

# Research exposes differences between how men and women compete against each other

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It is well understood that in the labor market there exist wage gaps between men and women, and in general, women have had to fight to break the "glass ceiling" to get to upper management in the workplace.

The causes of the gender gap may be multiple factors from discrimination to ability difference, and it is not easy to separate one from the other.

These questions were on the mind of researchers when they decided to use [video game](#) platforms to get some answers. They chose the online video gaming environment to do their research for its two-dimensional aspect. When creating a character or avatar, one can use their birth sex, or could conceal their [gender](#) and portray themselves virtually as the opposite sex.

The study authors conducted extensive empirical research to arrive at their findings. In the end, they found that men are more or less motivated by the knowledge of the gender of their competition, whereas women are not. Further, they found that this leads to poorer performance for women when competing against men unless they conceal their gender.

The study, "Does Concealing Gender Identity Help Women Win the Competition? An Empirical Investigation into Online Video Games," is published in *Marketing Science* and authored by Xinlei (Jack) Chen of the Shanghai Advanced Institute of Finance; Xiaohua Zeng of Peking University HSBC Business School; and Cheng Zhang of the Fudan School of Management in Shanghai.

"Given the competitive nature of video games, we wanted to explore the similarities and differences between the aggressiveness of men versus women," says Chen. "Common stereotypes assume that men tend to be more aggressive, while women are more passive, and that in a [competitive environment](#), men would strive more for dominance while women would not. This is the 'dominance effect.'"

"Through our research, we found that women did perform better when

they actively concealed their [gender identities](#) in online video games," says Chen. "To understand these findings, you have to know that online video games can be a toxic environment for women. According to a Pew Research Center survey on online harassment in 2014, compared with male players, female players experience more severe harassment, such as stalking, sexual harassment and sustained bullying."

The researchers said that this has caused women to quit playing online video games. For those who stayed, by muting their voices and concealing their identity, they were able to play under ambiguous or male names, and ultimately perform on a par with or better than their male counterparts.

"To analyze competitive performance, we had to examine the dominance effect among players of online video games," says Chen. "When men perceive their opponent as female, they tend to exert increased effort in competition, while women seem unaffected by their opponent's gender."

In the end, the researchers confirmed that gender stereotype arises during interpersonal competition and does affect the outcome of the competition.

"It's important to note that the reason for this is not that women are submissive, but rather, when men perceive their opponent to be female, they are more likely to exert increased effort than they would if they perceive their competitor to be a man," adds Chen. "Women don't change their approach regardless. So, by concealing their gender, they gain an advantage simply by the neutralizing effect such knowledge has on their opponent."

**More information:** Xinlei (Jack) Chen et al, Does Concealing Gender Identity Help Women Win the Competition? An Empirical Investigation into Online Video Games, *Marketing Science* (2022). [DOI:](#)

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