

The Girl Gamers in a Boys' Game

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The aim of this research is to explore the external and internal dynamics on why girl gamers play online games and how they developed the interest in local area network games. The themes of social interaction, team participation, and exploration are considered as compelling activities female gamers are engaging in local area network games. Qualitative case study was employed through a purposive selection of the 5 student girl gamers who were enrolled at the University of Perpetual Help System Laguna, Philippines. Though local area network games are originally boys' game, however, the result of the study reveals that girl gamers are now womanizing and are even addicted to the male dominated game as it caught their curiosity. It is also learnt that the girl gamers were influenced by the people around them whom they have relationship with like their friends, boyfriends, families and especially their peers. The girl gamers claimed that they face challenges such as being insulted, discriminated against, underestimated and generally prejudices as weak by their male counterparts, however, their love and addiction for the game still sees them occasionally missing class to be able to play local area network games. The researchers recommended that the girl gamers should be encouraged to play local area network since they claimed that they get pleasure from playing the games and that in a way, it helps them get rid of their repressed emotions.

Keywords: Computer gaming, girl gamers, LAN games, social interaction, team participation, dominant gender stereotypes.

INTRODUCTION

Computer gaming have become one of the most popular leisure activities for children, teenager, and adults in the world. Recently there is growing demands of women and girls who are into playing Local Area Network (LAN) games. Instead of chatting with their friends in a social networking websites, they prefer playing LAN games and online computer games. These girl gamers also known as women gamers in the social network and blog are now actively playing LAN games with other players like men. Girl gamers are not seen as competitors by boy gamers. Boy gamers see them as just players or just girls who learnt to play LAN games to kill boredom. Study by Taylor (2003) shows that women and girls playing what are typically defined as masculine games are framed as simply exceptions. Previous studies (Bryce and Rutter, 2003; Dickey, 2006) showed that there is an increasing evidence of female gaming. The authors examine the possibility of computer gaming as a potential site for

challenging dominant gender stereotypes, relating this to the production and consumption of contemporary leisure. According to Klepek (2006), 64% of 117 million online gamers are actually women, while the Entertainment Software Association (ESA) in its annual demographic study, found that two-fifths or 40% of gamers in the U.S. are women (PC Magazine Online, 2008; McCann, 2008).

LAN games are male dominated pastime, competition and high level on involvement is needed in playing this game. According to Beavis and Charles (2007) existing research into computer games culture suggests a male dominated environment and points to girls' lower levels of competence and participation in games. Male gamers treated these girl gamers with insulting comments, threatened them with sexual harassment and treats them like unwanted outsiders in the game. Comments such as "Show me your tits," "I've got something for you to sit on" and the more traditional "Make me a sandwich" are among the sexist remarks and obscenities received as a girl gamer plays on the web (Teitel, 2012). From a survey conducted by Matthew (as cited by Nunneley, 2012), out of 874 respondents, 80% believed sexism is rampant in

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the gaming community, and 35% have been sexually harassed while playing online. Women were harassed four times more than men, and 63% of women reported being called a “cunt, bitch, slut, and whore.” Others were threatened with sexual assault, or asked for sexual favors, and commented at regarding stereotypical female roles. Many insults hurled at women were derogatory remarks on their weight or general physical appearance. Also 35.8% of women quit playing temporarily because of sexism, and 9.6% quit playing a certain game permanently because of harassment.

Taylor (2003) and Danforth (2011) presented the social interaction of girl gamers with other players especially with men. Women and girls play, and they are doing so in steadily increasing numbers. They play online massively multiplayer online (MMOs) games, co-op games off Steam, tabletop role-playing games (RPGs), and board games. They are young and old, and the so-called “girl gamers” are becoming more visible and vocal. According to Lybæk and Witkowski (2006), leisure time and negotiating activity are girls’ reasons in playing computer games. There is complicated relationship between play and productivity in the design and advertising of computer games aimed at women audiences and show how gendered modes of play are constructed and ideologically driven (Chess, 2009). Alama (2012) interviewed several girl (early 20s to their 40s) gamers. The majority of them said they play Mario Bros series, Zelda, Final Fantasy, Duck Hunt, Chrono Trigger, and Sonic the Hedgehog. The majority of these girls stated that it was either their brothers or fathers that introduced them to video games. They also said that video games make them all happy in one way or another. In another study, a clear link between a sustained period of playing violent games and subsequent increases in hostile behavior was found. Girls who play violent computer games during their school years were found to be affected just as much as boys (Daily Mail, 2012).

In a research by Hartmann and Klimmt (2006), it was found that German females dislike video games. She found female respondents’ in Study 1 (N= 317) demonstrated lack of meaningful social interaction. The violent content and sexual gender role stereotyping of game characters, were the most important reasons why females disliked the games. In Study 2, an online survey (N= 795), revealed that female respondents were less attracted to competitive elements in video games, suggesting an explanation for gender-specific game preferences. Games now are much more welcoming to women - though there are plenty of improvements to be made. They have only ever gotten into a handful of computer games - mostly Zoo Tycoon and CoH. Both games are heavy on walk through, CoH is notorious for its character customization, and both games were primarily a way to keep their boyfriends company. Not only are new games available, but there is also more awareness and acceptance of women in gaming (Denner

et al., 2009).

According to Steinberg (2012), many games today also emphasize the cooperative aspects of game play, in which two or more players need to work together in order to reach a common goal. While the gaming culture may be more gender-based in Pakistan, Iftikhar (2011) research has shown that in the West, number of female gamers is on the rise and in fact account for 42% of all gamers. She concluded that female gamers have strong preference for female characters. Regardless of whatever game there may be, a game is incomplete without a decent female character. Girls were viewed “not” supposed to be gamers. Most boys, feeding on this idea, would constantly criticize girls (while getting beaten by a girl became the biggest threat to the fragile male ego – especially in Street Fighter) and even girls would start criticizing other girls if they continued to play video games. According to Welsh (2011), these women have their advantage playing computer games for it gives them good relationship to their families. Adolescent girls who play age-appropriate video games with their fathers are happier, healthier and have better family connections than those who do not. An average girl gamer play video games with her parents only once a month, though 46 percent of the girls studied never played with a parent at all. The young girls who played age-appropriate video games with their parents (more often than not their father) were better behaved, felt more connected to their families, were less aggressive and less likely to be depressed. The game playing with their parents accounted for 20 percent of the difference in outcomes, a pretty significant effect in the social sciences.

Marshall and Forna (2008) addressed the research question “What video games appeal the most to women?” A total of 250 female gamers were interviewed for the research. It was found that the female gamers were clearly averse to games involving violence while preferring games that involved creativity and mental stimulation. Ihamaki (2012) examined digital games through gendered game content, game spaces and advertisement. The fundamental differences between what boys and girls want from computer games is a discourse that posits essential differences in girls and boys interests and competencies. Female culture can be a significant extension into the realm of gaming, and contribute to the development of women's culture and the diversification of the gaming industry. Horrell and Schott (2000) in their paper described an investigation conducted into the current accessibility and allure of gaming platforms for females. In order to investigate one of the most developed areas of new media, a traditional feminist approach of explaining factors that exclude females from new media technologies was avoided in favor of a focus upon the experiences and attitudes of females who already view themselves as ‘gamers’. In-depth interviews and ethnographic game-play observations conducted with a small sample revealed

that 'girl gamers' possess an alternative playing orientation, style of play, the importance of cultural competency in game preference, as well as knowledge on the ways gaming is embedded in household dynamics.

According to the study of Lucas and Sherry (2004), they examined gender differences in video game use by focusing on interpersonal needs for inclusion, affection, and control, as well as socially constructed perceptions of gendered game play. Female respondents report less frequent play, less motivation to play in social situations, and less orientation to game genres featuring competition and three-dimensional rotation. Gee and Haves (2010) argued that women gamers - too often ignored as gamers - are in many respects leading the way in this trend towards design, cultural production, new seaming communities, and the combination of technical proficiency with emotional and social intelligence. According to Carr (2005), the issues of girls and their gaming preferences are explored through observations of computer games sessions at an all-girl state school. What emerged is that preferences are alterable, and site specific. Gaming selections relate to the attributes of particular games – but they also depend on a player's recognition of these attributes and the pleasures they entail. Players accumulate these competencies according to the patterns of access and peer culture they encounter. Thus preferences are an assemblage, made up of past experiences, and subject to situation and context. The constituents of preference, such as access, are certainly shaped by gender. As a result, gaming preferences may manifest along gendered lines. It is not difficult to generate data indicating that gendered tastes exist, but it is short sighted to divorce these outcomes from the various practices that contribute to their formation.

These researchers delved into the study "Girl Gamers in a Boy's Game" after being aware of the entry of girl gamers into a male dominated hobby. The study was anchored in the theory of Weber. The symbolic interaction perspective also called symbolic *interactionism* is a major framework of sociological theory. This perspective relies on the symbolic meaning that people develop and rely upon in the process of social interaction. Max Weber's (as cited by Dryden *et al.*, 2003) symbolic interaction theory analyzes society by addressing the subjective meanings that people impose on objects, events, and behaviors. Subjective meanings are given primacy because it is believe that people behave based on what they believe and not just on what is objectively true. Thus, society is thought to be socially constructed through human interpretation. People interpret one another's behavior and it is these interpretations that form the social bond. These interpretations are called the "definition of the situation." For Example why would girls play LAN games even when all objective research evidence points to the dangers of

being bullied and harassed while they were at play. The answer is in the definition of the situation that girls create. Anderson and Taylor (2009) find that girls are well informed about the risks of playing LAN games, but they also think that playing LAN games is good, that they themselves will be safe from harm, and that playing LAN games projects a positive image to their peers. So, the symbolic meaning of playing LAN games overrides those actual facts regarding risk of being bully and harass.

METHODS

Qualitative case study was employed by the researchers. The five (5) student girl gamers who were enrolled at the University of Perpetual Help System Laguna (UPHSL) for the school year 2013 - 2014 were purposively chosen and the experience of the respondents in terms of gaming was examined. The respondents had been playing LAN games for an average of five (5) years. The demographical data of the respondents were collected through interview which was conducted by the researchers. The information gotten is mainly biographical and relates to events in the individual's past (retrospective), as well as to significant events which are currently occurring in their everyday lives (McLeod, 2008).

The researchers used an interview schedule which determined the girl gamers' issues, fact and information. The interview composed of six (6) major questions with sub-questions undertow. The researchers personally conducted the case study to the girl gamers. These are third year and fourth year students with an average age of 18 years. These girl gamers were frequenting a cybercafé without the knowledge of their parents as they were playing mostly during class periods, thus, parental consents were not possible. Permission was derived from the respondents and they were assured of the confidentiality of the entire interview and observation. Data was recorded by the researchers. The study utilized data analysis used in qualitative research. Particularly, the study used the Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA). The essence of the girl gamers experience was sought. The researchers identified prior assumptions and beliefs and temporarily bracketed them away from the experience being researched, so that it may be understood on its own terms.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Using IPA, the researchers set aside *Prior Belief* and *Prior Assumptions* with other identified standard concepts (see Figure 1). These are *Traditional Concepts/Culture* and *Stereotypes*. After setting this aside the core of *Experience of Girl Gamer* is identified which now gives us the real girl gamer perspective.

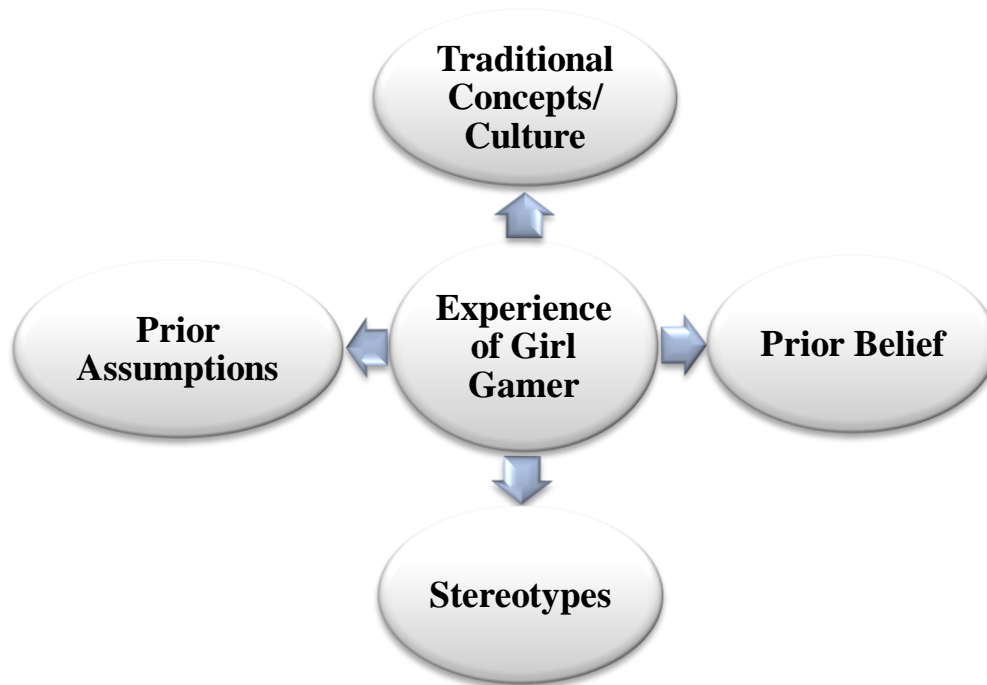


Figure 1. The core of Experience of Girl Gamer and setting aside other identified standard concepts.

Traditional Concepts/Culture

This part discussed the traditional concepts and culture of a particular individual in a given setting. The culture in focus here is the gaming culture. Here, the concepts of social roles are looked into as the researchers explore the gaming culture. LAN games are traditionally boys' game. Many people see that playing LAN games is a tradition for male gamers only. However, with the interviewed girl gamers, the researchers revealed that nowadays there are mounting number of girls who are playing LAN games and it is not common for other people to see a girl playing this kind of game that has content of actions and violence. The girl gamers were influenced by the people around them whom they have relationship with like their friends, boyfriends, families and especially their peers. Danforth (2011) found that the social interactions of girl gamers with other players especially with men are steadily increasing. They are young and old, and the so-called "girl gamers" are becoming more visible and vocal. In this study, the respondents asserted that they were influenced to play LAN games by other people.

One of the respondents deposited; "for me, I'm just exposed to play those games, and many of my friends in our place are boys. When other people look they're amazed. Hmm..." According to Alama (2012), the majority of these girls stated that it was either their brothers or fathers that introduced them to video (computer) games. These researchers found out through this study that most of the problems the female gamers

encountered in playing LAN games are; being bullied and harassed which they complained them to their boyfriends and brothers.

One of the respondents said, "my cousins and my boyfriend (are the first people to know that I experienced those things)." Another of the respondents also said "my brother, I'll complain them to him." The respondents' admitted that the boy gamers are still better players in playing LAN games. It is always almost automatic for girls to admit that they are no match with males. This actually intensifies the traditional concepts that male is better than female. One of the respondents said "Actually for me boys are still better in terms of playing those games"

Prior Belief

Here the belief about female does not only come from traditional activities for female; it also encompasses the belief regarding activities for males that females engaged into. A very good example of this is the LAN games. It is a belief that girls are influenced by another girl in their activities. The girl gamers however are influenced by boy gamers as what the interviews revealed. A respondent indicated "For me, that's only for my cousins and my past boyfriends who were also gamers and a bonding moment of two of us." Becoming so addicted to play LAN games, the girl gamers stated that there were times that they did not attend school making it one of the problems they encountered in playing LAN games. Prior belief tells us those males are the ones that normally get hooked on LAN games and normally cut classes. This does not

seem to be true with the girl gamers interviewed. Another of the respondents said, "Yes, often (I absent in my class). Hahaha..."

According Carr (2005) the issues of girls and their gaming preferences are explored through observations of computer games sessions at an all-girl state school. What emerged is that preferences are alterable, and site specific. Gaming selections relate to the attributes of particular games but they also depend on a player's recognition of these attributes and the pleasures they entail. Players accumulate these competencies according to the patterns of access and peer culture they encounter. Parents have different belief in computer games. They are almost always viewed as distraction for study and therefore must be limited. The parents of the girl gamers advise them to give limitation in playing LAN games. AS declared by one of the respondents, "At first they don't allow me to play; but now they accept the fact that I'm playing. They just advised me to have limitation in playing LAN games." Another of the respondents said, "Yes, they are prohibiting me if it affects my studies, but if it's for fun it's okay for them." According to Welsh (2011), girl gamers have the advantage of having good relationship with their families. Adolescent girls who play age-appropriate video games with their fathers are happier, healthier and have better family connections than those who do not. The young girls who played age-appropriate video games with their parents (more often than not their father) were better behaved, felt more connected to their families, were less aggressive and less likely to be depressed.

Prior Assumptions

Here, the researchers discussed the girl gamers' assumptions in playing LAN games and the assumptions of the male gamers towards their counterpart. It is an assumption that girl gamers experienced being deceived but they take into their minds that it is part of playing LAN games. They concentrate on how to surpass the male gamers and by winning games their self confidence is boosted. The male gamers identify these female gamers because of their capability to win over them. As the respondents revealed in the interview they attained team work with other players. The girl gamers obtained team work with their co-players in playing LAN games. A respondent said, "Strategy games, because it's more fun, then it also develops my teamwork with other players." According to Steinberg (2012) many games today also emphasize the cooperative aspects of game play, in which two or more players need to work together in order to reach a common goal. Even the way that games are made can encourage teamwork.

The self-confidence of the girl gamer becomes elevated when they knew that they can overcome the boy gamers in playing LAN games. Respondents asserted that by playing LAN games it helped them gained self-

confidence. One of the respondents stated "at first, I'm a shy person, but when I learned to play DotA, I also learned how to socialize with other people." Another asserted, "Of course, when you have knowledge to what you're playing, even though they're many boys watching you, they'll say to you Oh! They can play this game? Some boys are shocked when they see a girl playing LAN games." The girl gamers recognized that being bluffed by other gamers are part of the game, however, they set such factors aside and focus on the game. Although the girl gamers experienced bullying and harassment, still, they play LAN games for the bonding with her friends and peers. "I just reminding myself that this is only part of the game my top concern is for our bonding", declared by one of the respondents, whereas, another said, "What? Ah, just like the question in number two, I have been focused to push the game, because they are annoying." Similar to the study of Anderson and Taylor (2009) which finds that girls are well informed about the risks of playing LAN games, but they also think that playing LAN games is good, that they themselves will be safe from harm, and that playing LAN games projects a positive image to their peers. So, the symbolic meaning of playing LAN games overrides those actual facts regarding risk of being bully and harass.

Stereotypes

Here, the researchers discussed labels attributed towards girl gamers. Stereotypes are characteristics ascribed to groups of people involving gender, race, national origin and other factors. These characteristics tend to be over simplifications of the groups involved. The girl gamers are being visible in the gaming world although the male gamers hold that LAN games are still their territory. Girl gamers received sling of insults (Mathew as cited by Nunnely, 2012), generally prejudiced as weak gamers and felt that they are outsiders of the game (Teitel, 2012). As disclosed by one of the respondents, "If you asked me, I haven't experience that, maybe, of course, with some girls they experienced harassment. Because the world for us (girl) revolved only because of the boys so they discriminate the girl gamers. Because you're a girl gamer they would say that you are weak." The LAN games involved blood, gore and violence. Very good examples of these are Counter-Strike, Call of Duty: Modern Warfare, Left 4 Dead, Defense of the Ancients (DotA), Warcraft, and Starcraft which are now fast becoming beatnik icon. With the rise of popularity of this game, a good number of boys become entranced into the world of virtual blood, gore, and violence. Most of these are translated into their languages and gestures. Trash talks and dirty fingers are almost synonymous to LAN games and become a new stereotype.

The girl gamers do over-act and frequently scream when get killed in the game unlike boy gamers that have their own technique and knows what strategy to use. This

is corroborate by the statement of one of the respondents, who said that “The boy gamers have their own ability; unlike girl gamers they are over-acting in terms of playing.” In relation, Ihamaki (2012) underlying the position that there are fundamental differences between what boys and girls want from computer games is a discourse that posits essential differences in girls and boys interests and competencies. It was found out that the girl gamers probability to be offended, underestimated, and discriminated by the boy gamers was high. They were labeled as weak gamers because of their gender. One of the respondents indicated, “For me, it is common for boys to play like that, but when you see a girl playing LAN games you will be amazed! They would say “The girl is playing DotA, she look stupid!” and another confirm it through her statement “It’s just like we were been underestimated by boys. They’ll say “We don’t need to be serious into this game, they’re just girls.” And a third added “Problem, just like that they’re been discriminated as a girl gamer.”

In her virtual-gaming behavior study with the U.S. based research group SRI International, Teitel (2012) posit that “almost every one of the girl gamers had experienced harassment online”. As cited by Nunneley (2012), Matthew’s study found that women were harassed four times more than men, and 63% of women reported being called a “cunt, bitch, slut, and whore.” Others reported they were threatened with sexual assault, or asked for sexual favors, and stereotypical comments regarding female gender roles were prevalent as well. “Women were also much more likely to quit playing a game because of sex-based harassment than were men,” says the report. “35.8% of women reported having quit playing temporarily because of sexism, and 9.6% reported that they quit playing a certain game permanently because of harassment. Similar to the explanations of Toledano (2013) when it comes to sexism in video game studios, there is a big disconnection between perception and reality. They have heard the debate – many have accepted as an article of faith that sexism keeps women out of game studios.

The respondents made it known to the researchers that they win games either for the reason that boys give the game away for them to win since they are only girls or their co-players helped them to win the game. “None, because they just give way for me to win the game, because I’m a girl! They don’t take me seriously, just like that” posited by one of the respondents. Another said, “Maybe, before, they always say they give way for us to win the game, even though that isn’t so.” The study of Beavis and Charles (2007) shows a male dominated environment and points to girls’ lower levels of competence and participation in LAN games. Lucas and Sherry (2004) in their study, examined gender differences in video (computer) game use by focusing on interpersonal needs for inclusion, affection, and control, as well as socially constructed perceptions of gendered

game play. They found that female respondents report less frequent play, less motivation to play in social situations, and less orientation to game genres featuring competition and three-dimensional rotation.

Experience of girl gamer

The researchers identified the core experiences of the girl gamers. Here it showed how the girl gamers changed in terms of their attitudes, behaviors; socialization with other gamers, and as an individual in playing LAN games. Despite prejudices, it is however accepted by girl gamers that they can still be equal to their male counterpart. That is only if they give into the same obsession their male counterpart put up with playing LAN games. However these observations were based on personal experience of a girl gamers rather than corroborative observation of many girl gamers (which is only a handful as compared with boy gamers). One of the respondents claimed that “Yes, because more or less majority of boys that I know are good gamers. As far as I’m concerned boys are better than girls but there are some girls that I know where trying, I see their improvements in playing. If they play it every day I think they will learn. Girls will be better than boys.”

It is understood that when playing at computer shops, girl gamers usually caught the attention of their male counterpart. As one of the respondents posit, “Yes, when they heard my voice that yelling to trash talked them, after that there are many people at my back watching me.” The way the boy gamers communicate using foul languages and their poise really change the notion of the girl gamers on playing LAN games. As declared by one respondents “I think in the way they communicate, it changes a lot and it makes a bad image to the girls if they usually say foul words and other girls are into it.”, another respondents included that “They’re losing poise while playing (Girls); I’m so disappointed with them!” “Maybe, the bad effect for the girl is the way they speak. When you go along them while they’re playing they used foul language, you can say to them that “You’re a girl how can you say those foul words. They compete with the trash talking of those boys and its bad to the ears!” The girl gamers are now becoming like the boy gamers in terms of using abusive words when they know that they can beat their opponent while playing LAN games. A respondent supported this claim through her statement “Of course, you also need to tease them to make you stay in the game. Just bring it back to them, just like that.” Another conclude, “Good effects while they’re playing, maybe their self-esteem in a computer shop is so high. Unlike in the past years, when the girls enter in a computer shop filled with boys usually they get out. Today even though they are boys seated in front of computer units, still they enter the computer shop; they know that they can now compete with these boys.”The girl gamers acknowledge in the interview that they also

learned to socialize with other players and improved their self-confidence to meet and get different kind of friends. A respondent claimed that "I find different kind of friends, met so many people. Hahaha..." and another mentioned that "It is only for bonding moment with my cousins and at the same time I'm just playing for my enjoyment."

Conclusions

Most of the girl gamers started playing LAN games as a result of their curiosity to know why some boys were so addicted to the game to the extent that it is their hobby. The girl gamers were introduced to LAN games by friends, boyfriends, families, or relatives who are playing the game and the environment such as one where playing LAN games are very common also play a big role. The girl gamers are different from the boy gamers in terms of how they play; boys usually take it seriously in a way that they believe that they are much better and skilled than the girl gamers. This means that stereotyping and prejudices are very evident in this arena.

Some of the problems associated with girl gamers playing of LAN games are; occasional missing of classes, being insulted, offended, discriminated, seen as outsiders, under-estimated, and generally prejudiced as weak by their male counterparts. The girl gamers disadvantage is the way they play, they admit that they are weak in strategizing. The girl gamers' advantages were; their self-esteem increased, they also learned to socialize with other players which in turn developed teamwork, and improved self-confidence. Playing LAN games helped the girl gamers to get rid of their repressed emotions as they get pleasure playing games by trash talking. It is the view of these researchers that the girl gamer begins to womanize the male dominated LAN games.

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