

Men enjoy competition, but so do women, researchers find

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Common stereotypes would have us believe that men are more competitive and women more cooperative.

Researchers of Aalto University studied the [physiological responses](#) to competitive and cooperative play, investigating emotions, i.e. how males and [females](#) are motivated to behave in these situations. While males did enjoy competition more than cooperation, females enjoyed both competition and cooperation equally.

'Although there is a lot of research on gender differences, nobody has studied the emotions – the physiological mechanism that steers our behaviour – of competitive and cooperative activities in males and females before. This gives a better insight into why people behave the way they do. You may unconsciously give false information about your motivations, but your body doesn't lie', Matias Kivikangas, a researcher in the research group, says.

'Our results suggest that parts of the [common stereotypes](#) are untrue, at least in that women are not enjoying cooperation any more than competition. And it seems that the fact that men do enjoy competition more than cooperation might actually be a consequence from gender expectations rather than innate differences.

The reported two studies employed cooperative and competitive digital games to test the responses. While this makes the responses more natural than a contrived experimental procedure, the intrinsically motivated

nature of the activity limits the generalizability of the results.

'Neither [males](#) or females experienced notable differences in negative emotions, indicating that only [positive emotions](#) are relevant in motivating competitive behaviour. However, separate studies with other activities should be carried out as well, because I'd suspect that competition that the individual has not chosen themselves might elicit different emotional reactions', Kivikangas adds.

More information: Kivikangas JM, Kätsyri J, Järvelä S, Ravaja N (2014) "Gender Differences in Emotional Responses to Cooperative and Competitive Game Play." *PLoS ONE* 9(7): e100318. [DOI: 10.1371/journal.pone.0100318](#)

Provided by Aalto University

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