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**Introduction to Gender and Games – Moving the field forward**  
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# Introduction to Gender and Games – Moving the field forward

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Games studies is a new academic field, and has a responsibility to hear a multitude of voices in the mapping of the phenomena that are digital gaming. The challenge is to be inclusive whilst demonstrating rigour, to build on a long heritage of knowledge whilst finding the unique aspects and possibility of our subject.

From Brenda Laurel's work in the early 90s onwards (long pre-dating any such thing as games studies); critics, commentators and the academy have offered theories and observations on the difference in play habits, styles and consumption of digital gaming exhibited by women and girls. Yet well into our second decade of work in this area what can we say we have learnt?

We have certainly learnt that it is impossible to generalise. Women are one half of humanity; we are old and young, fierce and feeble, voiceless and powerful. This means that it is problematic to make definitive statements about what makes a female-friendly game or play preference. We can observe play in action in full acknowledgement that we bring our own prejudices and perspectives to bear on our study. We can express our horror at the banalities of game advertising or attempts from industry to turn our experience 'pink'. We can wonder about the prostheses offered by the interfaces of our game bodies. But we cannot build a deep understanding without acknowledging the complexities of the challenge at hand. Gender is not the only issue, or the only difference that is at stake here. Whether it is familiarity with or general access to leisure technologies, women and girls often do have different and difficult experiences. Yet digital gender equity is less to do with a binary fe/male behavioural split than the wider social and cultural context for gaming.

This first special section of *Eludamos* offers recent and previously unpublished work arising from the European Women in Games conference (<http://www.womeningames.com>). Currently in its fifth year, WiG highlights the most recent groundbreaking work in computer game research and development to both the academic and industrial worlds. It has consistently addressed empowerment and professional development for women working in, and researching, games and the games industry.

The papers published here interrogate key themes relevant to the field; from the analysis of gender theory and player culture to the commercial framing and distribution of games the work illustrates how thought is developing. Jennifer Jenson and Suzanne de Castell explore central issues from the wider context of gender studies to extend and validate the toolkit on offer. Esther MacCallum-Stewart argues that amongst players the female gaming body is often chosen purely for ludic pleasure and that players have normalised gender switching. Gareth Schott and

Siobhan Thomas's paper presents an analysis of a Nintendo Game Boy Advance SP advertising campaign that drew explicitly on 'lad' culture and the impact this had on female perceptions of the gaming industry and its relevance to them as a consumer.

All in all this special section creates a snapshot of current thinking in the ongoing challenge to support and celebrate difference and possibility in digital gaming.

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Emma Westecott, February 2008