More than Just Child’s Play?: An Experimental Investigation of the Impact of an Appearance-Focused Internet Game on Body Image and Career Aspirations of Young Girls

# Keywords

* Internet games
* Body image
* Career aspirations
* Sexualization
* Appearance
* Girls

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Internet usage, practices and engagement

## Sample

Eighty British girls aged 8–9 years

## Implications For Parents About

Parental practices / parental mediation

## Implications For Educators About

Other

# Abstract

In recent years, elements of the modern environment
(such as television, Internet, toys and clothes) have
been criticized for having an increasingly sexualized or
appearance focus, which has been suggested to be detrimental
to girls’ development. The current study examined
the impact of an appearance-focused Internet game on
young girls’ body image and career cognitions and aspirations.
Eighty British girls aged 8–9 years were randomly
assigned to play an appearance-focused or a non-appearance
focused game for 10 minutes. Girls in the appearancefocused
game condition displayed greater body dissatisfaction
compared to the control condition. Type of
game did not impact girls’ perceived capacity to do various
jobs. However, girls who played the appearance-focused
game reported a greater preference for feminine careers
compared to the control group. This provides preliminary
evidence that appearance-focused Internet games may be
detrimental to young girls’ body image and aspirations.
Internet games should be included in our consideration of
influential messages for young girls.

# Outcome

"The aim of the current study was to examine
the impact of playing an appearance-focused Internet game
on the body dissatisfaction and career cognitions and
aspirations of young girls. With respect to body dissatisfaction,
the results indicate that 8–9 year old girls who
played an appearance-focused Internet game (Dream Date
Dress Up) for a brief period of 10 min demonstrated
heightened body dissatisfaction compared to girls who
played an appearance-neutral Internet game (Penguin
Diner). This body dissatisfaction was expressed via a preference
for a thinner ideal body now as well as a preference
for a thinner ideal body in the future... In the Dream Date Dress
Up game used in the present study the female character is
preparing for a date with a boy. The player is shown an
image of what the boy’s “dream date” looks like, and then
proceeds to alter her character’s appearance (through
clothes, hair styles, and accessories) in order to be appealing
to the boy character. It is possible that the playing of such
dress-up and make-over games encourage girls to focus on
their outward physical appearance and highlights a perceived
discrepancy between their own appearance and
bodies and that of the culturally prescribed thin ideal." (Slater et al., 2017: 2054).