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## Women in Gaming: A Study of Female Players' Experiences in Online FPS Games

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The University of Southern Mississippi

Women in Gaming:  
A Study of Female Players' Experiences in Online FPS Games

by

Allison McDaniel

A Thesis  
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The University of Southern Mississippi  
in Partial Fulfillment  
of the Requirements for the Degree of  
Bachelor of Arts  
in the Department of Anthropology and Sociology

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## Abstract

Existing literature has long been divided over whether the gaming world fosters violence and misogyny or provides a space for people to explore diverse identities. Not enough is known about how women experience videogames, especially the hypermasculine environment of first-person shooter (FPS) games. Competition, violence, and war, are dominant features of these games. The following thesis explores what harassment and discrimination women playing FPS games face, how they respond, and in what ways they find games to be empowering. A survey was distributed online to an international sample of 141 female FPS gamers. This research finds that women who play FPS games often feel empowered by playing (79.4%), even though a majority also experience forms of verbal harassment or discrimination (75.9%).

Key Words: FPS, first-person shooter, videogames, women, gender, gaming, harassment, empowerment, inequality

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## **CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION**

In 2014, public conversations about sexism within the videogame world exploded. Users on social media sites publicly harassed multiple women in the videogame industry, such as videogame developer Zoë Quinn, to the point where they cancelled public appearances and sought police protection (Allaway 2014; Hathaway 2014; Hu 2014). This harassment led to public debates over misogyny in the videogame world, debates that the media now commonly refers to collectively as “Gamergate.” Such controversy is notable considering that gaming is big business; the \$83.6 billion videogame market as of 2014 is rapidly growing each year (Newzoo 2015). Contrary to the general perception, it is not a completely male-dominated domain. Women gamers, over the past years, have grown in number; up from 40% in 2010 (ESA 2010), women gamers now account for 48% of players (ESA 2014). Nonetheless, Gamergate indicates not everyone welcomes their presence, and that the increasing influx of women as players and creators is controversial.

Extant literature on videogames and women is limited. For decades, scholars have debated whether videogames are a socially productive pastime that can empower people and foster their creativity (Jenkins 2006). Some view them as inhibiting social interaction and fostering a potential for violence (Deselms and Altman 2003). More recently, scholars interested in gender and gaming have begun to build on this literature and explore if games can be a source of empowerment for women, or if they are a site that perpetuates negative stereotypes of women, and where women face sexist attitudes and bullying (Gray 2011).

Of this burgeoning literature on gender and gaming, scholars have spent relatively much of their time studying role-playing games. Much less literature examines first-person shooter (FPS) games. It is especially important to closely examine women gamers' experiences with these games as they are generally a more stereotypically masculine domain. The main objective of this game type is normally surrounded in masculine elements of violence, toughness, and power. Objectives of online play may range from capturing the flag/base to killing the most players on the opposite team.

Therefore, this study examines women gamers' experiences within the first-person shooter game genre. It explores how women view these games, why they choose to play them, and their experiences while playing. More specifically, I ask "Are FPS games a location where women may experience empowerment, or are sexual harassment and discrimination prevalent enough to disempower women and prevent this?" Findings come from an online survey of 141 women who play FPS games.

The results show that women may feel empowered as they challenge gender norms by engaging in play in this masculine environment. Many stated FPS games provide a way they may "prove" themselves as adequate gamers, and upon proving themselves, they feel a sense of empowerment. Although harassment can be an issue, it does not seem to stop women from seeing the positive effect of games.

Before I begin, I would like to clarify a comment that was made under a forum where this survey was posted. One participant said, "Interestingly I got the impression the researcher believes that FPS are boys games, if this is the case I wonder if they will acknowledge their own bias in their analysis :)" However, in my work, I am addressing the bias of the U.S. and some other Western nations. For this project, I speak of what

elements are "traditionally" considered masculine by society – violence, guns, war, competition, etc. All of these elements joined into FPS gaming create the hypermasculine environment in which I speak. This is also what helps create the stereotype that videogames are for boys, and that “girls don’t play games.”

## **CHAPTER 2: LITERATURE REVIEW**

### **Background on the Gaming Industry**

Videogames take many different forms. Players access videogames through computers, phones/tablets, or consoles (such as PlayStation, XBOX, and Wii generations). Of teens 13 to 17 years old, 81% own, or have access to, a gaming console (Lenhart 2015). Globally, console and online games remain the largest sources of revenue for the industry (Statista 2014). Videogame genres include action or shooters (first and third-person), role-playing, strategy, and simulation games (Apperley 2006). The most popular game type by sales in the United States is action, making up 31.9% of all bought games (Statista 2014).

Today, 59% of Americans play videogames (ESA 2014). According to a TED Conversation, we spend three billion hours a week playing videogames worldwide, and by the age of 21, the average person has spent 10,000 hours of their life gaming (McGonigal 2011). The percentage of women players has grown tremendously over the years. Whereas gaming has largely been a male-dominated area in past years, women now make up 48% of gamers (ESA 2014). Despite the overall nearly equal percentage of gamers, women seem to not be as welcome in this area – 44% of Internet users believe that the online gaming environment is more welcoming toward men (Duggan 2014). First person shooter games (FPS), however, consist mostly of males when compared with role-playing games (RPG) and real-time strategy games (RTS) (Ghuman and Griffiths 2012). Indeed, although the gender gap is closing in gaming in general, males still dominate the realm of FPS, as shown in a SuperData Research (2014) report of the United States: men make up 66% of FPS players. This makes sense when it is seen that

males tend to have a higher preference for violent videogames (Phan, Jardina, and Hoyle 2012). However, much research overlooks the females who *do* enjoy this genre.

### **Effects of Videogames and Active Gamers**

A large area of focus for the media has been aggression and violence in gaming (Deselms and Altman 2003). Particularly after the Columbine shooting, people began to point the finger of blame at video games. Because some violent offenders have a common denominator – videogames – news media and some studies argue that the violence in the games causes violence in the individual; this debate sparks whenever these tragedies occur (Kaplan 2012). Henry Jenkins (N.d.), an MIT professor, states on PBS.org that while “It’s true that young offenders who have committed school shootings in America have also been game players,” one must remember that young people in general are likely gamers; however, “the overwhelming majority of kids who play do NOT commit antisocial acts.”

Clearly, then, people are concerned that what happens in gameplay can affect gamers’ attitudes and behaviors outside of game worlds, and that the lines between the fantasy of gameplay and reality blur. For example, some people and news outlets presume that repeatedly playing shooting games may potentially cause the player to reenact this violence in the real world (Jaccarino 2013). As players immerse themselves into the game, they distance themselves from socializing in the real world.

To dispel this line of thinking, Henry Jenkins conducted his own research and discovered quite the opposite. “Games do represent powerful tools for learning – if we understand learning in a more active, meaning-driven sense,” writes Jenkins in “The War

Between Effects and Meaning: Rethinking the Video Game Violence Debate” (2006:25). Benefits of gaming are defended by other scholars as improving social interactions, teaching skills, and actually reducing aggression in individuals (Greitemeyer and Oswald 2010).

Therefore, scholars do not agree on how we should understand the gaming experience, and its effects on gamers. Part of the difficulty is that researchers tackle this topic from two different angles. Some focus on the effects of videogames and treat gamers themselves as passive, what Jenkins’ calls the “effects model” (Jenkins 2006:21). However, gamers are not passive, and must actively engage the games. Even if they did not, research shows that media consumers in general (for example of film) do not interpret content in the same manner; it is problematic to assume audiences are passive rather than active (Morley 2006). Therefore, another way to approach games is to study how audiences actively engage with gameworlds (Jenkins 2006). Gameworlds themselves may not only serve as a way of occupying the mind and temporarily forgetting real-life problems (Frostling-Henningsson 2009), but may also function as places where people can go beyond the constraints of entrenched societal norms and social structures to try on different identities and ways of interacting. One way this may happen is when players transgress traditional gender identities. For example, players have opportunities to play characters of the opposite sex, and with varying degrees of masculine and feminine characteristics.

It is no surprise then that scholars have become increasingly interested in issues of gender and videogames. Scholars are concerned with effects-based questions related to gender, as well as how games may be a site where players can transgress everyday gender

norms and try on new gender identities (Stabile 2014). The rest of the literature reviews details some of the main areas of research on gender and videogames.

## **Harassment and Sexism**

While games may offer a chance to foster creativity with virtual characters and environments, players may still experience forms of harassment. Internet users tend to believe that the online environment allows for easy harassment; Duggan (2014) finds that 92% of Internet users agree that this environment allows people to be more critical of each other. Cyberbullies may hide behind screen-names and say things that they would otherwise not say in person. A study on “game talk” gives a view of the different language and new words that gamers must learn from their environment in order to be an accepted member. It mentions that games offer an environment for behaviors that would normally not be tolerated, such as “trash-talking” other players (Wright, Boria, and Breidenbach 2002). Although the study does not focus on women who game, it can be assumed that women gamers must go through this same learning process as well.

Women gamers may face more difficulties because of stereotypes of gaming as a male-dominated environment. Plus, players may take their existing knowledge of gender with them into the gameworld. They may reinforce gender stereotypes that exist outside of games and recreate gender stratification within gameworlds. Being outside of the “norm,” women gamers often experience different reactions due to the surrounding stereotypes. Beavis and Charles (2007) discuss in their research how a female in a LAN café, being seen first as a girl, is then further assumed to be an “imposter” – less competent as a gamer because of her gender. With stereotypes in mind, when other

players encounter a female gamer, hostile behaviors may be elicited. Gray (2011) experiences this directly when playing an online game: when the leader becomes upset that she isn't communicating with the team, she inserts her microphone and prepares her apology – her voice then gives away her female identity, and a barrage of insults ensue which blame her gender for a poor performance. Likewise, Matthew (2012) finds in her study that 79.3% of 874 participants believe that sexism is prominent in the gaming community and that female players are four times more likely to have experienced forms of taunting or harassment from fellow players.

Brehm's (2013:7) research finds the massively multiplayer online role-playing game, World of Warcraft, to contain not only harassment toward women players, but also men who view women as "delicate" – male players who become overprotective of women and give them items. This sort of positive treatment, or "appeasement," can be viewed as a form of benevolent sexism. On the other hand, Norris (2004) finds that women who play games are more aggressive than women who do not, shown in areas of anger, physical aggression, and verbal aggression.

### **Characters and Gender Play**

Gameplay and interactions, whether harassment or cooperation, are affected by game design. For instance, game design affects whether players are focused on individual or shared goals. Further, game design shapes the degree to which characters are gendered, and the ability of players to engage in gender play, including playing as opposite sex characters. Much game research focuses upon the visual depictions of the female body in character design. As well as being underrepresented for main roles which

may be played in-game, women “when they are shown it is often in an overtly sexualized context” (Downs and Smith 2010:279). One study concludes that female videogame characters conform to the thin-ideal of society and argues that videogame culture can still be considered a society of men – men creating games for a male audience (Martins et al. 2009). Scholars have characterized female game characters as either in need of protection or sexual and dominant (Fox and Bailenson 2009). The issue with these types of studies, however, is that this dichotomy of the two extreme sides of female characters is not always the case; many female characters embody both masculine and feminine traits.

However, stereotypically, females are portrayed sexually within videogames and male characters are aggressive, and players’ perceptions of characters mirror this belief (Dill and Thill 2007). Both male and female high-frequency gamers, as opposed to casual gamers, do not feel that it causes any negative effects to the player (Brenick et al. 2007). Yet, in a controlled experiment, Yao, Mahood, and Linz (2010) discover that sexualized female characters may prime males’ thoughts about sex and encourage them to view women as objects, fueling belief of negative female stereotypes. Behm-Morawitz and Mastro (2009) find that playing these highly sexualized images, however, does not lower a female player’s self-esteem. Yet when a woman plays a sexualized avatar that resembles herself, she does have more body-related thoughts and rape myth acceptance (Fox, Bailenson, and Tricase 2013). Interestingly, another study concludes that men shown a sexualized image have an increased tolerance for sexual harassment, while women’s tolerance decreased (Dill, Brown, and Collins 2008).

Such research is complicated by the way in which players have choices over what characters to play. Players may choose to play as male or female characters, and characters are not always human. Players in some games can alter the masculinity and femininity of characters through decisions over characters' hairstyles and clothing, for example. The ability for players to make such choices does vary by game type, however, as many action games only allow one type of character. Gender play may be more common within RPG games.

One study finds that when playing male characters, a woman gamer feels superior not only in those roles, but also in her position outside of the gaming world (Royse et al. 2007). Royse (2007) also finds that having control over characters, and combining feminine and masculine attributes, maximizes women gamers' pleasure. This suggests a sort of empowerment felt by women when they enter this environment, as they balance these traits and form an identity. Players may choose which traits they wish to exhibit and which traits to suppress, in order to create their own identity. Femininity and masculinity may intertwine, and their character may be completely different from themselves. The game *Mass Effect* allows the player to create a personalized character and "romance" characters not only of the opposite sex; it also allows for gay, lesbian, and bi-sexual relationships. In response to disapproving fans, one of the game designers states, "We have a lot of fans, many of whom are neither straight nor male... They deserve no less attention..." (Bowers 2014). For LGBT fans, and even women, this is viewed as a great progress in the realm of games.

## **The Voice of Women**

Videogames provide women with complex worlds. In some ways, games provide expansive environments for gender and sexual expression; however, in other respects games represent hypermasculine environments where women may face harassment. How do women navigate these potentialities? The sexual harassment that many women gamers experience drives some women away while causing others to remain silent (Fox and Tang 2014). Some players may choose to not use voice chat for fear of giving away their sex and inciting more harassment. Gray (2011) directly focuses on this area, choosing to use voice chat on Xbox Live to study and compile accounts of discrimination and harassment against women, as it deals with intersectionality. Another study on communication, focusing on voice chat in the game Halo 3, finds that the female voice receives three times as many negative or derogatory comments as the male voice, as well as more questions and messages (Kuznekoff and Ro 2013).

In response to perceived harassment while playing videogames, some women players, as a way to cope and fight against this harassment, create blogs online to gain support; one such blog (“Not in the Kitchen Anymore”) documents a woman’s various experiences with online harassment in games (Hudson 2014). “Fat, Ugly, or Slutty” is another of these sites, playing upon the common stereotypes women gamers feel they face (O’Leary 2012).

Women who speak out place themselves at risk. Some women gamers who speak their minds find themselves harassed, sometimes so badly that they are forced to move from their homes or keep silent (McDonald 2014). The “Gamergate” controversy has brought a lot of attention to the topic of women in gaming (Hu 2014). The beginning of

Gamergate involved a supposedly unethical relationship between a female game developer and a journalist. Bashed for both her game, *Depression Quest*, and her past relationship, she was driven from her home by fear (Hathaway 2014). Gamergate brought the issue of women in gaming to the fore. Public debates raged over whether women belong in the industry, if they are harassed, and how they should respond.

Note that although the development of games is still largely male-dominated, women are beginning to play larger roles than they have in the past. Since 2009, the number of women who work in the game industry has doubled to 22% (Gaudiosi 2014). As more women continue to fill these positions, perhaps we will begin to see more diversity in the future of games.

### **Experiences of Women Gamers**

The above demonstrates how there is a growing literature on gender and gaming, but not enough research exists on why women gamers play FPS games and how they interpret their gaming experiences. Existing research focuses on the outward effects of gaming – whether or not it causes increased aggression in the player; videogame characters’ effect on the player; videogame play’s effect on reflexes. There is a lack of studies that specifically examine women gamers’ experiences of playing from their perspective, however. Women gamers, becoming more numerous in an environment that is traditionally thought of as male, may or may not feel a sense of belonging. The outside status is seen in the term “*girl* gamer,” whereas the default “gamer” is automatically assumed male. When experiences of players are examined, research is normally focused on the role-playing genre of games. First-person shooter games offer a completely

different environment. Indeed, it has been shown how women make up less of a percentage in this area. Role-playing games assume more of a fantasy element, whereas shooter games display more violence. My interest lies in finding out how women experience this hypermasculine environment and the ways in which they communicate with other players.

## CHAPTER 3: RESEARCH METHODS

### Pilot Study

A pilot study for this research was conducted. Looking at women who played any genre of games, I examined harassment and sexism in the videogame community. The study received IRB approval. I surveyed twenty women, interviewed three, and observed women as they played *Call of Duty* on the livestream website Twitch.tv. My most notable results included women reporting that first-person shooters contain the most harassment and that it is not uncommon for other women to be the harassers. Stereotypes seemed prevalent in their eyes; while some shrugged off harassment and stereotypes, others experienced frustration and sadness. Some women considered actions harmless flirtation, while others viewed it as sexual harassment. Because of the results, I decided to broaden my topic to include the overall experiences of women who game from their perspective. I desired to better understand the choices women make in gameplay and why (such as character choice). I sought to understand the diversity of their experiences, including their interpretation and response to such. This would allow me to understand how they respond to harassment, and if they see games empowering in any way. Further, videogame design and videogame play varies by genre. As much research focuses on RPG games, I decided to focus on women's experiences with first-person shooter videogames, where women are less represented and appear to face more harassment.

## **Current Study**

This study looks at the experiences of women who are gamers, because women often fade into the backdrop of many studies dealing with videogames. It specifically focuses on their experiences with FPS games – a hypermasculine environment to which scholars have devoted scant attention. To reach a diverse sample, I created a survey and distributed it online utilizing Qualtrics software. The survey consisted of a host of targeted closed-ended questions, combined with open-ended questions that allowed women to explain and expand upon their answers.

I used the vastness of the Internet (including posts on forums, gaming sites, and social media) to attract as many participants as possible. In order to participate, respondents needed to be age 18 or over and have experience playing first-person shooter games online with other players. This study received IRB approval. An informed consent form provided participants with an overview of the purpose of the study and an assurance of confidentiality. One hundred and forty-one respondents from 12 countries form the final sample. All participants are age 18 or over and have experience playing first-person shooter games online with other players. Participants who did not complete the majority of the survey, were under the age of 18, or responded to questions with answers that did not deal with FPS games, had to be cut from the survey. This included three “Trolls,” those responding to my survey for the creation of mischief and false data.

Women gamers were asked a series of questions about their experiences in online gaming (which can be found in Appendix B). Respondents answered basic questions about their playing habits (e.g. how often they play, what games they play, if they use voice chat). They answered questions about gameplay and interactions with other

characters, including how they engage in gender play when gaming. They discussed any harassment or discrimination they have witnessed, as well as questions related to empowerment and positive experiences that keep them playing the games. Such questions help us understand if women experience gaming as empowering or restricting. This study also helps us understand what types of gendered and sexual harassment and discrimination women may face and how they respond to such. Harassment includes verbal name-calling and threats, which can reveal an underlying issue of stereotypes against women players. This includes the stereotype of women generally being “bad at games,” and players who judge their skills before a game even begins. However, women, being in control of a powerful character, may feel empowered in a way that they are otherwise denied outside of gaming. Because of their gender, they may feel suppressed in ways outside of gaming, while they may feel a freedom from constraints when playing. A final question on the survey asked if participants would like to say anything else that the survey might not have fully covered. Many individuals left further insightful thoughts, and others left modes of contact to keep updated with the results. A fuller understanding of the female first-person shooter gamer emerges from this study.

After data collection, I calculated univariate and bivariate statistics using SPSS. This included means and frequencies for all variables. Qualitative data from open-ended questions were coded for common themes, and specific quotes have been included in the findings.

## CHAPTER 4: RESULTS

### Demographics

Participants reside in a host of countries, although the majority live in North America. See Table 1 for demographic information. (The n varies from 138-141 due to missing data.) A small minority of participants identify as Hispanic, Latino, or Spanish.

**Table 1**

<b>Respondents' Demographics</b>	<b>n</b>	<b>% (frequency)</b>
Region	140	
Asia		.7 (1)
Europe		11.3 (16)
North America		79.9 (112)
Oceania		7.8 (11)
Race		
Asian	3	2.1 (3)
African American or Black	6	4.3 (6)
White	124	87.9 (124)
American Indian or Alaska Native	3	2.1 (3)
Native Hawaiian or Other Pacific Islander	1	.7 (1)
Other	9	6.4 (9)
Hispanic, Latino, or Spanish origin	140	
Yes		5.7 (8)
No		94.3 (132)
Annual Income	138	
Less than \$15,000		32.6 (45)
\$15,000 to \$29,999		22.5 (31)
\$30,000 to \$44,999		17.4 (24)
\$45,000 to \$59,999		8.7 (12)
\$60,000 to \$74,999		8.7 (12)
\$75,000 or more		10.1 (14)
Education	141	
Some high school		3.5 (5)
High school graduate		7.1 (10)
Some college		38.3 (54)
College graduate		26.2 (37)
Some postgraduate work and above		24.8 (35)

Participants largely identify as “White” (87.9%). Note that the survey allowed participants to select more than one racial category, so this percentage includes people who identify with more than one racial group. However, rather than select multiple racial groups, some of these people chose to just write in “bi-racial” or “mixed” for their response.

Participants have diverse levels of income. Over 30% of participants report an annual income of less than \$15,000, with only 10.1% earning \$75,000 or more. The majority of women report having attended college, with almost a quarter completing at least some postgraduate work.

Participants are relatively experienced gamers. See Table 2; almost 90% of the sample has been regularly playing videogames for six or more years.

**Table 2**

<b>Approximate Years Regularly Playing Games</b>	<b>n=141</b>	<b>% (frequency)</b>
0-1 year		3.5 (5)
2-3 years		5.7 (8)
4-5 years		1.4 (2)
6 years or more		89.4 (126)

### **Conceptualizations of Play**

When asked whether or not respondents think men and women play games differently, the decision is nearly split (see Table 3). Of the responses, 53.3% say “no,” while 46.7% say “yes.” Of those who say there is no difference in play, they say this is because men and women share the same *goals* and *reasons* for playing FPS games. One

person in particular points out that men and women play the same, yet they encounter different problems:

I think on average there are more men that play FPS games specifically, but I don't think they play the games themselves inherently different from the women who do play them. As far as skill, there are women who are bad at games and there are also men who are bad at games. But when a woman is bad, it's more often attributed to the fact that she's a woman, and not just because she's unskilled. Men do not have this problem. That is a big issue I see, but I do not think men and women play the games differently.

Those who believe there is a difference, mention biological and social distinctions. Their claims reflect and reinforce common perceptions of gender differences:

- Men are more aggressive and have tendencies that involve testosterone, but women do not get as into the games and anger as easily as the men.
- Even though we might be playing the same game, I tend to find men being a little more aggressive in whatever the goal currently is.

Some women even hold the belief that other women gamers use men to their advantage: “Other women I meet tend to scam guys or use being a girl to their advantage in whatever way they can.” Other participants also claim women are more cooperative and emotional, yet one respondent says they communicate less often in-game, making cooperation difficult.

**Table 3**

<b>General Thoughts and Preferences</b>	<b>n</b>	<b>% (frequency)</b>
Do you think that men and women play games differently?	137	
Yes		46.7 (64)
No		53.3 (73)
Do you interact with other players differently based on whether they are (or you perceive that they are) a man or woman?	141	
Yes		29.8 (42)
No		70.2 (99)
Do you believe that other players treat you differently because you are a woman?	141	
Yes		78.7 (111)
No		21.3 (30)

Many make the distinction that difference of play is based upon the individual – *not* sex and/or gender:

- Everyone plays games differently/has their own preferred play style, it has nothing to do with gender.
- People play differently. Sex doesn't impact that.
- Everybody plays game differently, but it's based on individual personality, characteristics, goal, etc. In that way, they don't play differently because everybody plays different
- I think PEOPLE in general have different personalities and play styles. It's not gender specific.

These women clearly believe that sex and gender have nothing to do with a player's playstyle; the individual is who is focused upon.

Even though a large percentage of the sample still thinks that that men and women may play differently, the majority (70.2%) report that they themselves do not interact with men and women players differently (see Table 3); yet, they *do* believe they are treated differently. Over three-quarters of participants say that because they are a woman, they believe that they receive differential treatment. This difference in treatment ranges from hostility to flirtation:

- As soon as other players, players I do not personally know, realize I'm a woman they generally get either extremely hostile or overly flirtatious. Sometimes an awful mix of both. I often have to turn my mic off or exit the game completely.
- 60% of guys will love you because you're a chic. Other percentage think you play crap.

The majority of responses lament the negative assumptions that are made of women gamers:

Even in today's day and age, some men might assume that a woman cannot play as well as they can. They may assume that a woman is too silly, feminine, or kind to play a FPS game. Sometimes they may also sexualize or objectify women, assuming that because she is a woman she is interested in a romantic or sexual relation with male gamers. They may even believe that the woman started playing games particularly in order to get male attention.

Another participant states: "They also blame any failure on my gender. I am not free to have a range of skill level - I either have to be twice as good as they expect or they tell me I'm a poser." Because they are women, they sometimes believe that they must do exceedingly well in order to prove themselves.

The ways in which women conceptualize games are complicated by how participants present themselves and perform gender in games. They can play characters

of a different sex, for example, and they can try to hide or reveal aspects of their identity, such as by choosing whether or not to use a headset.

### **Character Selection**

Most women describe being upset about the options (or lack thereof) in characters (see Table 4). In online FPS games, the default character is typically male. Sometimes, there may not even be the option to change your character's sex.

[The] majority of FPS games offer only male options and that character is typically “saving” the female or avenging the horrific death of a female. There's rarely the option to choose to be a female avenging the death of a male or saving a male character. I think if women were given more options to choose female characters it would be more empowering.

As a representation of the player, the majority of respondents want to be able to have this choice. There are some who don't see this as a problem. “I could care less if I play as a guy or a girl,” says another respondent.

**Table 4**  
**Character Creation and Selection**

How much participants agree with statements						
		% (frequency)				
	n	Never	Rarely	Sometimes	Often	Always
I feel dissatisfied when there is no option of choosing whether to play as a male character.	141	39.7 (56)	23.3 (30)	22.0 (31)	6.4 (9)	10.6 (15)
I feel dissatisfied when there is no option of choosing whether to play as a female character.	140	13.6 (19)	13.6 (19)	19.3 (27)	32.1 (45)	21.4 (30)
Even when there is the option to play as a female character, I choose to play as the male character.	141	26.2 (37)	31.9 (45)	29.1 (41)	7.1 (10)	5.7 (8)
I enjoy playing characters that are more feminine, either in appearance or manner, than myself.	141	11.3 (16)	27.0 (38)	38.3 (54)	14.9 (21)	8.5 (12)
I enjoy playing characters that are more masculine, either in appearance or manner, than myself.	140	14.3 (20)	27.9 (39)	41.4 (58)	11.4 (16)	5.0 (7)

Overall, many respondents indicate that they appreciate the ability to engage in gender play. Some demonstrate this through the way they desire the ability to play characters of different sexes. Other players take advantage of the opportunity afforded to them in videogame worlds to try on characters with both more masculine and more feminine traits than themselves. Characters may showcase different personalities, skills, and traits, and players seem to enjoy a full spectrum of these offered. In FPS games where the only avatar available is of one sex, respondents are generally more upset when they encounter situations where only male avatars are available. They are less bothered by situations where only female characters are available for play. Almost 40% of respondents indicate they would never be dissatisfied if they encountered a game where no male characters were available for play.

When there is the option to play a male character, many women still prefer to play as a female. These responses may further show that women want to be able to exhibit some aspect of their femininity in the character. When asked about how often they enjoy playing characters that are “more feminine” than themselves, over 60% say they feel this way some of the time or more often. The question was repeated regarding “more masculine” characters, in which over 50% report feeling this way at least some of the time. These responses indicate women wish to have choices available regarding the gender of characters.

### **Community and Playing with Others**

Online FPS games offer a chance to play with others. These could be people you may never meet in real life or people you know but may not be able to see very often.

However, of the 64.7% of respondents who prefer to play with others, sometimes a distinction is made about *who* the “others” are (see Table 5). One way women try to maximize benefits and minimize negative encounters, including harassment or discrimination based on their sex and/or gender, is by only playing with those they already know:

- I prefer playing with friends, but not with the obnoxious online community.
- I prefer to play by myself OR with friends. I am not a fan of playing with strangers.

Sticking with a group of friends ensures them that the experience will remain positive, which the unexpectedness of random online encounters does not provide.

Most of the women (78.7%) believe that they are treated differently by players *because* they are a woman. As discussed earlier, this may not directly translate into “negative” harassment, however. Along with harassment/discrimination and flirtation, women also mention other forms of “difference,” which involve being put on a pedestal and treated as special. These include men paying extra attention to them and wanting to spend more play-time with them for being a woman. In some cases, they may even be treated as in need of help or saving.

**Table 5**

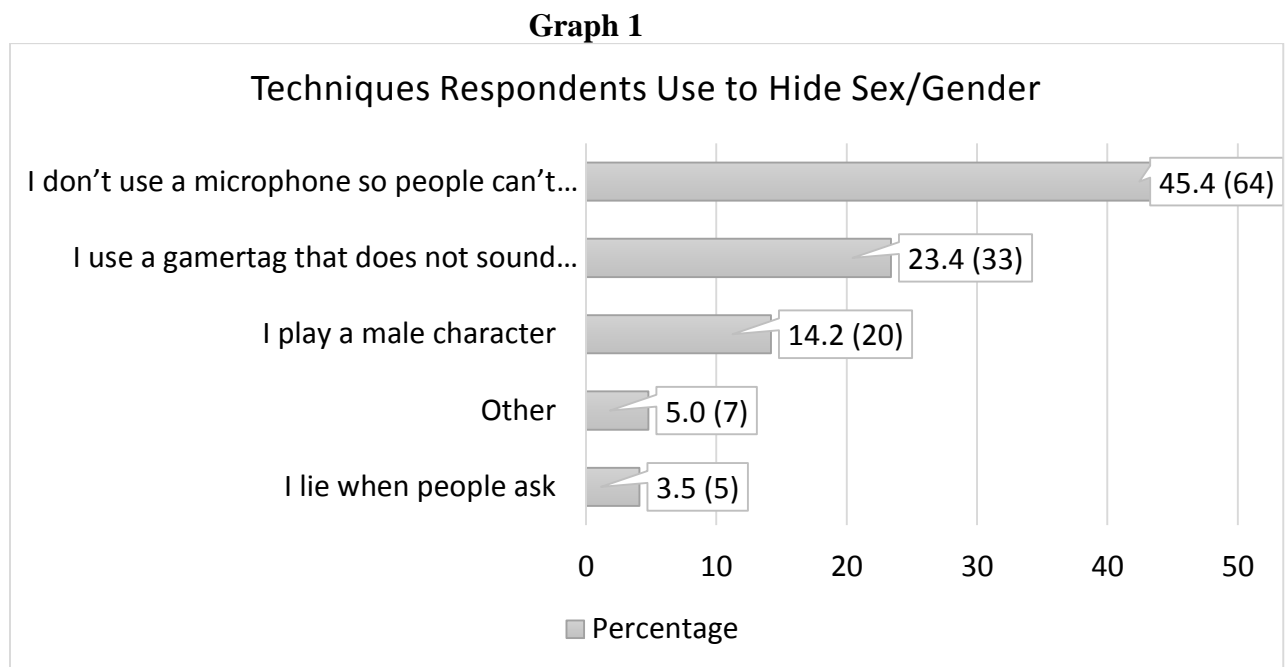
<b>Preference and Treatment When Playing Online</b>	<b>n</b>	<b>% (frequency)</b>
Preference when playing FPS videogames	139	
Prefer to play with others		64.7 (90)
Prefer to play alone		35.3 (49)
Perceived Difference in Treatment Based on Sex/Gender	141	
Yes		78.7 (111)
No		21.3 (30)

Most participants (46.8%) “sometimes hide and sometimes reveal” their sex and/or gender (see Table 6). This may depend upon the scenario, such as whether they are playing with strangers or not. Whereas 36.2% do not think about this, 7.8% “always hide.” Sometimes hiding one’s sex and/or gender, and always hiding it, paint a fearful environment. Women players realize that openly showing their sex and/or gender (through name, chat, etc.) could open the doors for targeted harassment. Not wanting to deal with the repercussions of speaking and revealing this to strangers, they may instead hide in various ways.

**Table 6**

<b>How Often Women Hide or Reveal Sex/Gender Online</b>	<b>n</b>	<b>% (frequency)</b>
	141	
Always hide		7.8 (11)
Sometimes hide and sometimes reveal		46.8 (66)
Always reveal		9.2 (13)
I don't think about this		36.2 (51)

Of those who try to hide their sex and/or gender while playing online, 45.4% do so by not communicating through voice chat (see Graph 1). Others (23.4%) use gamertags, or usernames, which do not sound feminine.



The “other,” category in Graph 1 includes women who say that they use generic names, or they “don’t lie when asked, but don’t volunteer their gender either.” Some further specify in the “other” category that they only type in the chat or lie and say their microphone is broken.

### **Harassment and Discrimination**

The majority (75.9%) of participants *do* experience various forms of harassment or discrimination (See Graph 2). When asked, some believe it’s just the typical harassment anyone would receive while playing: “No more than any other person –male

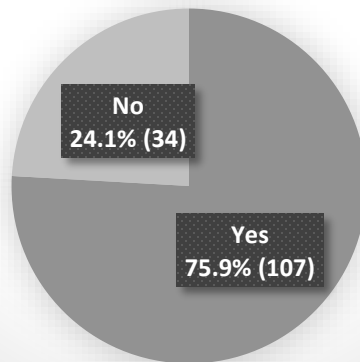
or female- would receive really, and nothing more special than ‘get raped’ aka the ‘your mom’ of this generation.” Although she sees both men and women treated in this manner, some of the language used in trash-talking may still be charged with gender-specific phrasing. Others specifically see the “typical” harassment as more harmful and gender-targeted; the danger of it may even keep them offline:

- I’m a woman so my gender is a liability when I play with other people. Use of the word “rape” as a shorthand by others when they mean “dominate and destroy” doesn’t make me feel inclined to engage with them. I’m aware that I could be swatted and stalked if I play with others, and that’s not particularly enjoyable – much less dangerous if I play by myself.
- I like trash-talking when playing games. However, it would be nice if it wasn’t based on someone’s sex, but instead on actual skill level.

Asserting one’s dominance is used in this gendered language, with words such as “bitch” and “pussy” commonly thrown around with threatening words such as “rape,” and women may become specific targets to these attacks. The language is commonly used both inside and outside of gaming for teasing or putting another person down. Although it may be used to refer to either gender, the language remains as an insult to women specifically. The second quotation shows that perhaps a few women may enjoy participating in this talk as well, however. Some may engage in trash-talking to other players in order to assert a form of superiority over them. This particular woman clarifies she would rather the trash-talk not deal with the sex of a person, however. For her, participating in trash-talk is perhaps taken as a playful “jab” as part of the game, rather than serious insults.

**Graph 2**

**Women Who Report Experiencing Verbal Harassment or Discrimination Because They are Women**  
***n* = 141**



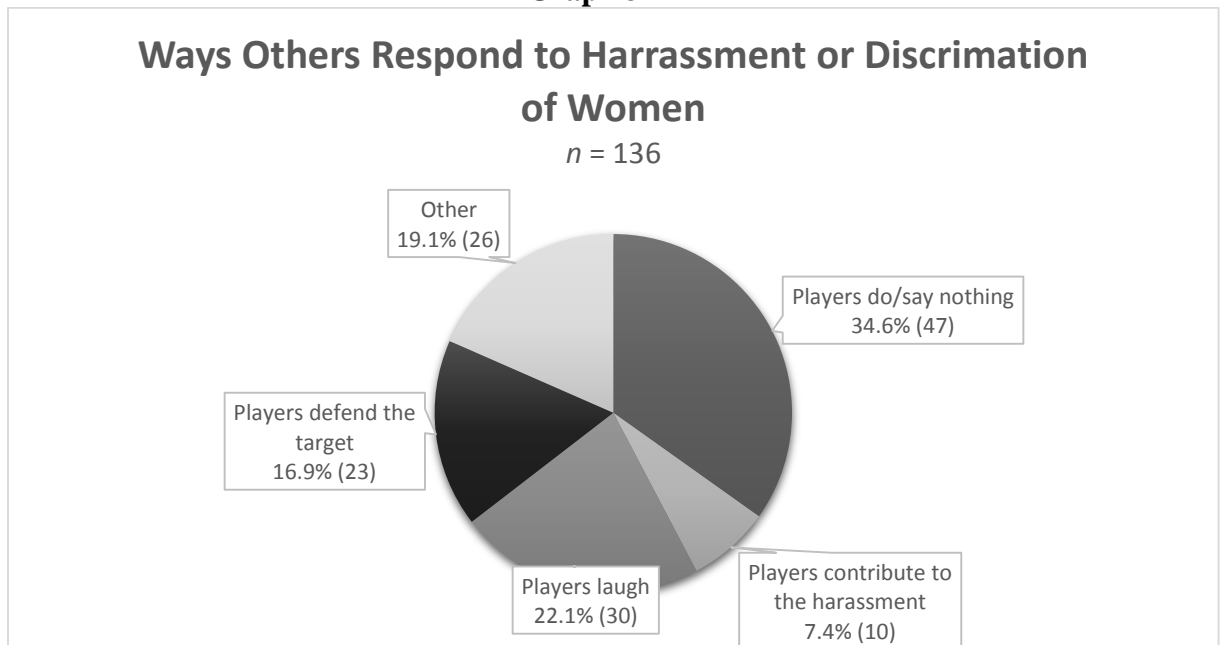
A question that has not been typically asked in game research is whether women find there to be more discrimination within games or outside of them. Of the women in this survey, 52.5% say that they have faced more harassment and discrimination while playing videogames, and 22.7% say that they have faced more of this outside of playing games (see Table 7). About half (51.8%) of the respondents feel that verbal harassment of women (e.g. name-calling, insults) exists in the gaming community, while a much lesser percentage (27.7%) say that discrimination of women (e.g. being team-killed, not being included in a game) exists. Although many women may experience some form of harassment or discrimination because they are women, 33.3% say that it does “not at all” deter them from playing.

**Table 7**

<b>Harassment and Discrimination</b>	<b>n</b>	<b>% (frequency)</b>
Harassment or discrimination faced while playing FPS videogames compared to life outside FPS gaming	141	
Equal amount of harassment and discrimination in both settings		17.0 (24)
More harassment and discrimination while playing videogames		52.5 (74)
More harassment and discrimination outside of the videogame setting		22.7 (32)
Never faced any harassment or discrimination in any setting		7.8 (11)
What extent it is felt that verbal harassment of women (e.g. name-calling, insults) exists in the gaming community	139	
Not at all		3.6 (5)
Not really		7.2 (10)
Undecided		11.5 (16)
Somewhat		25.9 (36)
Very much		51.8 (72)
Extent it is felt that discrimination of women (e.g. being team-killed, not being included in a game) exists in the gaming community	141	
Not at all		8.5 (12)
Not really		15.6 (22)
Undecided		14.9 (21)
Somewhat		33.3 (47)
Very much		27.7 (39)
Whether harassment or discrimination of women, or fear of such, keeps respondents from playing as much as they would like	141	
Not at all		33.3 (47)
Not really		29.8 (42)
Undecided		7.8 (11)
Somewhat		16.3 (23)
Very much		12.8 (18)

Another question asked women the ways in which others respond to harassment. Mostly, 34.6% of respondents believe that other players do or say nothing (see Graph 3). If most players do nothing, then what might women think is the best way for them to respond?

**Graph 3**



*Ideally*, there would be no harassment, they say:

- Ideally there wouldn't be any and if it did happen, then the same way they would respond to racism. In general, I'd say addressing the person would only enflame them, so reporting them would be best.

But because women players recognize this targeted harassment, they offer ways in which other players could potentially help stop this.

- In an ideal world, people would always stand up for those who are being oppressed or victimized in some way. This is not just for the discrimination of women, but for all people.
- Of course. If not then they're part of the harassment by doing nothing to stop it.

Women believe that responses to harassment and discrimination should include a form of intervention – many believe that players should stand up in some way for those being harassed or discriminated against. Silence may even contribute to part of the problem.

### **Empowerment and Trying on New Roles**

In playing FPS games, women are sometimes allowed to try on new roles, which they might not typically have the option of displaying. These roles not only involve a strong character they may play, but also the personal traits that they may exhibit in online gameplay (competitive or cooperative). In breaking traditional gender roles, women are able to create an identity they desire:

- Other media does not usually show women as strong or powerful. In fps games you can be both.
- Strategic FPSes give women the opportunity to take on leadership roles or other important collaborative roles as part of a team, which makes people see each other as equals.

Characteristics that the U.S. and some other Western cultures tend to regard highly are traditionally masculine – “strong,” “powerful,” “leadership.” By trying on these traits, women are reinforcing the values that society says are important, which may in turn cause them to feel empowered.

By participating and exhibiting these skills online, they may then be transferred outside the game world as well.

- It just opens up a lot of opportunities that I would never had been able to have.

For example, I did not assume I could learn how to code (everyone in my friends

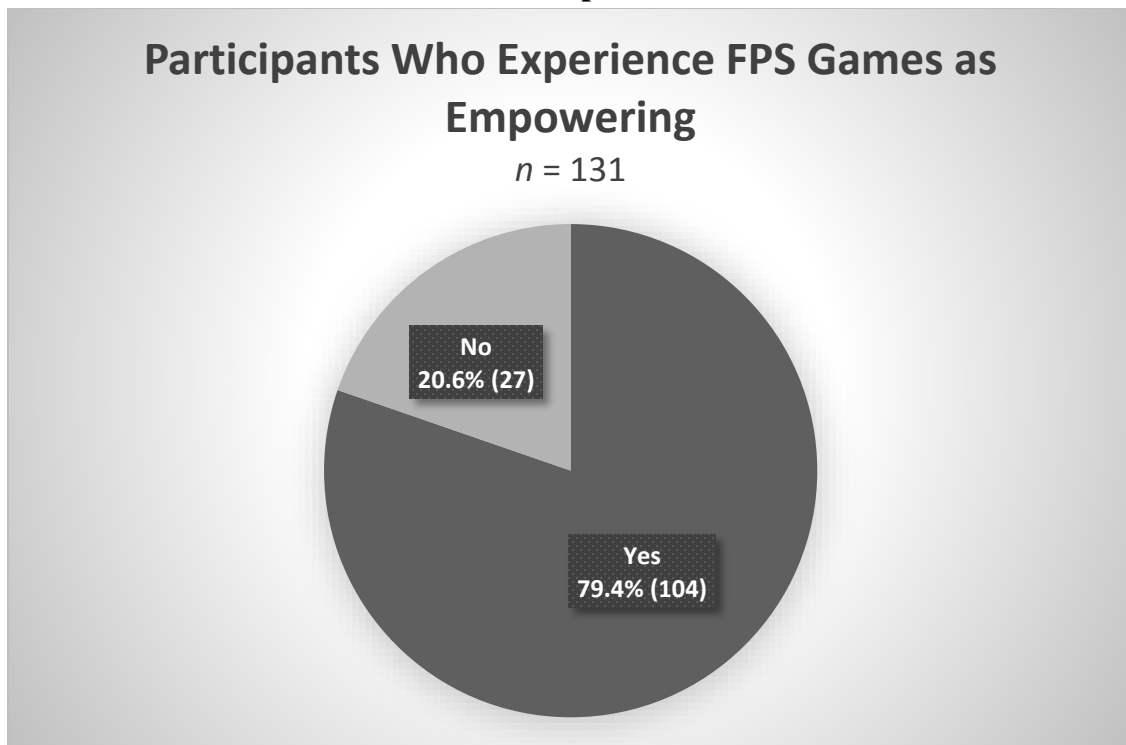
group knows how to), but they made me realize that I could learn it and apply it to my own field...so being around people who had a different background and different interests compelled me to try something new.

- I work in a gender-skewed environment that happens to be more male-oriented (IT). Participating in something like an FPS game has helped my confidence to relate with my fellow peers while giving me the confidence to contribute to my full potential in my current work environment.

Here, one person has realized her potential to try something new – to learn a skill she had previously not thought of as possible, while another person feels that she is able to better display confidence at work after playing first-person shooter games. Learning new skills and transferring online personas lead us to ways in which women may then feel empowered.

According to the survey, 79.4% of respondents believe that FPS games may be empowering for women (see Graph 4). This particular question asked participants to expand upon the answer they chose. From these responses, the empowerment gleaned from online FPS games seems strongest in the sense of videogames providing a context where women can be on a level playing field with men. This online arena is where women can prove themselves as a dominant player, excelling in skill, ability, and power.

**Graph 4**



Even if some cannot prove themselves in their daily lives, or do not feel as if they have an equal footing with men, they may get the chance to exhibit and feel this when playing online FPS games. This seems especially true if being targeted for harassment:

- I think there's a degree of satisfaction in being able to beat a man on the other team when he has harassed me or assumed I am not a good player. There's a chance to demonstrate that I can be just as good or better.

The satisfaction expressed seems to connect the harassment a woman has experienced to empowerment through the demonstration of skill. She may be harassed by a man online, but then she has the chance to show him her skill which may overpower his own.

It is notable then to see that even though so many women report being harassed, they may still feel that games can empower them (see Table 8). Whether women find FPS videogames to be empowering is not dependent on the experience of harassment/discrimination (i.e. Pearson chi-square with 1 degree of freedom,  $p = 0.165$ ).

This is an interesting finding, as people might normally be led to believe that if one is harassed in an environment, one would feel underpowered. However, perhaps because women find ways in which to deal with and avoid this treatment, as well as showcase their skill, they may still reap the benefits that games can offer to players.

**Table 8**

<b>Harassment and Empowerment</b>		Do you feel that FPS videogames can empower women?	
		Yes	No
Have you ever personally experienced verbal harassment or discrimination from other players because you are a woman?	Yes	78.6 (81)	21.4 (22)
	No	82.1 (23)	17.9 (5)

Women who believe videogames can empower women do not exclusively play male characters in an aggressive fashion. They enjoy playing feminine characters with feminine traits some of the time, and desire female character options—more so than women who do not feel videogames can empower women. Table 9 displays these comparisons. It shows how women who believe videogames perceive and use videogames. It compares this to how women who do not find videogames empowering, otherwise perceive and use videogames. (Table 9 presents mean responses on a scale

from 1-5, with higher scores indicating higher agreement, followed by the results from independent-samples t-tests.).

**Table 9**  
**Significance Tests Between Variables and Empowerment**

	Empowering	Not Empowering	t (df)	p-value
FPS Games Give a Break From Everyday Stress	4.28	3.85	2.264 (129)	.025
FPS Games Can Help Manage/Reduce Depression	3.88	3.11	3.964 (129)	.000
FPS Games Foster Interaction With Others	4.03	3.63	2.151 (129)	.033
Pleasure in Acting Aggressive/Violent	3.28	2.74	1.890 (129)	.061
Dissatisfied When No Female Character Option	3.46	2.85	2.109 (128)	.037
Dissatisfied When No Male Character Option	2.20	2.48	-.979 (129)	.329
Enjoy More Feminine Characters	2.98	2.26	3.128 (129)	.002
Enjoy More Masculine Characters	2.63	2.81	-.813 (128)	.418
Choose to Play Male Character over Female	2.35	2.52	-.711 (129)	.478

We can see that there is a significant difference in means between these groups regarding if they enjoy playing characters more feminine than themselves, but not if they enjoy playing characters more masculine than themselves. Other significant differences between these two groups of women occur with respect to feelings of dissatisfaction when there is no female character option; beliefs that FPS games can provide a break

from everyday stresses; beliefs that FPS videogames can help someone who is depressed manage/reduce symptoms; and beliefs that FPS videogames can foster interactions with others.

Some women believe progression is being made regarding harassment/discrimination of women in gaming. “I’m glad my response can be much more positive than it would have been years ago. Females in gaming have come a very long way,” a participant states. It would be interesting to do this survey years from now to try to gauge any change – to test this progression they feel. Another assures that “As it becomes more socially acceptable for women to be gamers, so it will be more common for men to encounter women in FPS games. More exposure to the ‘fear’ will lead to improvement.” As people, gamer and non-gamer alike, begin to accept that women can and do play games as well – that it is not just a hobby for boys and men – I believe the stigma will dissipate and another area of equality will be achieved. “This is like the last frontier, equal treatment of women in gaming,” says another respondent.

## CHAPTER 5: DISCUSSIONS AND CONCLUSIONS

Conducting this survey, I imagined that I would happen upon “trolls” – those finding joy in supplying false data and insults. Luckily, these were not as numerous as I had feared. Three obviously perceptible trolls answered the survey with answers such as “fucking bitches,” “wet vagina,” “if i play by myself then i cant cum ovar 2 ur house an fukc ur bitch,” and comments regarding penis size. This sexually charged language and these gender-specific insults reveal the type of comments that women who game can face.

While some believe that playing shooter games may cause an individual to want to reenact this violence in real life (Jaccarino 2013), my study shows that playing videogames can allow women to discover new potential in positive ways. New potential is reached not only through gaining in-game skills, but also in ways that affect them in real life. They may realize their ability for a skill, or playing may boost their confidence inside and outside of games. This can be seen in the woman who reported her raise in confidence within the workplace. The Royse et al. (2007) study which shows women who feel superior from playing masculine roles in gaming does not seem to acknowledge their satisfaction in choice, however. The gaming context is important, because it has the ability to offer so much choice to players. My study finds that women are often *not* satisfied when they are forced into male roles and not offered the chance to customize. Players may feel most superior within a character that they may fully customize to their liking. Women report that they enjoy having the choice to play male or female characters, and choose to play characters both more masculine and more feminine than themselves at times.

Expressing masculinities and femininities is not limited to character choice, however. A masculine element of online play is “trash-talking.” Wright, Boria, and Breidenbach (2002) show, “trash-talking” is a common element in gaming, which women may enjoy participating in as well. They say that this behavior, while unacceptable outside of gaming, is a common mechanism within.

My most interesting finding is in the high percentage of women gamers who see FPS games as empowering, while an equally high number also experience harassment and/or discrimination. Although 79.4% of women believe videogames can be empowering, 75.9% say they experience harassment or discrimination. It is unfortunate that instead of standing up for others, 34.6% of participants believe that most players do or say nothing. “Sexism in gaming” has been a topic that has been of great focus lately, and some gamers have grown weary of the “feminazi” intrusion. This is the belief that mostly women, who are outsiders to gaming, are intruding in this space and highlighting problem areas that some gamers see as non-existent. Perhaps there *is* a problem when women choose to stay silent for reasons regarding harassment or discrimination.

This research illuminates the idea that: yes, harassment exists, but so does *empowerment*. In the case of some games, an environment that does not allow for character customization suggests that equality is lacking. However, in some games men and women are able to equally exhibit skill when they battle against one another online. They may try on new identities and allow themselves to become something other than they can in person, or they may purely enjoy the release of built up tensions and stress games can offer them. Although women can become annoyed by flirtation and sick of “get back in the kitchen” comments, this does not keep them from playing; rather, they

find ways in which to minimize these encounters. In some cases, at the cost of hiding their identity, women may find empowerment in playing. They *feel* empowered from what the games offer them, but their actions of hiding may tell another story. Women's individual sense of empowerment is real, but is it really empowering for women as a group? Discrimination and harassment against women, as well as structural issues of some games, show that a disempowering aspect may exist. Especially in FPS games, women are underrepresented and often only male characters are available for online play. Videogames are commonly thought of as "men creating games for other men." These structural issues will hopefully resolve as increased diversity opens an array of choice and opportunity within the workplace and within gameworlds.

Frostling-Henningsson (2009) creates an accurate picture of what gameworlds can be for players. This is where people may try on different personas, roles, and even break norms of their gender. In a broader spectrum of game types, players can choose to act more masculine or act more feminine. They may hunt and kill, or display kindness and assistance. They can travel to worlds and places that do not exist in reality from their home. Players' ability to experience all this is limited by game creators who may not offer many character choices, however. The benefits of videogame worlds are hindered by sexual and gendered harassment, discrimination (or extra attention/white-knighting toward women) which forces some of them to hide who they are. However, we live in a world where these women find harassment to occur outside of it. It upsets women that harassment has found its way into the gaming world, but they still tend to find that the benefits of gaming outweigh anything else. Some women may feel empowered by strong, masculine characters/traits, and others by displaying more femininity in-game. If

society could view certain traits as equal and attainable by men and women, such as leadership or caregiver, empowerment may be looked at from a different perspective. We should value both what is stereotypically masculine as well as feminine, instead of privileging one over the other.

The limitations of my research are in the convenience sample I was only able to obtain. There is no way I could possibly reach out to the whole of women gamers for my survey. Therefore, only those women I found through online forums, social media, and other groups are included in my sample. Another limitation is that some participants may have conflated third-person and first-person shooters in their responses due to much similarity.

Future research may wish to explore more age-related issues. This was especially brought to my attention in a forum where my survey was posted. Here a participant states, “I brought up the subject of ageism within the public and media image of video gaming. This - I think - is a much bigger issue for us now. I've had more run-ins with ageist wnkrs than overtly sexist ones.” Might the mature gaming audience also use some of the same strategies which minimize harassment and maximize empowerment? What are the ways in which they are harassed and discriminated against; is it similar or different from the things discussed thus far? Perhaps mature gamers are empowered by the young, strong characters they play, or maybe they also wish to have more character customization as a reflection of self. As another woman said, “WE are all gamers in spirit.”

Videogames are a quickly growing media with a plethora of gametypes. It can be a professional sport or it can be a hobby; women may participate just as well as men, and

the old may play as well as the young. Games are not going away; they are evolving. Virtual reality is the new big thing, and it will be interesting to see how players may interact in these future second “realities.”

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## APPENDICES

### APPENDIX A: IRB Approval



#### INSTITUTIONAL REVIEW BOARD

118 College Drive #5147 | Hattiesburg, MS 39406-0001

Phone: 601.266.5997 | Fax: 601.266.4377 | [www.usm.edu/research/institutional.review.board](http://www.usm.edu/research/institutional.review.board)

#### NOTICE OF COMMITTEE ACTION

The project has been reviewed by The University of Southern Mississippi Institutional Review Board in accordance with Federal Drug Administration regulations (21 CFR 26, 111), Department of Health and Human Services (45 CFR Part 46), and university guidelines to ensure adherence to the following criteria:

- The risks to subjects are minimized.
- The risks to subjects are reasonable in relation to the anticipated benefits.
- The selection of subjects is equitable.
- Informed consent is adequate and appropriately documented.
- Where appropriate, the research plan makes adequate provisions for monitoring the data collected to ensure the safety of the subjects.
- Where appropriate, there are adequate provisions to protect the privacy of subjects and to maintain the confidentiality of all data.
- Appropriate additional safeguards have been included to protect vulnerable subjects.
- Any unanticipated, serious, or continuing problems encountered regarding risks to subjects must be reported immediately, but not later than 10 days following the event. This should be reported to the IRB Office via the "Adverse Effect Report Form".
- If approved, the maximum period of approval is limited to twelve months.

Projects that exceed this period must submit an application for renewal or continuation.

**PROTOCOL NUMBER:** 15091804  
**PROJECT TITLE:** Women in Gaming: A Study of Female Players' Experience in Online FPS Games  
**PROJECT TYPE:** New Project  
**RESEARCHER(S):** Mary Allison McDaniel  
**COLLEGE/DIVISION:** College of Arts and Letters  
**DEPARTMENT:** Anthropology and Sociology  
**FUNDING AGENCY/SPONSOR:** N/A  
**IRB COMMITTEE ACTION:** Exempt Review Approval  
**PERIOD OF APPROVAL:** 09/22/2015 to 09/21/2016

**Lawrence A. Hosman, Ph.D.**  
**Institutional Review Board**

## **APPENDIX B**

### **Informed Consent Form**

#### **Project Information**

Project Title: Women in Gaming: A Study of Female Players'

Experiences in Online FPS Games

Principal Investigator: Allison McDaniel

Phone: 601-441-4284

Email: mary.a.mcdaniel@eagles.usm.edu

College: The University of Southern Mississippi

Department: Anthropology and Sociology

#### **Research Description**

##### **1. Purpose:**

The purpose of my research is to bring to light some of the ways women gamers experience online first-person shooter games. As women are not normally focused on in these types of studies, your participation will greatly help in uncovering how women feel and react in this environment.

##### **2. Description of Study:**

This survey will take approximately 15-20 minutes of your time.

**3. Benefits:**

Your participation in this survey will help contribute knowledge to an overlooked area of study - how women gamers experience the FPS online environment.

**4. Risks:**

Risks are minimal to none. You may wish to not answer a question and opt to skip it. You may also choose to quit participating at any time.

**5. Confidentiality:**

All information you give will be kept confidential. Nothing with your identifiable information will be revealed in the research.

**Participant's Assurance:**

This project has been reviewed by the International Review Board, which ensures that research projects involving human subjects follow federal regulations. Any questions or concerns about rights as a research participant should be directed to the Chair of the IRB at 601-266-5997. Participation in this project is completely voluntary, and participants may withdraw from this study at any time without penalty, prejudice, or loss of benefits. Any questions about the research should be directed to the Principal Investigator using the contact information provided above.

### **Consent to Participate**

Consent is hereby given to participate in this research project. By continuing with the survey, you agree that you are a woman (18+) who has played an FPS game online with others. All procedures and/or investigations to be followed and their purposes, including any experimental procedures, were explained. Information was given about all benefits, risks, inconveniences, or discomforts that might be expected.

The opportunity to ask questions regarding the research and procedures is given. Participation in the project is completely voluntary, and participants may withdraw at any time without penalty, prejudice, or loss of benefits. All personal information is strictly confidential, and no names will be disclosed. Any new information that develops during the project will be provided if that information may affect the willingness to continue participation in the project.

Questions concerning the research, at any time during or after the project, should be directed to the Principal Investigator with the contact information provided above. This project and this consent form have been reviewed by the Institutional Review Board, which ensures that research projects involving human subjects follow federal regulations. Any questions or concerns about rights as a research participant should be directed to the Chair of the Institutional Review Board, The University of Southern Mississippi, 118 College Drive #5147, Hattiesburg, MS 39406-0001, 601-266-5997.

## APPENDIX C

### Questionnaire

TXT1 Please mark or write in your answers to the following questions. Mark only one bullet point unless otherwise noted. Please remember questions will be dealing with videogames, NOT other online activity.

Q1 What is your birth year?

Q2 What is the highest level of education you have completed?

- ☐ Some high school (1)
- ☐ High school graduate (2)
- ☐ Some College (3)
- ☐ College graduate (4)
- ☐ Some postgraduate work and above (5)

Q3 What race do you identify as? Mark all that apply.

- ☐ Asian (1)
- ☐ African American or Black (2)
- ☐ White (3)
- ☐ American Indian or Alaska Native (4)
- ☐ Native Hawaiian or Other Pacific Islander (5)
- ☐ Other (please specify): (6) \_\_\_\_\_

Q4 Are you of Hispanic, Latino, or Spanish origin?

- ☐ Yes (1)
- ☐ No (2)

Q5 In which country do you currently reside?

Q6 What is your annual income?

- ☐ Less than \$15,000 (1)
- ☐ \$15,000 to \$29,999 (2)
- ☐ \$30,000 to \$44,999 (3)
- ☐ \$45,000 to \$59,999 (4)
- ☐ \$60,000 to \$74,999 (5)
- ☐ \$75,000 to \$89,999 (6)
- ☐ \$90,000 or more (7)

Q7 Approximately how long have you regularly been playing videogames?

- ☐ 0-1 year (1)
- ☐ 2-3 years (2)
- ☐ 4-5 years (3)
- ☐ 6 years or more (4)

Q8 Considering the past three months, approximately how many hours did you play videogames on average each week? Write your answer in the blank.

Hours played each week: (1)

TXT2 From this point on in the survey, questions will only refer to your experiences of playing first-person shooter (FPS) videogames.

Q9 Considering the past three months, approximately how many hours did you play FPS videogames on average each week? Write your answer in the blank.

Hours played each week: (1)

Q10 When playing FPS videogames, which is your preference?

- ☐ I prefer to play with others (1)
- ☐ I prefer to play by myself (2)

Q10.5 Please explain your answer below.

Q11 Please list in order the top three things you like about FPS videogames compared to other videogame genres (with 1 being the most favorable point).

- 1 (1)
- 2 (2)
- 3 (3)

Q12 Please list up to three FPS videogames that you have played the most in the past three months and select the number that corresponds to the skill level you believe you possess (with 1 being the lowest skill and 5 being the highest skill).

	1 (1)	2 (2)	3 (3)	4 (4)	5 (5)
FPS Videogame 1 (1)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
FPS Videogame 2 (2)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
FPS Videogame 3 (3)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

TXT3 The following questions will be about your general experiences and thoughts regarding FPS videogames.

Q13 Rate how much you agree with the following statements:

	Strongly Disagree (1)	Disagree (2)	Neither Agree nor Disagree (3)	Agree (4)	Strongly Agree (5)
FPS videogames give one a break from everyday life stresses. (1)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
FPS videogames lessen one's self-esteem. (2)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
FPS videogames waste time in which one could be more productive. (3)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
FPS videogames can help someone who is depressed manage or reduce symptoms. (4)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
FPS videogames foster interactions with others, that one might otherwise not have. (5)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
I take pleasure from being able to aid other players in-game. (6)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
I enjoy saying	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

<p>flirtatious things to other players. (7)</p> <p>I take pleasure from being able to act in more aggressive and violent ways than I can in my life outside of FPS videogames. (8)</p> <p>I enjoy engaging in trash-talking that I otherwise would not in my life outside of FPS videogames. (9)</p> <p>I receive flirtatious attempts by other players based upon their assumption (or knowledge) of me being a woman. (10)</p>	○	○	○	○	○
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TXT4 The following questions will be about sex roles and gender.

Q14 Rate how much you agree with the following statements about character creation and selection:

	Never (1)	Rarely (2)	Sometimes (3)	Often (4)	Always (5)
I feel dissatisfied when there is no option of choosing whether to play as a male character. (1)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
I feel dissatisfied when there is no option of choosing whether to play as a female character. (2)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Even when there is the option to play as a female character, I choose to play as the male character. (3)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
I enjoy playing	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

characters that are more feminine, either in appearance or manner, than myself. (4)					
I enjoy playing characters that are more masculine, either in appearance or manner, than myself. (5)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

Q15 When you interact with other players online, how often do you imagine or become aware of the following:

	Never (1)	Rarely (2)	Sometimes (3)	Often (4)	Always (5)
Whether the player is a man or woman (1)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
The player's skill level (2)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Another important characteristic about the player (please specify): (3)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

Q16 Do you think that men and women play games differently?

- ☐ Yes (1)
- ☐ No (2)

Q16.5 Please explain your answer below.

Q17 Do you interact with other players differently based on whether they are (or you perceive that they are) a man or woman?

- ☐ Yes (1)
- ☐ No (2)

Q18 Do you believe that other players treat you differently because you are a woman?

- ☐ Yes (1)
- ☐ No (2)

Q18.5 Please explain your answer below.

Q19 When you play, how often do you try to hide or reveal from other players that you are a woman?

- ☐ Always hide (1)
- ☐ Sometimes hide and sometimes reveal (2)
- ☐ Always reveal (3)
- ☐ I don't think about this (4)

If Always reveal Is Selected, Then Skip To End of Block  
If I don't think about this Is Selected, Then Skip To End of Block

Q19.5 What techniques do you use to hide that you are a woman? Mark all that apply.

- ☐ I play a male character (1)
- ☐ I don't use a microphone so people can't hear my voice (2)
- ☐ I lie when people ask (3)
- ☐ I use a gamertag that does not sound feminine (4)
- ☐ Other (please specify): (5) \_\_\_\_\_

TXT5 The following questions will be about game interactions, and harassment and discrimination. "Verbal harassment" is defined as unwelcome spoken comments, including offensive comments and jokes, and threats. "Discrimination" involves the unequal treatment of someone because they are part of a certain group.

Q20 Rate your attitude regarding the following questions:

	Not at all (1)	Not really (2)	Undecided (3)	Somewhat (4)	Very Much (5)
From your general experience playing FPS videogames, to what extent do you feel that verbal harassment of women (e.g. name-calling, insults) exists in the gaming community? (1)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
From your general experience playing games, to what extent do you feel that discrimination of women (e.g. being team-killed, not being included in a game) exists in the gaming community? (2)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

Does harassment or discrimination of women, or fear of such, keep you from playing as much as you would like? (3)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
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Q21 Have you ever personally experienced verbal harassment or discrimination from other players because you are a woman?

- ☐ Yes (1)
- ☐ No (2)

If No Is Selected, Then Skip To Have you ever personally experienced ...

Q21.5 In the space provided, please give examples of harassment or discrimination that you have received.

Q22 Have you ever personally experienced the following:

	Never (1)	Rarely (2)	Sometimes (3)	Often (4)	Always (5)
Been told by other players that you are "good for a girl" regarding your skill level (1)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Been called a "bitch," "cunt," or similar term, by whom you believe to be a male player (2)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Been blocked from joining a group, or kicked off a team, or had your character killed, because you are a woman (3)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

Q23 Comparing any harassment or discrimination you may have faced while playing FPS videogames, and comparing it to your life outside of playing FPS videogames (such as at work), which of the following is true?

- ☐ I have faced an equal amount of harassment and discrimination in both settings (1)
- ☐ I have faced more harassment and discrimination while playing videogames (2)
- ☐ I have faced more harassment and discrimination outside of the videogame setting (3)
- ☐ I have never faced any harassment or discrimination in any setting (4)

Q24 In your experience, how have players responded to the harassment or discrimination of women?

- ☐ Players do/say nothing (1)
- ☐ Players contribute to the harassment (2)
- ☐ Players laugh (3)
- ☐ Players defend the target (4)
- ☐ Other (please specify): (5) \_\_\_\_\_

Q25 In an ideal world, how do you believe that other players should respond to the harassment or discrimination of women?

TXT6 This last section will focus on positive experiences and the empowerment of women.

Q26 What positive experiences do FPS videogames offer women?

Q27 Rate how much you agree with the following statements:

	Strongly Disagree (1)	Disagree (2)	Neither Agree nor Disagree (3)	Agree (4)	Strongly Agree (5)
The FPS videogame culture offers important female role models for women (whether players or game creators). (1)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Playing FPS videogames gives me a chance to role-play as strong and powerful characters. (2)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Playing FPS videogames provides me with an opportunity to demonstrate my skill and intelligence. (3)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Playing FPS videogames has changed how I view gender norms by enabling me to be more accepting of others who don't fit the mold. (4)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

FPS videogame culture has changed how society views traditional gender norms for women by enabling others to be more accepting of women who participate in masculine spheres. (5)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
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Q28 Do you feel that FPS videogames can empower women?

- ☐ Yes (1)
- ☐ No (2)

Q29 Please explain your answer below.

Q30 Is there anything else you wish to say that you were not able to within this survey or is there any feedback you wish to leave? If so, please provide the information in the lines below. (If you are taking this survey for Fennell's class, then write your name in this box to receive credit.)

TXT7 If you would like to be contacted for any future research, please provide your contact information below. If you do not wish to be contacted, omit this section. All blanks do not have to be filled. Remember, this information will be kept confidential. Do not hesitate to reach out to me if you have any further questions or comments you wish to make.

INFO Information:

Name: (1)

Phone: (2)

Email: (3)

Other: (4)