

For many people, video games are the first taste of the world of technology. Therefore, the message these games send to the players is vitally important. Women, specifically, are most often portrayed in more mature video games as both overly sexual and somewhat masculine. For example, one of the most commonly known woman video game characters, Lara Croft, is dressed in tight, revealing clothing with clear emphasis on her breasts and hips. It is only natural that any environment in which women are objectified is one most females will avoid. Lara Croft also demonstrates emotional aloofness and participates in shooting and violence, activities and traits thought of as purely male-oriented. The fact that she is only *physically* feminine, and eccentrically so, suggests that a woman's appearance may be her only valuable attribute. Furthermore, her character implies that a successful person must strictly demonstrate traditionally male personality traits.

Beyond these obstacles still lie many social implications a woman must face when entering the world of video games. A female gamer is typically seen as unfeminine, geeky, and holding lower status than other females. More importantly, she is seen as a worse game player than her male peers. Although there has been no research that proves women cannot play video games as well as men, an overwhelming majority of the population shares this belief, including many women. In this way the video game community is somewhat antiquated, treating women as having an eternally lower status than men.

While previously the subjects of research on women in video games have been mostly on player statistics, we will explore both women's portrayal in video games as well as the social environment of a woman gamer. The Interactive Digital Software Association, or IDSA, reported in 2000 that 43% of video game players are women. We will grow on this famous finding by examining why women are still thought of as a minority in the realm of video games even though they are more prominent in the industry each year. Furthermore, we will investigate why they face such harsh criticism as female gamers when there has been no substantial evidence of one gender being more capable than the other in playing video games.

In order to accurately research discrimination and its affect on women within the video game community, data will be collected through a series of experiments and surveys. Experiments will be conducted by placing a female in an online community such as Xbox Live and World of Warcraft. A control group will be established by "friending," sending a friend request and playing with a randomly assigned person or group of people online. In one case, a female will play two rounds of a game, the first anonymously and the second with her gender revealed through voice chat. Our second point of review will be a female revealing her sex before the game starts, as to emphasize the opponent's preconceived notions of her character and ability. Moreover, we will record the female player's thoughts on the experience afterward, indicating women's comfort level in playing video games and whether she feels accepted or encouraged to continue.

In addition, written surveys will be widely distributed throughout Temple University to male and female students of all majors. Our collected data from these surveys will shed light on both sexes' opinions of video games in general, as well as female video game characters and gamers specifically. Our gathered information will also include the amount and types of technology the surveyed person in question uses on a weekly basis. This will provide us with a clear notion of the difference in perception

inside and outside of the video game community. This data will be used in conjunction with our findings from the experiments to accurately portray a woman's standing within this group.

With this project we strive to clarify how women are viewed both in video games and as players, as well as how this influences their opinion of technology in a broader sense. We hope presenting these findings will improve the general notion of a female gamer and alleviate the stereotypes she is faced with. In doing so, women of all ages will more often participate in playing and designing video games, thus increasing the number of women in technology as a whole. Also, we will bring the negative connotations that female characters are instilling in both male and female players to the video game industry's attention. The anticipated result of this unveiling will be both an increased and more realistic representation of women in video games. A similar increase in female participation as not only gamers, but as game designers, programmers and engineers is inevitable as females feel more accepted by the technological community.