals, which may lead them to move towards a profession related to animals, such as a vet.

Having in mind what Beullens & Van den Bulcke (2010) have emphasized, that there is a causal relationship between occupational choice and watching documentaries about professions on television, it is difficult to measure the impact of these video games on the directions of girls toward professions such as vet or other animals/horses-related activities.

For the time being we can say, based on our interviews with students at the Veterinary School of Toulouse, as well as professionals, that the practice of horse-riding by girls is one of the most-cited reasons to explain the appeal of the 'doctor's profession for animals'. Young girl riders today are probably those who play

video games concerning topics relating to horse-riding, which probably will increase the influence of the equine world and tie it in with the choice to become a vet.

Other studies and professions (such as doctor, judge, captain and lieutenant) which have become feminized over the past twenty years in France are not widely represented in video games and toys. These occupations however are very common in recent years on television series (Pruvost 2007), which is not currently the case of a vet. It thus seems that the early “socialization” toward certain professions is done in different ways and using different mediums: games, toys, TV series. It is worth noting that the TV series *Daktari* in the 1970s attracted many to veterinary vocations. During our numerous interviews with vets, many of those born in the 1960s told us *I am of the Daktari generation*.

We noted a recurrence of messages on animal care by girls in various media:

- in video games and toys, as have seen;
- in non-specialized magazines for children and adolescents which almost always contain a section on animals: how to look after them; welcome them home; take care of them;
- in specialized magazines on horses designed specifically for girl riders;
- in some collections of books like *Big gallop*, read generally by girl riders (Fontanini 2010).

Chaumier (2006) has shown that “recurrence is pervasive and unconsciously grants reality to fantasies that would otherwise have remained unthinkable”. From an early age to their teens, girls are gradually brought into the world of animal care by means of various formats (toys, video games, magazines, books). The progressive trend of horse-riding for girls is yet one more constituent. When it comes time to choose a career, teenage girls (like boys) will make choices based on jobs they have known since they were “little” – via various models and information sources.

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## KONSEKWENCJE I ZNACZENIE ROZWOJU ZABAWEK I GIER VIDEO ZE ZWIERZĘTAMI

**Streszczenie.** Artykuł jest próbą ukazania w jaki sposób specjalistyczne gry video, szczególnie dla dziewcząt, w których chodzi o opiekowanie się zwierzętami mogą prowadzić do innych form „wirtualnej” bądź realnej troski o zwierzęta, a później do rozważania wykonywania zawodu związanego z opieką nad zwierzętami. W tekście zaprezentowano wyniki autorskich badań własnych, skoncentrowanych na analizie opakowań zabawek i gier video.

**Słowa kluczowe:** Gender, zabawki, gry video, opieka nad zwierzętami.