

# **Gamers play against type: Avid online role-players do not fit gamer stereotypes, survey finds**

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Participants in the role-playing game EverQuest II defy the stereotype of the overweight male teenager, researchers reported this month in the *Journal of Computer-Mediated Communication*.

The average age of the 7,000 players surveyed was 31, said first author Dmitri Williams, assistant professor in the USC Annenberg School for Communication.

"We found that older players were more typical," Williams said. There were more players in their 30s than in their 20s, and playing time tended to increase with age.

In addition, while women made up only 20 percent of players, they logged more time in the game than their male counterparts.

"The hardcore players are the women," Williams said. "They play more hours, they're less likely to quit."

Players also stated that they exercise vigorously once or twice a week – more than most people – and their reported height and weight showed that they are slightly overweight, but still 10 percent leaner than the average American.

Even assuming a modest amount of under-reporting, the survey suggests

that serious gamers resemble the general population in overall fitness.

The fitness data point to an intriguing difference between television and online game experiences.

The researchers cited studies showing that time spent watching television is related to poor health outcomes and fewer servings of fruits and vegetables. But EverQuest II players do not appear to fit this profile.

On the popular virtual worlds blog Terra Nova, a comment about the EverQuest II survey blamed commercials for television viewers' poor health habits ([terranova.blogs.com/terra\\_nova ... who-plays-how-m.html](http://terranova.blogs.com/terra_nova...who-plays-how-m.html)).

The results conformed to stereotypes in some respects. Data provided by Sony Online Entertainment, which runs the game, showed that players spent a large amount of time in-game: 26 hours per week on average.

Survey respondents were roughly 50 percent more likely to have had a depression diagnosis than the population at large. The rate of substance addiction was about 20 percent higher than normal.

On the other hand, players reported slightly lower levels of anxiety than the general population.

The researchers warned against inferring that online gaming compromises mental health. It may be that individuals with mental health issues play the game as a form of self-medication, or that individuals with these issues are simply more attracted to the game, they said. The lower anxiety may reflect players' efforts to regulate their moods through play.

Source: University of Southern California

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