

# Female Gamers: A Thematic Analysis of Their Gaming Experience

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## ABSTRACT

*International evidence indicates that the number of females involved in video-gaming is increasing. Within the context of this increase, there is a need to explore the experiences of this group of gamers in detail. This study explored female experiences of playing video-games. Data were collected from an online discussion forum dedicated to video-gaming; the sample comprised of posts drawn from 409 discussion threads. Thematic analysis of the discussions suggests that gaming is a key element of the female gamers' identity, with females discussing the integration of gaming into their daily lives on a number of different levels. Similar to previous research, social elements of gaming are highlighted with simultaneous difficulties with online interaction emphasised. These themes are discussed in relation to relevant research in the area, along with recommendations for future research and consideration of possible explanations for the themes observed.*

**Keywords:** *Female Gamers, Gaming, Gaming Identity, Online Gaming, Social Interaction, Video-Games, Video-Game Violence*

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## INTRODUCTION

International research has consistently found that compared to females, males play video-games more frequently, are attracted to different games, and play for longer (Rideout, Roberts & Foehr, 2005; Anderson, Gentile & Buckley, 2007; Olsen, Kutner, Baer, Beresin, Warner & Nicholi, 2009; Coyne, Padilla-Walker, Stockdale & Daly, 2011). Therefore, further research is needed to explore these gender differences in motivation to play, and experience of playing. Researchers have argued that the gender

differences reported in gaming may be related to (i) socialisation factors (i.e., females not being socially rewarded for playing video-games in the same way as males), (ii) video-games typically being designed by males for other males, and (iii) males having better spatial ability skills than females thus aiding gaming (Krahe & Moller, 2004; Griffiths, 2007; Olsen et al., 2009). However, Entertainment Software Association (2012) reported females now represent 47% of US gamers, with females aged over 18 years representing the fastest growing gamer demographic.

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## Motivation to Play Violent Video-Games

In exploring gamer's motivation to play, research has indicated various factors that make games more attractive to male gamers (MGs) than female gamers (FGs). Hartmann and Klimmit (2006) research with FGs indicated that females disliked the violent content of games, and stereotypical game characters. In a second study, they conducted an online survey and argued that FGs were less attracted than MGs to the competitive element in violent video-games, similar to previous research with FGs (Griffiths, Davies & Chappell, 2004; Lucas & Sherry, 2004). The researchers argued that if competing and winning were not appealing incentives to FGs, then other incentives identified as important to MGs may not be as relevant for FGs.

Olsen, Kutner, Warner, et al's (2007) study indicated that adolescents key reasons for playing video-games related to emotional regulation, relaxation, and the ability of gaming to reduce loneliness. Similar findings have reported gaming offers a means of escape from everyday stress and relaxation by adults and adolescents (Klimmt, Hefner & Vorderer, 2009; Padilla-Walker, Nelson, Carroll & Jensen, 2009; Snodgrass, Lacy, Denagh, Fagan & Most, 2011). Hussain and Griffiths (2009) reported online gaming alleviates negative feelings of loneliness, boredom, and/or frustration. Online gaming studies indicate that social elements of gaming are a key attraction of gaming (e.g., Cole & Griffiths, 2007; Griffiths, Davies & Chappell, 2003; Griffiths, Davies & Chappell, 2004; Yee, 2006). One study reported one-fifth of online gamers preferred to socialise online, rather than offline (Hussain & Griffiths, 2008).

In online gaming, gender differences are evident in the social interactions, but females may place a different emphasis on these interactions (Taylor, 2003). Cole and Griffiths (2007) reported over 70% of MGs and FGs made what they described as good friends online, and 42%

had met them offline. Males made more friends in online games than females, but females were more likely to discuss sensitive issues online and meet them offline than MGs. Yee (2006) argued males are motivated by achievement and manipulation factors in online gaming, whereas females are motivated by relationship, immersion, and escapism factors. In relation to Massively-Multiplayer Online Role-Playing Games (MMORPGs), Cole and Griffiths (2007) noted that MMORPGs were highly social interactive environments providing opportunities to create strong friendships and emotional relationships. Furthermore, FGs were more likely than MGs to share and confide with people they met while playing online.

Reinecke (2009) reported gaming was a means of developing friendship and support systems. This study found adults who received less social support from colleagues and supervisors played games at work more frequently than did individuals with higher levels of social support. Lucas and Sherry (2004) argued that while social elements of video-game play explain the motivation to play, they also explain the lower numbers of FGs attracted to such play. The study argued that fewer females were playing video-games due to recognised social norms of gaming being a gender-specific activity.

Social interaction in gaming has also been explored from other perspectives. Coyne, Padilla-Walker, Stockdale and Day (2011) suggested that while gaming is associated with heightened aggressive behaviour and reduced prosocial behaviour in adolescents, when considering female adolescents alone, gaming was associated with a increased prosocial behaviour for girls when they played video-games with others. However, it may be significant that the prosocial measure used in the study related directly to prosocial behaviour directed towards the adolescents' family members (adolescent and parent reporting), and as such it could be argued that co-playing with a parent could lead to an increase in prosocial behaviour towards

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