2011

# Investigating trait attribution through gendered avatar play: An analysis of the sims 3

Erika M. Behrmann
*Eastern Michigan University*, ebehrman@emich.edu

Investigating Trait Attribution through Gendered Avatar Play:

An Analysis of *The Sims 3*

by

Erika M. Behrmann

Thesis

Submitted to the Department of Women and Gender Studies

Eastern Michigan University

in partial fulfillment of the requirements

for the degree of

MASTER OF ARTS

in

Women's and Gender Studies

Thesis Committee:

Carol Haddad, PhD, Chair

Elizabeth Currans, PhD

Kathryn Ziegler, PhD

June 29, 2011

Ypsilanti, Michigan

**Dedication**

I dedicate this thesis to all of the feminists who have helped me along the way. If it were not for

your dedication to peace, love, and equality, I would not be here today.

Thank you.

**Acknowledgements**

First and foremost, I want to thank my thesis committee members, Dr. Carol Haddad, Dr. Elizabeth Currans, and Dr. Kathryn Ziegler for their amazing support, knowledge, and patience. I could not have done this project without your guidance. Thank you for taking the time out of your busy schedules to help me. It did not go unnoticed. I also owe a large amount of gratitude to the participants of my study who were willing to share their heartfelt stories. Finally, I would like to thank my partner, Gregory, for being my "behind the scenes" editor. You are my biggest critic and fan and I am grateful for your help. Thank you everyone!

**Abstract**

This study investigates whether the life-simulation videogame, *The Sims 3*, enables the

deconstruction of the gender binary. *The Sims 3* permits its players the capability to attribute

similar traits to male or female avatars. In doing so, players can experiment with taboo trait

attributions and potentially defy a male-female binary. A group of 82 *The Sims 3* players was

surveyed to determine their overall male and female Sims trait selections during gameplay.

Participants were questioned on how their trait selection related to their personal identities.

Results indicated that players tend to select traits that maintain a gender binary. This thesis

discusses the implications as to why players continue to follow social norms even in

technological environments conducive to deconstructing the gender binary.

**Table of Contents**

## List of Tables

## List of Figures

## Chapter 1: Introduction

**Background**

On February 4, 2000, the video game developer Maxis Software released the best-selling personal computer (PC) gaming series of all time: *The Sims* (Electronic Arts, 2010). Over the past decade, 100 million units were sold worldwide, with their most recent installment, *The Sims 3,* prevailing as the best-selling PC game of 2009. Similar to its predecessors, *The Sims 3* is a life simulation game that allows its players to control various human-like avatars, called Sims. Players are allowed to customize their Sim's appearance, personality characteristics, occupation, and life goals. The Sims are placed in a westernized, suburban community where they can freely move among other computer generated Sims. Compared to other PC games, *The Sims* is unique in that there are no specific objectives to the game. With no predetermined specific goals, players can create their own life-simulated scenarios and play according to their own preferences.

Similar to a sandbox, the players have a clean slate and can build any type of storyline they choose. Due to the fact that there are no specific objectives, *The Sims 3* is considered to be a "sandbox" game. The popularity of such games may be explained by the fact that sandbox games offer a sense of "equifinality" — multiple routes to an end (Chan, 2003). This allows players to feel empowered by creating unique narratives that reflect their desires (Przybylski, Rigby, & Ryan, 2010). *The Sims 3* does not offer a linear type of gameplay narrative where there is a beginning and an end to the storyline. As a result, players are able to form attachments to the game through personal, virtual narratives. Players can construct their Sims into astronauts, superstars, homemakers, master criminals, CEOs, even world leaders. In addition to experiencing occupations different from their own, players are allowed to explore thousands of social interactions within the virtual Sim neighborhood.

**Justification and Significance**

Video gaming has become a common pastime within the United States. Of American households, 72% play video games (The Entertainment Software Association [ESA], 2011). Notably, more Americans play video games than go to the movies (NPD Group, 2009). Considering its popularity, feminist scholars have encouraged research on video gaming, particularly the relationship between video games and gender. Writer and video game artist A. M. Schleiner (2001) condemned the lack of feminist attention in examining this increasingly popular activity. She notes that until recently, video games were viewed by most scholars as mere toys for children, as opposed to a medium that influences or reflects society. Most recent gender-related video game studies have focused on character stereotypes and role portrayal (Beasley & Standley, 2002; Dietz, 1998; Dill & Thill, 2007; Jenson, de Castell & Fisher, 2007; Schleiner, 2001; Shaw, 2009; Spence & Buckner, 2000; Yao, Mahood, & Linz, 2010) as well as gameplay motivation and ability (Chan, 2003; Jansz, Avis, & Vosmeer, 2010). Furthermore, prior publications on gender and video gaming have followed a hegemonic, binary discourse. Researchers have used a gender-binary model when analyzing player interaction and game content. As a result, this research gave answers to why women and other minorities were not interested in video gaming: games did not include stereotypical feminine traits for women to enjoy. Academics argue that the purpose of these studies was to find out why women were not playing videogames, consequentially using women and minorities as an "untapped" sector of marketing (Jenson & de Castel, 2010). This study offered an alternative way to analyze gender and videogames by not forcing its participants into male or female "boxes." In terms of gender, there has been minimal exploration done within the life-simulation genre of video games. Additionally, no studies have been done that look at gender as a non-binary (Shaw, 2009).

Furthermore, researchers have studied how traditional gender stereotypes of video game characters affect its players in terms of aggression, violence, and sexual stereotyping in everyday life. Unlike this thesis project, which looked at player interaction throughout the entire game, previous research only looked at player interaction in the first few minutes of the game or analyzed game cartridge covers and cases (Dietz, 1998; Dill & Thill, 2007; & Yao, Mahood, & Linz, 2010). Additionally, the evaluated games, such as *Tomb Raider*, *Super Mario, Zelda*, or *Grand Theft Auto,* contain a linear storyline, unlike *The Sims 3,* which has an open, non-linear style of play. As of now, no known research has been published on how *The Sims 3* players attribute gender traits to game characters. This emerging area of research is significant in that it integrates gender studies, culture studies, and technology studies. The disseminated results of this study encourage further research on the relationships between social construction and life simulation games. Considering that *The Sims* series is so popular, it behooves both gender theorists and virtual gaming analysts to examine what character attributes *The Sims* series players find so appealing. Such an examination will offer a better understanding of the complex ways in which technology design and gender construction interact.

Last, the exploration of gender non-conforming technologies, technologies that aid in deconstructing gender, has been on the rise in the past few decades (Dvorsky & Hughes, 2008; Halberstam, 1991; Haraway, 1990; Shapiro, 2010; Wajcman, 2006). Theories concerning these technologies range from believing that gender non-conforming technologies subvert the gender binary (Dvorsky & Hughes, 2008) to questioning whether it is feasible to deconstruct gender via technology in a social constructivist world where the gender binary is pervasive (Daniels, 2009; Haraway, 1990; Haraway, 2003; Faulkner, 2001). This study applied these conceptual theories to a tangible technology, *The Sims 3.*

**Purpose of the Study**

Due to its technological design, *The Sims 3* permits players the freedom to attribute the same personality and aesthetic traits to their male or female avatars. This study expanded upon prior research by examining how players attributed traits to *The Sims 3* characters during gameplay and questioned whether that attribution maintained or defied a male-female binary. Furthermore, this study investigated how the *Sims'* personality and aesthetic trait attributions reflected the participants' gender identities, gender roles, personality traits, sexual orientations, and sexual relations.

**Research Questions**

The following research questions guided this research project:

Q1: How do *The Sims 3* players select personality and aesthetic traits when constructing their Sims characters?

Q2: Are the traits that they select different for male and female Sims? Is there any overlap?

Q3: Do most players see their most frequently constructed Sims as a reflection of themselves in terms of gender identity, gender roles, personality traits, sexual orientation, and sexual relations? If so, how?

4

**Definitions of Terms**

For the purpose of this study, the operational definitions for the specific terms below are as follows:

**Cyberfeminists—** feminists who investigate cyber worlds

**Gender—** socially generated attributes and behaviors, usually organized in a binary, dichotomously as masculinity and femininity (Renzetti & Curran, 2003).

**Gender Binary—** traditional, essentialist notion that the aspects of gender, specifically masculinity and femininity, are a dichotomy and that men and woman cannot be both masculine and feminine (male and female; Bem, 1978).

**Gender Non-Conforming Technologies—** technologies that aid in dissolving the gender binary and do not conform to a social script regarding gender (Shapiro, 2010).

**Gender Performance—** concept that gender is a reiterated act and performance (Butler, 1990).

**Gender Spectrum—** a social construction of the characteristics of gender and sex in the form of a spectrum in which feminine features are at one end and masculine features on the other and androgynous abilities in the middle (Bem, 1974, Bornstein, 1994; Butler, 1990, Fausto-Sterling, 2000; Feinberg, 1996; Wilchins, 2004).

**Gender Trait Attribution**— when we attribute gender to someone (or something) based on an intricate system of cues, or traits, varying from person to person (Kessler & McKenna, 1978).

**Life Simulation Game—** a genre of virtual gaming in which players simulate real-world activities (Bryant & Davies, 2006)

**Mods—** a download created by third party companies that can be installed to enhance the game

5

**Postgenderism—** a theory that argues that gender can be dissolved and humans would no longer classify one another based on gender (Dvorsky & Hughes, 2008)

**Sandbox Game—** a virtual game that has attributes similar to a sandbox. These games have a storyline that is an open canvas. Players are able to construct any storyline they please. These games do not direct the player in any particular way allowing no single correct way of playing the game (Bryant & Davies, 2006).

**Sims—** the virtual avatars from *The Sims 3*

**Trait Attribution on a Gendered Being—** reciprocal from Kessler & McKenna's idea of Gender Trait Attribution; this is how one attributes certain traits to a predetermined gendered being.

**Chapter 2: Review of Literature**

The following chapter outlines the theoretical framework and literature used to build the previous research questions. The first section discusses how one defines *gender*. It is important to describe *gender* in this study because there are many disparities within the literature on gender. This study viewed each player's gender as a spectrum, which is explained in detail in the following section. Additionally, each *Sim's* gender is described as a male-female binary, primarily because the game's design only allows male or female designated *Sims*. The succeeding section outlines how trait attribution is determined in gendered beings. An explanation of the notion of gender deconstruction through gender non-conforming technologies and a review of gender performance and video gaming will then complete the literature review.

**Defining Gender**

Due to the fact that the terminology within gender theory literature varies, it is important to define the terms used. It is first vital to establish the difference between gender and sex. According to Renzetti & Curran (2003), "a biological given, sex (i.e., maleness or femaleness) is used as the basis for constructing a social category that we call gender (i.e., man or woman)." Therefore the specific traits typically attributed as manly— aggressiveness, logical thinking, competitive, or sexually driven— or womanly— complacent, emotional, nurturing, or relationship driven— are all constructs given to categorize human nature into a strict binary: man or woman. Because of this binary logic, we tend to believe two discourses. First, we believe that men lack feminine traits and women lack masculine traits. Second, we believe that both traits are complementary to one another, which means men desire femininity and women desire masculinity (Deaux & Kite, 1987). Both discourses become problematic when these constructs

result in a disparity in the treatment of these two binary beings: man and woman. Men are treated more assertively and women are handled more delicately. This becomes a dilemma because as humans, despite what we are told by society, we are neither one gender nor the other, but components of both (Renzetti & Curran, 2003). This thesis treated *The Sims 3* players as non-binary beings by allowing participants to declare their gender in an open-ended question. Although the human players were viewed as non-binary gendered beings, the *Sims* were predetermined male and female. This was due to the game's limitation of gender, not by the investigator's choice to create a binary. The players were restricted to choosing only a male and female gender for their Sims.

**Trait Attribution towards Gendered Beings**

Many gender theorists have speculated that gender should not be viewed as a binary system but rather a social construct across a spectrum (Bem, 1974; Bornstein, 1994; Butler, 1990; Fausto-Sterling, 2000; Feinberg, 1996; & Wilchins, 2004). They argue that no human is entirely masculine or entirely feminine, but somewhere in the middle. Furthermore, the social construction of gender creates a "reality" that is based on several factors, trait attribution (the process in which one identifies another's gender based on a system of cues) being one of them (Kessler & McKenna, 1978). According to Kessler and McKenna (1978), humans have a set of rules, for example style of dress, hairstyle, voice pitch, body shape, and personality traits that defines who is a man and who is a woman. Furthermore, the standards or rules by which people define what attributes are feminine or masculine vary between societies and communities. For instance, one person might assume wearing makeup is a feminine trait because they see women encouraged to wear makeup daily in their world; however, in many punk or rock n' roll

communities men wear makeup regularly. Additionally, within these communities, not all of the men might decide to wear makeup for several different reasons. This illustrates that wearing makeup could be masculine or feminine depending on the context and person. One can conclude that there is no exact constant of what attributes define a "real" man or woman.

The ways in which humans link traits to gender vary within the context of each person's own culturally-driven reality. Traits intrinsically give no information about one's gender. It is not until gender links with a personality or aesthetic trait that the trait has meaning (Kessler & McKenna, 1978). For example, hair length does not define a human as male or female. Only when gender links with having long or short hair does it become meaningful. Then after this attribution, one might assume a female has long hair and a male has short hair. Each individual's reality, although autonomous in many ways, is influenced by specific cultures. Whether traits are feminine or masculine is determined by a given culture. It is important to note that culture is not always synonymous with large populations (Benedict, 2006; Mead, 1971). A person's culture can be as small as a familial unit or as vast as an entire global hemisphere. An individual can also be involved in several different cultural groups or influencers at the same time, which results in a complex labyrinth of human behaviors and interaction.

Culture creates a discourse that not only determines what a true "man" or "woman" is, but also forces hegemonic norms. Historian and philosopher Michel Foucault addresses this in his research on sexuality and culture. In *The History of Sexuality Volume I*, Foucault (1978) contends that the medicalization of peripheral sexualities, non-heterosexual sexualities, has resulted in an increased examination and classification of non-marital sexual acts (p 48). This increased scrutiny created a specific pathology, which compartmentalized these peripheral sexual acts (p 41). As a result, there was a shift in perceiving sexual acts as a part of human behavior to

sexual acts being a part of their character and identity. For example, a man who engaged in homosexual acts was now identified as a homosexual man. His behaviors were now his identities.

Foucault uses homosexuality to illustrate the complex relationship between those in power (medical doctors) and the sexuality of their examinees. He argues that discourse about peripheral sexualities labeled and individualized those behaviors, resulting in more supervision by those in power. Foucault's examination of how sexuality has been regulated by the medical systems can be expanded to gender. Similar to peripheral sexuality, the medicalization of gender has created a specific discourse that describes how men and women should appropriately act, look, and feel. Any person who does not follow this specific script is labeled as "abnormal."

The "normalization" of gender has been prominent throughout Western history, especially for the individuals who defy the gender binary. Gender Identity Disorder (GID) is a great example of how medicine and technology have influenced gender. GID is a classification in psychology that labels individuals who have "discontent with their biological sex and/or the gender they were assigned at birth" as disordered (American Psychiatric Association [*DSM-IV-TR*], 2000). Many GID activists have argued that this is problematic in that gender roles and expectations are fluid and relative to culture and society (Park & Manzon-Santos, 2010). The labeling of individuals who defy the gender binary, physically or mentally, as disordered or abnormal is a way in which medicine attempts to exert control over the human body.

The relationship between technology and gender is a significant one, especially in the case of those labeled with GID. The advancement of technology has allowed medical procedures to reconstruct one's genitalia to fit one's gender identity. In order to receive a sex reassignment surgery (SRS), patients go through extensive screening to prove that they are fit for

reassignment. This screening process examines to what degree a person feels uncomfortable in their assigned sex at birth, as well to what extent a person's gender identity matches with their biological sex. The screening of individuals seeking SRS implies that gender has a very specific script for how a man and woman should act. In this case, gender has a right or wrong answer because if an individual does not act according to the psychologist's gender standards, that individual is denied surgery. Although current social standards see gender as a complete binary, this study tried to view gender as a spectrum.

Kessler and McKenna argue that deciding a person's gender usually comes before attributing traits to that gendered being. The authors illustrate this in regard to cross-dressing. Knowing that an anonymous person is a cross-dresser will not determine their gender. In fact, one might not be able to tell if an individual is cross-dressing. It is only after an onlooker determines the person's gender that the cross-dressing can be interpreted. Because we rarely have any initial knowledge of another's personal gender identity or gender assignment, the decision of a person's gender comes first. This suggests that knowing one's gender identity or assignment is not necessary to make a decision of gender based on attributed traits.

Rather than permitting players to have genderless characters, *The Sims 3* forces players to choose whether they want their Sims to be male or female. The decision of a binary gender assignment has been made for them through game design. The difference between real-life cultures and this technologically-generated culture is that there is no positive or negative reinforcement of behaviors. Sims who are male and act feminine are not punished and vice versa. With a few exceptions (such as general body shape and the ability to give birth), players are allowed to pick from the same pool of traits for both male and female Sims. This offers players the opportunity to experiment with attributing traits to male and female Sims that their real life

culture might consider taboo. The question then becomes whether players utilize this opportunity

to experiment or whether they continue to attribute traits to their male and female Sims that

parallel with their real-life cultural standards.

**Gender Non-Conformity through Technology**

Despite common assumptions, technology encompasses more than just computers, cell

phones, and television. According to Eve Shapiro (2010), technologies are anything that humans

develop to change the natural environment (p. 2). Gender non-conforming technologies,

technologies that have the potential to deconstruct gender, aid in rejecting the gender social

script expected of humans (Shapiro, 2010, p. 66). Gender non-conforming technologies include,

but are not limited to, advancements in sex reassignment surgery, assisted reproductive

technologies (artificial uteruses and surrogacy), or cyber worlds (virtual games or online

communities). In all cases, technology plays a pivotal role in dissolving the boundaries that

define the gender binary. Sex reassignment surgery redefines gender because the argument that

sex and gender are based on one's genitalia becomes moot. Similar to sex reassignment surgery,

assisted reproductive technologies redefine gender. Some have defined people as male and

female based upon their reproductive capabilities. Assisted reproductive technologies blur the

boundary lines between binary gender roles because science becomes a part of the process of

reproduction. Many societies define gender by one's natural reproductive capabilities. Men

provide sperm and women give their egg and carry the child. Assisted reproductive technologies

can allow these roles to be dismantled. The creation of artificial uteri and the rise of surrogacy

allow the roles of reproduction to be altered. These technologies allow men and women to have

children without reproducing them. Finally, cyber worlds, like the universe created in *The Sims*

*3,* offer a space where men and women can experiment with gender and identity. Feminist sociologist Judy Wajcman (2006) contends that due to technological advancement, such as the evolution of cyber worlds, women and men might have a chance to become "ungendered" (p. 11). An electronic alias allows people to hide or manipulate their identity if they choose. Through cyber worlds, women and other social minorities are more accepted because their race, gender, and/or sexual orientation are not disclosed. Although this research is optimistic, it lacks evidence. Some cyberfeminists, feminists who investigate cyber worlds, argue that the subversion of the gender binary cannot be achieved in cyber worlds because there continues to be a strict policing of gender in online communities (O'Brien, 1997). For example, these communities continue to use language that demeans women and femininity. Individuals are policed by each other in these communities. The men of these cyber worlds are still expected to follow masculine roles and the women are expected to follow feminine roles. When an individual disrupts the gender binary, that person is usually harassed or threatened. Cyber worlds have dissolved the accountability of one's actions. Therefore, there are few social repercussions to being offensive, rude, and hateful.

Due to the fact that gender is pervasive, the deconstruction of the gender binary may be impossible. Social scientist Wendy Faulkner (2001) discusses the interactive relationship between gender and technology. Taking a social constructivist perspective, Faulkner points out that gender and technology are not produced separately but are *co-produced.* Rejecting notions of technological determinism, Faulkner illustrates that technologies do not cause social change but are used as *tools* to enable people to do so. Additionally, social constructivism argues that humans have the free will to act independently from technology. This is demonstrated by the fact that humans *create* technology, not vice versa. Technology only aids in the creation of new ideas

thus requiring the human mind in order to maintain its own existence. In the case of *The Sims 3,* players are given the option to deliberately choose characteristics to construct their Sims and gameplay. In other words, players have the free will to play the way they choose.

It becomes apparent that the design of *The Sims 3* is a reflection of non-traditional values. The female characters are not forced into a vamp-versus-victim dichotomy. Instead players have the free will to choose to create characters who are vamp, victim, or none of the above. However, it is also important to note that although this game has a more "female-friendly" design, its potential to deconstruct the gender binary is limited to the gaming choices of its players. If the player lives in a culture where individuals are persecuted for going against social norms, it may be more difficult to create stories that encourage this type of behavior.

Donna Haraway's "Cyborg Manifesto: Science, Technology, and Social-Feminism in the Late Twentieth Century" in *Simians, Cyborgs, and Women: The Reinvention of Nature* (1990) lays the groundwork for the current literature regarding gender non-conforming technologies.  In that book she ubiquitously describes technologies that deconstruct gender as "cyborgs." Haraway writes, "The cyborg is a creature in a post-gender world; it has no truck with bisexuality, pre-oedipal symbiosis, unalienated labour, or other seductions to organic wholeness through a final appropriation of all the powers of the parts into a higher unity" (p. 150). It can be argued that the cyborg is a gender-nonconforming technology, contributing to a *potential* post-gendered world.

Postgenderists use Haraway's idea of the cyborg to argue that technology can permit gender classification to dissipate, resulting in a postgender or genderless society (Dvorsky & Hughes, 2008). These theories are problematic because they assume that non-gender conforming technologies, and the humans who built them, are divorced from cultural biases. Haraway notes that technology is not self-designing and autonomous but is limited to the design man gives it (p.

152). Although the cyborg can be thought of as a feminist utopia, she argues that cyborgs are built within the constructs of patriarchy. Consequentially, cyborgs are likely to always be flawed.

The concept of Haraway's cyborg can be applied to this study because *The Sims 3* has the potential to aid in deconstructing the gender binary. Although players are limited to creating characters who are either male or female, they can attribute non-stereotypical gender traits either type of Sim. Players have the power to create characters who don't follow gender scripts in a binary way.

Similar to Haraway's cyborg, *The Sims 3* has limitations as well. Although the *The Sims* series was design by a prominently female staff, there is no indication that there were feminist intentions when designing this game (Jenson & de Castell, 2010). The design of the game only permits players to choose male or female Sims. As a result, players are not allowed to have their Sims change gender during gameplay nor define their Sim in a non-gender binary way. In addition to this, the design team wanted to keep this game rated E (everyone). This too limits the possibilities of the game because typically individuals who defy the gender binary are seen as taboo.

Judith Butler's recent work (2004) discusses the possibility of gender always being an incessant activity (p. 1). She argues that gender performitivity, the idea that gender is an act that is performed, is a subconscious desire to be recognized (Butler, 2004). For humans, the desire to fit in and have a "viable life" is contingent on following social norms such as gender. As a result, humans find themselves not only following the social norms of a binary gender but describing "non-binary genders" within the constructs and language of the social norms. We as humans cannot independently analyze gender without the social systems set in place. What this means is that humans are not able to completely divorce themselves from gender when analyzing the

social scripts of the gender binary. Humans were born into a gendered world. The social

expectation for individuals to act according to their gender assignment is so strong that

consequently it would be relatively impossible to ignore gender. This supports the argument that

gender non-conforming technologies will always be gendered. Although designers of non-gender

conforming may have the intention to create technologies that are gender neutral, gender is so

subconscious in our lives that it becomes virtually impossible.

Ultimately, gender non-conforming technologies, like *The Sims 3,* can help aid humans to

travel down three different paths (Figure 1): one that allows complete defiance of the gender

binary, one that maintains the gender binary (like the video games with binary stereotypes), or

one that blurs the boundaries between maintenance and defiance of the gender binary.
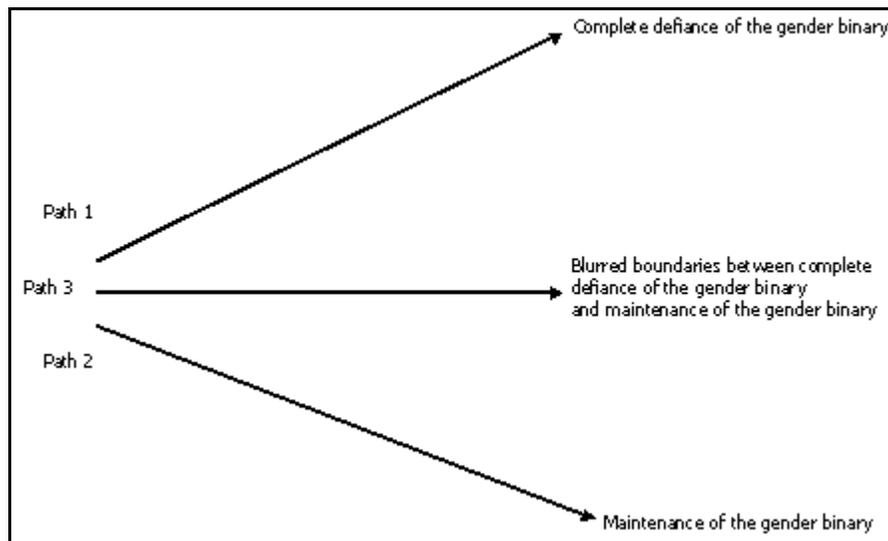


*Note: Illustration created by author*

*Figure 1.* Possible paths of the maintenance and/or deconstruction of the gender binary

This theory is what drove the formation of questions guiding this thesis. Do people who

play *The Sims 3* alter traditional notions of gender through virtual performance when playing the

game? Specifically, do they select traits for the male and female Sims they create in such a way that deviates from the gender binary? The following section discusses the relationships between gender performance and virtual gaming.

**Video Gaming and Gender Performance**

There is an overall trend in which video game characters display intensified masculine or feminine qualities, forcing a strict dichotomous gender path on their players. Following a traditional gender binary, the male roles produced in many video games are masculine, burly men who have bulging muscles and great strength (Beasley & Standley, 2002; Dietz, 1998; Ivory, 2006; Smith, Lachlan, & Tamborini, 2003). They resolve issues with violence and tend to be the hero in the game's storyline. For example, Max Payne from the *Max Payne* series, Niko Bellic from *Grand Theft Auto IV,* and all of the male characters from the *Street Fighter* and *Mortal Kombat* series all have one purpose: to conclude to the game's main objective violently. Conversely, the majority of female roles in video games are docile, overtly-sexualized victims whom are accessories to the plot. Princess Peach from *The Super Mario Brothers* series, Princess Zelda from the *Zelda* series, and Amy Rose from the *Sonic the Hedgehog* series are all damsels in distress whom are made into the game's main objective: save the girl. Overly-sexualized characters such as Lara Croft from *Tomb Raider,* Kitana from the *Mortal Kombat* series, Chung Li from the *Street Fighter* series, and Rayne from the *BloodRayne* series are definitely far from damsels in distress with their kick-butt attitudes, but they are also explicitly sexualized with large breasts, skimpy clothing, and long legs. These two types of female video game characters create a virtual virgin-versus-vamp dichotomy. The female characters who are virgins are typically passive and are not the main character. Instead, these characters are objects of affection or the

prize of the game. Conversely, the vamps are active characters who are dealt with in a violent manner (Gailey, 1993). After gameplay, research has indicated that players tend to view women more negatively. Also a binary male versus female stereotype prevails (Fox & Bailenson, 2009).

In these previous games, the ability to attribute traits to male or female avatars in a non-traditional way is impermissible. Instead, players are forced into following a strict gender roles due to the game's linear storyline plot. This exemplifies what theorist Donna Haraway would consider "an offspring of militarism and patriarchal capitalism" (Haraway, 1990). These characters are a reflection of patriarchal standards positioning men over women by means of victimization and the male gaze. Unlike *The Sims 3,* these strict storyline-based video games do not offer players opportunities to deconstruct their gender realities.

Eve Shapiro (2010) discusses how players can bridge their cyber identities with their everyday life identities. She notes that it is important to point out that not all technological identity play is significant and that some players might change identities to have fun (p. 95). She parallels this to drag performance. Although some people consider drag as a part of their life and identity, there are cases where drag is not a portrayal of a deep identity. She describes Halloween as such a case. Some people dress in drag for Halloween for the fun of it. Similarly, it can be assumed that not all people who choose traits for their Sim that are opposite of their own are acting out a repressed, internal identity. This study looks at those who intentionally and explicitly perform gender roles through gender non-conforming technologies. Gender performance is the concept that gender is a reiterated act or performance (Butler, 1990). Drag shows are a great example of how gender performance is not necessarily a representation of one's biological sex.

Gender performance through drag is discussed by historian Leila Rupp and sociologist Verta Taylor (2003). Rupp and Taylor argue that drag can serve as a social protest against a rigid

gender binary (p. 3). The display of men dressing up as women and vice versa illustrates that there is a definite overlap of grey area between men and women. Others argue that cross-dressing is still a replication of mundane social norms. As Judith Bulter (1990) describes it, cross-dressing is a parodic performative practice that replicates the social binary. Dressing in drag does not subvert a binary. It only swaps the performative gendered act to the opposite sex. In addition to this, Butler argues that drag doesn't completely demonstrate the performer's intent (Butler, 1993). For example, one might assume a drag show has political connections. Viewers assume that the performer is trying to make a statement. This is not always the case. It is commonplace for many male sports teams or fraternities to haze their newcomers with drag. In this circumstance, no political statement is trying to be made but rather it is used as a form of punishment. Although *The Sims 3* players may not be explicitly dressing in the opposite gender's clothing, the game allows players to create Sims who do. In addition to this, players can assign personality characteristics to either gender. This opens a whole world of possibilities. Players can bestow traditional gender roles on their Sim, create Sims that engage in "virtual drag," or invent new Sim identities that blur the lines of a binary gender.

Last, research has shown a connection between online, cyber identities and real-life identities (Hill, 2005; McKenna, Green, & Smith, 2001; Shapiro, 2010). Unlike this research project, these studies have strictly looked at online communities such as *Second Life.* Although players are allowed to attribute traits to their avatars in a non-gender binary way, these communities are different from *The Sims 3* in that player identity is determined by the social approval others, a commonly found trait in online communities (McKenna & Bargh, 2000). *The Sims 3* is completely isolated from any type of corporeal human interaction. Players play alone

without other human influence. Therefore, the autonomy to create an identity of their avatar is completely left to the player's discretion.

**Chapter 3: Methodology**

This study was conducted by quantitatively and qualitatively surveying a group of people who play *The Sims 3*. Questions regarding each player's competency with *The Sims 3* game, their overall male and female Sim's trait selection during gameplay, and how the trait selection relates to each player's personal identity and demographics were asked and the results analyzed. The following sections discuss the reasons for choosing a methodology grounded in feminism and give an overview of the methods of this research project.

**Using Research Methods Grounded in Feminism**

This thesis was grounded in feminist methodology and epistemology. Key features of this study illustrate inclusivity and use feminist theory in analyzing its findings. One of the main goals of social research is to find, analyze, and interpret human behavior. The formation of the research questions guiding this study were inspired by certain feminist theorists, specifically Judith Butler, Kate Bornstein, Donna Haraway, and Eve Shapiro. Ideally, I would like to see a world that is free of persecution due to one's identity. This ideal has led me to embrace feminism and has shaped my perceptions of the world. It wasn't until after years of playing *The Sims* series that I realized its potential to deconstruct gender. My education and research in Women's and Gender Studies has helped give me the tools to understand the theory behind gender deconstruction. My personal goals for this study were first, to offer a new perspective on how to empirically look at gender as a fluid construction, and second, to bring attention to this Sims 3 video game from a feminist viewpoint.

Methods of how to extract this *knowledge* of human behavior have been scrutinized in the feminist communities. Feminist researchers have questioned what determines *knowledge* and

who has it. It is recognized that the researcher alone has the power to determine the validity of *knowledge.* This can lead to biased data and distortion of the experiences of women and other minorities (Epstein and Stewart, 1991). It has become commonplace to assume that empirical research is unbiased and objective. In my previous studies as a researcher in both social science and human health, I have found this to be quite the opposite, particularly in terms of gender. There are few studies that treat gender as a spectrum. I wanted this study to illustrate that it is possible to do an empirical study while treating gender as a non-binary entity. This study tried to reduce the marginalization of social minorities in two ways: 1) by integrating quantitative and qualitative methods of data extraction and analysis and 2) allowing opportunities for *outsiders*, people who usually do not fit the normal categories in traditional demographic surveys*,* to contribute their opinions as well as valuing their identity.

Feminists have acknowledged the power dynamics between the researchers and researched (Naples, 2003). My education level, race, class, and opportunities have made me privileged. Feminist epistemology has helped me to recognize and compensate for this in structuring my data collection instruments and procedures.  By integrating quantitative and qualitative research methods, this study ensured that players of the *The Sims 3* were able to share their experiences in their own language and vocabulary. Due to the sandbox nature of the game, mixed methods allowed more comprehensive data collection. Although I was an insider to *The Sims 3* community and had experience playing the game, the game design is so intricate that it would be difficult to know all of the options the game has to offer. In addition to this, the game has immeasurable potential approaches to gameplay. Therefore the open-ended questions aided in filling in the gaps.

The presentation and interpretation of data also tried to diminish circumstances for

*outsiders* to be unrecognized. The demographic survey offered options to fill in the blank for the player's age, gender, race, and sexual orientation. Individuals who did not align with the statistical majority were each treated as a separate group during analysis. This also helped give a voice to those who are often overlooked in social science research.

**Sample Population**

Surveys were sent out to *The Sims 3* players, ages 18 and older, using several community forums. The forums used to recruit study participants were the official Electronic Arts *The Sims 3* forum and third party forums including— GameSpot, Snooty Sims, The Sims Resource, Custom Sims 3, *The Sims 3* Facebook Page, Neoseeker, SimsForum, and Carl and Pam's Sims 3 Forum. In addition to the large amount of traffic they receive, these sites were chosen because they allowed anyone to post to the forum. A message was sent to the forum describing the study attached with a link to the questionnaire constructed with Survey Monkey. This message indicated to the forum community that only people who live in the United States and who were legal adults (18 years and older) were able to participate. Once a member showed interest by clicking the link, they were directed to a consent letter which gave an overview of the study and the possible hazards. This consent letter then had an option for participants to leave their contact information if they were interested in being interviewed at a later date. Interviews were not conducted due to time constraints and because the interview questions would answer go beyond the scope of this study.

To ensure confidentiality and validity, Survey Monkey assigned a specific, confidential ID to each participant's computer IP address. The link also had a cookie that tracked the participant's computer browser and limited the respondent's ability to take the survey numerous

times. The data were also protected through the Survey Monkey website, whereby the researcher had access to only the cumulative results. In addition to creating a specific ID for each player account, the researcher asked the players for a pseudonym. It was asked that this name should not be the same name used in the community forums. The pseudonyms were used during the dissemination of results of the thesis. The virtual interaction within these communities and the use of pseudonyms allowed both the participant and the investigator to keep personal information private, resulting in a double blind study.

Upon gathering data, participants were screened in several ways. First, players were asked their age and location. If players did not meet the first two requirements, they were omitted from the study. After this, participants were asked to discuss how often they used certain aspects of the game. If players scored high on this measure, they were included in the study. Finally, players were asked if they *Randomly* picked traits or *Deliberately* picked traits. Players who picked their traits *Randomly* were excluded because they were such a small population ($n = 8$) and their data were inconclusive. This was primarily due to flawed implementation. The majority of these respondents misunderstood the question and selected "Not Applicable" on the Male and Female Sim Trait Measure. As a result, these data were inaccurate.

From this method of data gathering, 209 *The Sims 3* players showed interest in participating in the study. Of this group of people, only 82 were of adult age, completed the online survey via SurveyMonkey, were currently residing in the United States, and indicated that they picked their Sims *Deliberately*. The other 127 participants were not included in the study due to not meeting the earlier criteria.

**Instrumentation**

The questionnaires given to players covered four basic areas: their *The Sims 3* game-playing competency (Appendix A), their most typical trait selection for male and female Sims (Appendix B), their analysis of how attributing those traits to male and female Sims reflects their real lives in terms of gender (Appendix C), and their personal demographics (Appendix D). In order to ensure participants have enough knowledge of the game, their competency was measured by how often they utilize specific functions of the game (the *The Sims 3* Player Competency Measure). Because of its "sandbox" nature, players are able to avoid using the functions that offer the ability to deconstruct the gender binary via attributing Sims aesthetic and personality traits. For example, a player might have played the game for several hours but spent the bulk of their time constructing and decorating the city. Those who did not score in the appropriate competency range were excluded from the study. This ensured that the participants used in the analysis had valid knowledge of the game.

The second measurement analyzed each player's attribution of personality and aesthetic traits to male and female Sims (the Male and Female Sim Trait measure – Appendix B). Players were first asked if they deliberately pick out traits for their male and female Sims. The game offers the ability to randomly pick traits; thus players were screened to see if they use this option. If they did, they were also excluded from analysis, since the intent of this research was to understand the deliberate choices made by game players. The players who indicated that they deliberately pick traits for their Sims were asked to identify the five personality traits and the aesthetic traits that they typically give their male Sims. The same questions were also asked in regard to their female Sims. The traits were then compared to see if there was any overlap.

The third measurement was the qualitative portion of the study (the Player Self Analysis of Attributing Traits to Gendered Sims measure – Appendix C). Participants were asked a series of six open-ended questions regarding their gameplay, gender trait attribution, and their personal lives. These questions looked at how and why participants pick specific traits for their male and female Sims and whether or not they explore different types of gender roles while playing *The Sims 3*.

Last, the demographic portion asked for general demographics of players including: gender, race/ethnicity, age, education level, and sexual orientation. Participants were asked an open-ended question regarding their gender identity and age. The other questions regarding race/ethnicity, education level, and sexual orientation had several options to choose from. These lists were adapted from the 2000 U.S Census. To guarantee all types of people were counted, an "other" box was given on each of those options for players who felt they did not identify with the given options, so as to be consistent with an inclusive feminist approach to data collection.

**Methodological Limitations**

There are over one million copies of *The Sims 3* sold; therefore only 82 participants do not accurately represent the overall population. In addition to this, selecting people from the United States-based *The Sims 3* communities could lead to an inaccurate depiction globally. *The Sims 3* has been sold in 60 different countries; therefore a better representation of *The Sims 3* players would include participants from all over the world (Electronic Arts, 2010). Players are also adults (18 years and older). This demographic might not accurately represent *The Sims 3* players. To fully understand how players utilize the capabilities of the game, younger players would need to be surveyed.

Another limitation to this study is that participants are self-reporting their data. This poses a problem as players may not accurately report their play experience. Complications regarding online surveying have been researched over the past decade. This research has shown that there is no guarantee that the information given via a self-report survey is accurate. In addition to this, these online communities have "lurkers," or people who do not comment on the forum but read the comments (Wright, 2006). This also causes difficulty in gathering an appropriate sample of *The Sims 3*.

Last, the principal investigator is also to be considered an "insider" to *The Sims 3* player community. There has been much debate as to whether being an "insider" to an observed community causes bias. Feminists have argued that objectivity has served as a means to mask the power dynamics between the researchers and researched (Naples, 2003). Because the principal investigator does have insider knowledge to the game, there could be biased opinions during analysis and during questionnaire construction. Since *The Sims 3* has no specific storyline, players are able to play the game in infinite ways. Due to the fact that the principal investigator has played the game prior to this study, preconceived notions about how the game is played could skew the study. This has been eliminated as much as possible by adding options for participants to offer additional answers not given in the multiple choice list. This blank option offered participants an opportunity to fill in an answer that had not been thought of during questionnaire construction.

Notwithstanding those limitations, this study offered an empirical examination of the extent to which the reported behavior of gender trait attribution either defies or conforms to traditional representations of gender attributions.

**Chapter 4: Presentation and Analysis of Data**

The following section presents the results and analysis of this study. Many of the online survey questions permitted respondents an option to choose a multiple choice answer or write an answer. In order to maintain consistency, answers that were part of the multiple choice questions will be reported using italics, and answers that were written by players will be reported using quotations. Additionally, the terms "players," "respondents," and "participants" will be used interchangeably.

**Data Analysis**

To analyze the quantitative data, the information from the Male and Female Sim Trait measure (Appendix B) was cross-compared. The male traits and female traits selected by players were compared to see if there was any overlap. Out of the 64 possible personality-trait choices, 12 were selected by at least 20% of the respondents when constructing male or female Sims. A 20% response rate was chosen to be the cut-off because there was the largest drop off (4-5%) between trait responses (see Table 1 and Table 3). The 12 traits with the highest response rate were then compared with the corresponding response rate given to the opposite Sim gender (see Table 5). For example, the trait *Brave* had a response rate of 33% for the male *Sims*. This was matched with the female *Sims* response rate (5%) and the difference was taken between the two (33%-5% = 28%). Of these top 12 traits, there were 9 traits that had a significant difference (10% or higher). This illustrated which top personality traits had the biggest difference in gender attribution.

Final analysis cross-compared the self-identified gender of the player with their responses (see Table 6 and Table 7). The self-identified genders of the players were broken down into four

different gender groups: male-identified players, female-identified players, non-gender binary-identified players and unidentified gender players (those who did not submit an answer). The non-gender binary players were quantified as one group because they shared the characteristic that they do not identify with the male-female gender binary. This comparison of personality traits determined how *The Sims 3* players attributed traits when given gendered Sims.

The answers to the open-ended questions were grouped together in major and minor themes. Next, the quantitative data were compared with the answers to the open-ended questions. The following chapter discusses the possible reasons why players attributed specific gender traits to their Sims and also why some traits overlapped.

**Response Rates**

The total number of respondents to the initial survey was 209. Of this group of people, 82 individuals answered that they were over 18 year of age, were from the United States, and had picked their Sim's traits *Deliberately*. The other 127 individuals were not included in analysis. These 82 participants responded to all of the quantitative and qualitative questions. No questions were skipped; instead, participants wrote "I choose not to answer" if they did not want to answer the question.

**Demographic Data**

**Age of Respondents.** All 82 respondents (N=82) submitted information about their age. The average age was about 29 years ($M = 28.8$) with the range in age from 18-63 years. The median age was 24 years and the mode was 19 years. Demographically speaking there was a large range of age in this study. Many participants were over the age of 30 (about 36%). The

mean age of 29 years old was under the national average age of video game players, which is 35 years old (ESA, 2011). This could be due to the fact that there are younger demographics on the *The Sims 3* community forums or that younger players had more time to fill out the online survey.

**Gender of Respondents.** Players were asked how they define their gender/sex in an open-ended question. The majority of participants (88%, *n* = 72) answered "male" or "female." The breakdown of answers is as follows: 68% (*n* = 56) of the participants responded as "female," 20% (*n* = 16) as "male," 7% (*n* = 6) identified as "androgynous male," "female with a masculine mind," "male (transitioned)," "gender is not applicable," "transsexual," or "purely masculine." Finally, 5% (*n* = 4) chose not to answer the question.

The data did not show an equal representation of gender. Significantly more people identified as the binary "male" or "female" than as a non-binary gender. Previous research has indicated that female players tend to choose life simulation games rather than the more well-known competitive games (Lucas & Sherry, 2004). A fundamental reason why females might play life simulation games is because these games, such as *The Sims* series, offer a world where women are able to freely move within a society without persecution, discrimination, and sexism. It is also important to note that even in a small, random population of 82 people, there were five participants who did not align themselves with the male and female gender binary. Ergo it is imperative to include other options beyond the dualism of male and female to fully include the populations who do not align with binary gender categorization.

**Sexual Orientation of Respondents.** The reported sexual orientations of these

respondents were: 79% (*n* = 65) *Straight/Heterosexual*, 10% (*n* = 8) *Bisexual*, 4% (*n* = 3) *Queer*,

4% (*n* = 3) *Asexual*, 2% (*n* = 2) *Gay/Lesbian/Homosexual* and 1% (n = 1) identified as

"straight/heterosexual but practicing life-long celibacy." Similar to gender, there were some

people who did not align themselves with the social norms of sexual orientation; about 20% of

participants did indicate that they were not *Heterosexual/Straight*. It is hard to determine how

representative this is of the United States population because there has been no conclusive data

that indicate the percentage of people who are not heterosexual (LeVay, 1997). This is primarily

due to several reasons: 1) homosexuality is underreported due to its stigmatization in the United

States, 2) a standard that defines and measures homosexuality has yet to determined, and 3)

Census data has only asked US residents if they have lived in same-sex households; this does not

connote that these individuals are homosexual. Regardless, the findings in this study and other

studies alike are important because when looking at human behavior, it is important not to limit

people's options in terms of gender and sexual orientation.


**Education level of Respondents.** The majority of respondents had some level of

postsecondary education (80%, *n* = 66). Specifically, 25% (*n* = 20) had one or more years of

college with no degree, 21% (*n* = 17) had a Bachelor's degree, 16% (*n* = 13) had an Associate's

degree, 13% (*n* = 11) had some college credit but less than one year of college completed,  4% (*n*

= 3) had a Master's degree, 1% (*n* = 1) had a Doctorate degree, and 1% (*n* = 1) had a

cosmetology license. Those who did not have any postsecondary education included 21% (*n* =

17) who had a high school diploma or GED and 6% (*n* = 5) who had never graduated from high

school. Only 2% (*n* = 2) chose not to answer the question. In terms of education status, it is

significant to note there were some participants (5%, $n = 4$) who specifically indicated they had

some form of formal training in Women's and Gender Studies courses. Although there is no

conclusive data, this percentage is probably higher than the number of people in the United

States who have had this type of education. This raises the question, do people who participate in

Women's and Gender Studies programs find *The Sims 3* as a means of entertainment?


      **Race and/or Ethnicity of Respondents.** When asked about their race and/or ethnicity,

respondents were given the option to choose more than one answer as well as answer it as an

open-ended question. The most frequently identified race and/or ethnicity among the population

sample was *Caucasian/White* at 94% ($n = 77$), followed by *Asian* 6% ($n = 5$) and *African*

*American and/or Black* 6% ($n = 5$). Only 5% ($n = 4$) chose *Native American and/or Alaska*

*Native and* 4% ($n = 3$) chose *Hispanic and/or Latino*. A small group of people 2% ($n = 2$)

identified as *Native Hawaiian and/or Other Pacific Islander*. Two (2%, $n = 2$) individuals wrote

in "human race." Finally, 1% ($n = 1$) identified as each separate option as follows:

*Arab/Iranian/North African*, "Greek American," "Scottish," "Spanish," "Filipino-American,"

and "Greek and Egyptian."

      The race and ethnicity of the players for this study were not very diverse. The majority

(94 %) of participants indicated that they were *Caucasian/White*. Unfortunately, it is difficult to

determine if this is representative of *The Sims 3* gaming population as there have been no studies

done on this. In comparison to the 2000 United States Census, *The Sims 3* percentage of

*Caucasian/White* respondents is higher. This could be due the linkage between access to

computers and social class. More importantly, one of the major components to the game is that it

requires internet access to download updates to the game. Research has shown that

Caucasian/White individuals are more likely to have computer and internet access than any other racial or ethnic minority (Banerjee & Hodge; 2007). Social scientists speculate that this is primarily due to economic status and social institutions that prevent non-white individuals from gaining access to computers.

When asked how many total hours participants played *The Sims 3*, the majority of the players, 81% (*n* = 67), have played over 100 hours in their lifetime, 7% (*n* = 6)* participants played 76-100 hours in their lifetime, 5% (*n* = 4) 26-50 hours, 3% (*n* = 3) played 51-75 hours, and 2% (*n* = 2) players played less than 25 hours or chose not to answer this question. Although these two players had not played the game as much as the other participants, they scored high on the *The Sims 3* Player Competency Measure (Appendix A).

**Quantitative Data**

The following section looks at the results from the Male and Female Sim Trait Measure (Appendix B). The 82 participants analyzed noted that they selected their Sims *Deliberately*; because of this, it can be assumed that these individuals demonstrated free will in the creation of their Sims. Players determined how their Sim was constructed rather than having the game create a character for them, a trait found in most other non-sandbox games.

**Personality and Aesthetic Trait Attribution for Male Sims.** All 82 survey participants were asked to pick up to five personality traits (from a list of 64 traits) that players used while constructing their male (Table 1) and female (Table 3) Sims. In addition to this, players were asked to select the aesthetic traits they chose to create their male (Table 2) and female (Table 4) Sims.

For the male Sims, the top responses (over a 20% response rate) were: *Athletic* (33%, $n =$ 27), *Brave* (32%, $n = 26$), *Family-Oriented*, (31% $n = 25$), *Genius* (29%, $n = 24$), *Good Sense of Humor* (24%, $n = 20$), *Charismatic* (23%, $n = 19$), *Friendly* (22%, $n = 18$), and *Loves the Outdoors* (22%, $n = 18$). The rest of the personality traits for the male Sims are referenced in Table 1.

Table 1

*Response rates of personality traits for the players' male Sims*

| Personality Trait for Male Sims | Response Percent | Response Count | Personality Trait for Male Sims | Response Percent | Response Count |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Athletic | 33% | 27 | Childish | 2% | 2 |
| Brave | 32% | 26 | Clumsy | 2% | 2 |
| Family Oriented | 31% | 25 | Heavy Sleeper | 2% | 2 |
| Genius | 29% | 24 | Hot-Headed | 2% | 2 |
| Good Sense of Humor | 24% | 20 | Kleptomaniac | 2% | 2 |
| Charismatic | 23% | 19 | Over-Emotional | 2% | 2 |
| Friendly | 22% | 18 | Snob | 2% | 2 |
| Love the Outdoors | 22% | 18 | Commitment Issues | 1% | 1 |
| Ambitious | 17% | 14 | Easily Impress | 1% | 1 |
| Great Kisser | 17% | 14 | Evil | 1% | 1 |
| Handy | 17% | 14 | Light Sleeper | 1% | 1 |
| Flirty | 16% | 13 | Loser | 1% | 1 |
| Lucky | 15% | 12 | Mooch | 1% | 1 |
| Workaholic | 12% | 10 | Never-Nude | 1% | 1 |
| Artistic | 11% | 9 | Slob | 1% | 1 |
| Computer Wiz | 10% | 8 | Absent-Minded | 0% | 0 |
| An Angler | 9% | 7 | Can't Stand Art | 0% | 0 |
| Bookworm | 9% | 7 | Couch Potato | 0% | 0 |
| Party Animal | 9% | 7 | Coward | 0% | 0 |
| Virtuoso | 9% | 7 | Dislikes Children | 0% | 0 |
| Good | 7% | 6 | Frugal | 0% | 0 |
| Neurotic | 7% | 6 | Grumpy | 0% | 0 |
| Excitable | 6% | 5 | Hates the Outdoors | 0% | 0 |
| Green Thumb | 6% | 5 | Hydrophobic | 0% | 0 |
| Hopeless Romantic | 6% | 5 | Inappropriate | 0% | 0 |
| Not Applicable | 5% | 4 | Insane | 0% | 0 |
| Loner | 5% | 4 | Mean-Spirited | 0% | 0 |
| Natural Cook | 5% | 4 | No Sense of Humor | 0% | 0 |
| Perfectionist | 5% | 4 | Technophobe | 0% | 0 |
| Schmoozer | 5% | 4 | Unflirty | 0% | 0 |
| Daredevil | 4% | 3 | Unlucky | 0% | 0 |
| Neat | 4% | 3 | Vegetarian | 0% | 0 |

In addition to constructing the personality of their Sims, all 82 participants were asked which aesthetic traits they use to construct the appearance of their male (Table 3) and female (Table 4) Sims. Results indicated that traits with the largest response rate were *Wears No Makeup* (76% *n* = 62), *Short Hair* (74%, *n* = 61), *Has Muscles* (72%, *n* = 59), and *A Low Voice* (63%, *n* = 52). The rest of the aesthetic traits for the male Sims are referenced in Table 2.

Table 2
Response rates of aesthetic traits for the players' male Sims

| Aesthetic Traits for Male Sims | Response Percent | Response Count |
|---|---|---|
| Wears No Make Up | 76% | 62 |
| Short Hair | 74% | 61 |
| Muscles | 72% | 59 |
| A Low Voice | 63% | 52 |
| No Muscles | 15% | 12 |
| Long Hair | 13% | 11 |
| Not Applicable | 2% | 2 |
| Wears Make Up | 2% | 2 |
| A High Voice | 2% | 2 |

**Personality and Aesthetic Trait Attribution for Female Sims.** Similar to the male Sims, players were asked to pick up to five personality traits that were used to create their female Sims in the *Create-a-Sim* option of the game. Table 3 displays the results. The personality traits chosen by over 20% of respondents were *Family Oriented* (43%, *n* = 35), *Artistic* (33%, *n* = 27), *Hopeless Romantic* (31% *n* = 25), *Friendly* (29%, *n* = 24), *Natural Cook* (28%, *n* = 23), *Flirty* (26%, *n* = 21), and *Good Sense of Humor* (22%, *n* = 18).

Table 3
*Response rates of personality traits for the players' female Sims.*

| Personality Traits for Female Sims | Response Percent | Response Count | Personality Traits for Female Sims | Response Percent | Response Count |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Family Oriented | 43% | 35 | Schmoozer | 2.4% | 2 |
| Artistic | 33% | 27 | Snob | 2.4% | 2 |
| Hopeless Romantic | 31% | 25 | Workaholic | 2.4% | 2 |
| Friendly | 29% | 24 | An Angler | 1.2% | 1 |
| Natural Cook | 28% | 23 | Childish | 1.2% | 1 |
| Flirty | 26% | 21 | Computer Wiz | 1.2% | 1 |
| Good Sense of Humor | 22% | 18 | Evil | 1.2% | 1 |
| Bookworm | 18% | 15 | Heavy Sleeper | 1.2% | 1 |
| Neat | 18% | 15 | Kleptomaniac | 1.2% | 1 |
| Genius | 16% | 13 | Mean-Spirited | 1.2% | 1 |
| Charismatic | 15% | 12 | Can't Stand Art | 0.0% | 0 |
| Good | 15% | 12 | Commitment Issues | 0.0% | 0 |
| Great Kisser | 15% | 12 | Couch Potato | 0.0% | 0 |
| Excitable | 13% | 11 | Coward | 0.0% | 0 |
| Green Thumb | 12% | 10 | Daredevil | 0.0% | 0 |
| Lucky | 12% | 10 | Dislikes Children | 0.0% | 0 |
| Ambitious | 11% | 9 | Grumpy | 0.0% | 0 |
| Love the Outdoors | 11% | 9 | Handy | 0.0% | 0 |
| Party Animal | 7% | 6 | Hates the Outdoors | 0.0% | 0 |
| Not Applicable | 6% | 5 | Hot-Headed | 0.0% | 0 |
| Easily Impress | 6% | 5 | Hydrophobic | 0.0% | 0 |
| Virtuoso | 6% | 5 | Inappropriate | 0.0% | 0 |
| Athletic | 5% | 4 | Light Sleeper | 0.0% | 0 |
| Brave | 5% | 4 | Loner | 0.0% | 0 |
| Over-Emotional | 5% | 4 | Loser | 0.0% | 0 |
| Absent-Minded | 4% | 3 | Mooch | 0.0% | 0 |
| Frugal | 4% | 3 | Never-Nude | 0.0% | 0 |
| Perfectionist | 4% | 3 | No Sense of Humor | 0.0% | 0 |
| Vegetarian | 4% | 3 | Slob | 0.0% | 0 |
| Clumsy | 2% | 2 | Technophobe | 0.0% | 0 |
| Insane | 2% | 2 | Unflirty | 0.0% | 0 |
| Neurotic | 2% | 2 | Unlucky | 0.0% | 0 |

The aesthetic traits most frequently chosen for the players' female Sims included: *Has Long Hair* (77% *n* = 63), *Wears Makeup* (77% *n* = 63), *Has a High Voice* (50% *n* = 41), *Has No Muscles* (43% *n* = 35), and *Wears a Dress* (40%, *n* = 33). The rest of the aesthetic traits for the female Sims are referenced in Table 4.

Table 4
*Response rates of aesthetic traits for the players' female Sims*

| Aesthetic Traits for Female Sims | Response Percent | Response Count |
|---|---|---|
| Long Hair | 77% | 63 |
| Wears Make Up | 77% | 63 |
| A High Voice | 50% | 41 |
| No Muscles | 43% | 35 |
| Wears A Dress | 40% | 33 |
| Muscles | 24% | 20 |
| Wears No Make Up | 10% | 8 |
| Short Hair | 6% | 5 |
| Not Applicable | 5% | 4 |
| A Low Voice | 2% | 2 |

**Cross Comparing Male and Female Sims' Traits.** When comparing the top 12 personality traits (20% or higher response rate), a few traits were stereotypically picked for the male Sims and others for the female Sims (Table 5 and Figure 2). The difference between the top responses for the male Sims and the female Sims was calculated. Of these personality traits, 9 out of 12 had a difference over 10%. These personality traits were *Artistic, Athletic, Brave, Family Oriented, Flirty, Genius, Hopeless Romantic, Loves the Outdoors,* and *Natural Cook.* The traits with the lowest difference were *Charismatic, Friendly,* and *Good Sense of Humor.* This indicates that there was a relative equal distribution of these top traits among the male and female Sims. The other nine traits had an unequal distribution. These traits followed a traditional

38

gender binary in that the male Sims received more traditional masculine traits and the female

Sims received more feminine traits.

The traits *Athletic, Brave, Genius,* and *Loves the Outdoors* were traits typically given to

male Sims. These traits aligned with the stereotypical assumptions of gender roles. Men, rather

than women, are usually assumed to be more athletic and brave. Men have been stereotypically

been perceived to be smarter than women and the outdoors has been recognized as a "male

realm." These stereotypes are depicted time and time again in various forms of media.

Comparatively, these traits for the female Sims scored only 5% (*n = 4)* for *Athletic*, 5% (*n = 4)*

for *Brave*, 16% (*n = 13*) for *Genius,* and 11% (*n = 9*) for *Loves the Outdoors*.

The top traits that were stereotypically chosen for the female Sims were *Artistic* (33%, *n*

*= 27*), *Family Oriented (43%, n = 35), Flirty (26%, n = 21), Hopeless Romantic* (31%, *n = 25*),

and *Natural Cook* (28%, *n = 23*). Again, this too aligns with the classic stereotypes of women.

Women are perceived to me more aligned with the Arts instead of the STEM fields, are assumed

to be obsessed with romanticism and relationships, and are expected to be the principal person in

childrearing and meal preparation. When compared to their male counterparts, the male Sims

only had an 11% (*n = 9*) response rate for *Artistic,* a *31% (n = 25)* response rate for *Family*

*Oriented,* a 16% (*n = 13*) response rate for *Flirty*, a 6% (*n = 5*) response rate for *Hopeless*

*Romantic*, and a 5% (*n = 4*) response rate for *Natural Cook.*

Interestingly enough, 31% of participants chose *Family Oriented* for their male Sims, and

43% chose *Family Oriented* for their female Sims. *Family Oriented* was a top personality trait

for both the male and female Sims. This could be for many different reasons. First, because the

majority of players identified as "female" and "heterosexual," this might be a trait that these

players find attractive in a male partner. Some players indicated that they create their male Sims

based on people they like. In addition to this, many players noted that their primary goal was to create a family. Therefore, picking *Family Oriented* as a personality trait would help aid in this goal.

Table 5
*Response rates and difference between personality traits for the players' male and female Sims*

| Personality Trait | Difference of Percentage of Players Picking Male and Female Sims Traits (Column C and D) | Percentage of Players Picking Trait for Male Sims (Column C) | Percentage of Players Picking Trait for Female Sims (Column D) |
|---|---|---|---|
| Athletic | 28.0% | **33.0%** | 5.0% |
| Brave | 27.0% | **32.0%** | 5.0% |
| Hopeless Romantic | 25.0% | 6.0% | **31.0%** |
| Natural Cook | 23.0% | 5.0% | **28.0%** |
| Artistic | 22.0% | 11.0% | **33.0%** |
| Genius | 13.0% | **29.0%** | 16.0% |
| Family Oriented | 12.0% | 31.0% | **43.0%** |
| Loves the Outdoors | 11.0% | **22.0%** | 11.0% |
| Flirty | 10.0% | 16.0% | **26.0%** |
| Charismatic | 8.0% | 23.0% | 15.0% |
| Friendly | 7.0% | 22.0% | 29.0% |
| Good Sense of Humor | 2.0% | 24.0% | 22.0% |

*Note: The large black box indicates traits that had the highest difference (over 10%)*
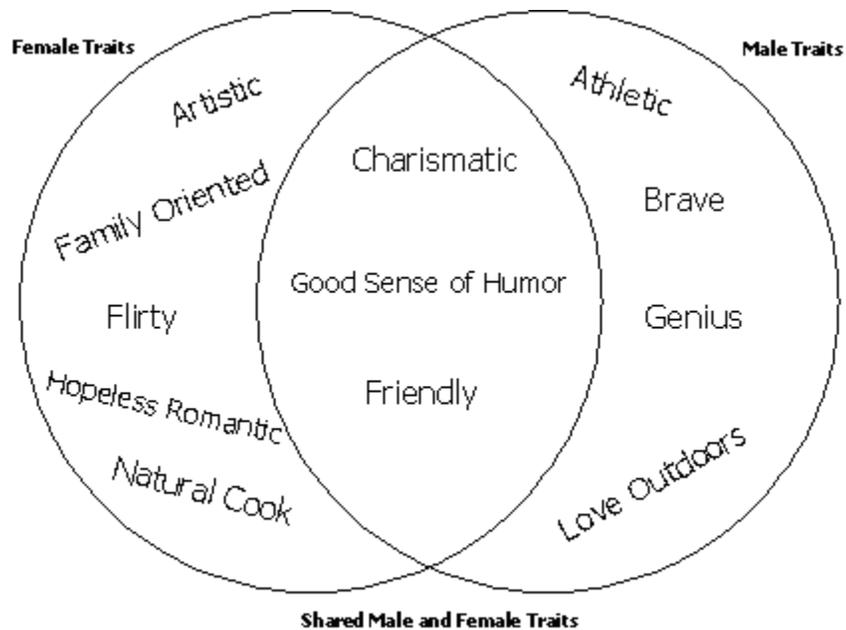
*Figure 2.*Venn diagram of top personality traits (over a 20% player response rate) stereotypically picked for the male and female Sims

**Cross Analysis of Self-Identified Gender of Participants and Selection of Top Traits.**

A cross tabulation was conducted between the four different gender-identified player groups (male-identified, female-identified, non-gender binary-identified, and unidentified gender). Results indicated that many players, regardless of their self-identified gender, chose at least one of the stereotypically male or stereotypically female traits listed in Table 6 and Table 7.

The personality traits *Athletic* and *Loves Outdoors* were selected by more female-identified players for their male Sims than any other group (Table 6). Reasons for this might be that these female-identified players see athleticism as an attractive trait. These traits might also be a part of a storyline that includes a male Sim who enjoys the outdoors. Another possible reason for this is that these female-identified players might know men in their lives who are athletic or enjoy the outdoors. In addition to this, female-identified players were more likely to pick *Genius* for their male Sims than the male-identified players. Interestingly, non-gender

41

binary individuals were most likely to select *Brave* and *Genius* for their male Sims. Although the

male Sims were being characterized, the male-identified players were not the top responders

when picking stereotypical traits. This may be because these male-identify players do not

identify with stereotypical traits. Instead they may think there are other, non-stereotypical traits

that characterize their male Sims better. More research would be needed to determine this.

Table 6
*Frequency of participant self-identified gender with selection of male Sim personality traits*

| Top Personality Traits Chosen for Male Sims by Self-Identified Gender of Respondent | Athletic | | Brave | | Genius | | Loves the Outdoors | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | $n$ | Percent | $n$ | Percent | $n$ | Percent | $n$ | Percent |
| **Self-Identified Gender** | | | | | | | | |
| Male (n=16) | 1 | 6% | 4 | 25% | 3 | 19% | 3 | 19% |
| Female (n=56) | **8** | **14%** | 12 | 21% | 17 | 30% | **14** | **25%** |
| Non-Gender Binary (n=6) | 0 | 0% | **2** | **33%** | **3** | **50%** | 0 | 0% |
| Unidentified Gender (n=4) | 1 | 25% | 2 | 50% | 0 | 0% | 0 | 0% |

For the female Sims, more female-identified players than male-identified players and

non-gender binary players selected *Family Oriented* (Table 7). This might indicate that this

group of female-identified Sims players have an expectation for females to be *Family Oriented.*

This would need further investigation. Additionally, the male-identified players selected

*Hopeless Romantic, Flirty,* and *Artistic* more than their female-identified and non-gender binary

counterparts. This may be because the male-identified players expect female Sims to be objects

of affection in their gameplay.

Table 7

*Frequency of participant self-identified gender with selection female Sim personality traits*

| Top Personality Traits Chosen for Female Sims by Self-Identified Gender of Respondent | Artistic | | Family Oriented | | Flirty | | Hopeless Romantic | | Natural Cook | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | *n* | Percent | *n* | Percent | *n* | Percent | *n* | Percent | *n* | Percent |
| **Self-Identified Gender** | | | | | | | | | | |
| Male (n=16) | **6** | **38%** | 5 | 31% | **6** | **38%** | **6** | **38%** | 4 | 25% |
| Female (n=56) | 18 | 32% | **26** | **46%** | 13 | 26% | 17 | 30% | 15 | 27% |
| Non-Gender Binary (n=6) | 1 | 17% | 2 | 33% | 1 | 16% | 1 | 16% | **3** | **50%** |
| Unidentified Gender (n=4) | 2 | 50% | 2 | 50% | 1 | 25% | 1 | 25% | 1 | 25% |

Although some players defied the gender binary by identifying as neither male nor female, this group of individuals still picked traits that aligned with a binary viewpoint. Non-gender binary individuals were the most likely to pick *Natural Cook* for their female Sims and *Genius* for their male Sims. This illustrates that although players are defying the gender binary in their personal identity, they preferred a more gender binary gameplay.

**Analysis of Aesthetic Traits.**  The players' selection of aesthetic traits for their Sims very clearly followed a gender binary pattern, despite the fact that the game permits other options in the construction of Sims characters (Table 8). The majority of players surveyed reported that they selected the following traits for their male Sims: *Wears No Makeup* (76% *n* = 62), *Short Hair* (74%, *n* = 61), *Has Muscles* (72%, *n* = 59), and *A Low Voice* (63%, *n* = 52), and their female Sims should have *Has Long Hair* (77% *n* = 63), *Wears Makeup* (77% *n* = 63), *Has a High Voice* (50% *n* = 41), *Has No Muscles* (43% *n* = 35).

*Table 8*
Response rates and difference between aesthetic traits for the players' male and female Sims

| Aesthetic Trait | Difference of Percentage of Players Picking Male and Female Sims Traits (Column C and D) | Percentage of Players Picking Trait for Male Sims (Column C) | Percentage of Players Picking Trait for Female Sims (Column D) |
|---|---|---|---|
| Wears Make Up | 74.4% | 2.4% | 76.8% |
| Short Hair | 68.3% | 74.4% | 6.1% |
| Wears No Make Up | 65.8% | 75.6% | 9.8% |
| Long Hair | 63.4% | 13.4% | 76.8% |
| A Low Voice | 61.0% | 63.4% | 2.4% |
| Muscles | 47.6% | 72.0% | 24.4% |
| A High Voice | 47.6% | 2.4% | 50.0% |
| No Muscles | 28.1% | 14.6% | 42.7% |

**Logic for Picking Traits.** *The Sims 3* players were asked to identify their logic when picking personality and aesthetic traits while creating their Sims. It is important to know that participants were allowed to choose more than one answer as well as write in an answer if they felt the options did not fit their logic. As a result, these data add up to be over a 100% response rate. Results indicated that 61% ($n = 50$) picked traits with the intention of creating a story. In addition to this, 52.4% ($n = 43$) picked traits that they feel are more efficient than others in gameplay. For example, one player noted that they pick the *Neat* trait because they did not want to clean up after their Sims, thus creating a more efficient gameplay. Others felt that the *Genius* trait would help their Sim gain logic points faster and aid in their Sim's career advancement. Furthermore, 28% ($n = 23$) picked traits for the comic relief, 27% ($n = 22$) picked traits similar to themselves, 26% ($n = 21$) picked traits based on the Sim's gender, and 23.1% ($n = 19$) chose *Other*. Among the 19 participants who chose *Other* as an answer, five themes arose. The most common theme at 9% ($n = 7$) was that participants picked traits that fit a specific character or personification. One participant noted, "I pick traits that seem to fit their [the Sim's] 'stereotype'

for example: If I dress them nerdy, then they'd have characteristics such as Computer Wiz, Clumsy, or Bookworm." It would be important to investigate whether players who are creating these stories are creating characters who follow stereotypical gender roles. This player might be more representative of the other players than one might think. Again, further investigation would be needed to determine this. Other themes included participants noting that they picked traits no more than once (4%, *n* = 3) or they picked traits entirely at random (4%, *n* = 3*)*. Only 2% (*n* = 2) of participants indicated that they picked traits related to the career track they intend for that specific Sim. Finally, 1% (*n* = 1) of participants noted that they created Sims similar to other people in their lives. This participant, who is a 51-year-old, female-identified, heterosexual player, wrote:

> I am a control freak and pick traits that will give me satisfying results from the Sims. I make [them] to resemble people in real life that are bugging me. I am THE CREATOR! with my Sims. And I love the feeling I get when they act the way I want.

**Qualitative Data**

After the quantitative portion of the online survey, six open-ended questions were given to the players to fill out. All 82 participants completed the qualitative portion (N = 82). The following section will be divided up by question. When looking at participant responses, each question had several themes arise; this is illustrated in Table 9. Notably, although all of the players responded, some answers were very extensive and had many of the themes incorporated into one answer.

Table 9
*Overall themes from open-ended questions, survey questions 15-20*

**Question # 15 (Qualitative question #1)**
**Describe how you design your Sim. Do you find yourself creating Sims that are similar to yourself in terms of gender identity and personality traits? Do you create all different types of Sims that vary in gender and personality?**

Theme 1) Participants create all different types of Sims that vary in gender and personality (60%, $n = 49$).
  Sub-theme 1) Participants create Sims based on their own scripted narrative (18%, $n = 15$).
  Sub-theme 2) Participants create Sims based on characters of another story (i.e. a movie, book, television show, religious texts; 5%, $n = 4$).
  Sub-theme 3) Participants create Sims similar to people in their real lives (5%, $n = 4$).
Theme 2) Participants like to play Sims similar to their gender (29% $n = 24$).
  Sub-theme 1) Participants make Sims of their ideal selves (11%, $n = 9$).

**Question # 16 (Qualitative question #2) Do you find yourself mixing up personality traits for your male and female Sims, or is there a set of specific traits that you give to the male Sims and the female Sims? Please describe.**

Theme 1) Participants mix personality traits between the male and female Sims (74%, $n = 61$).
Theme 2) Participants pick specific, gendered traits for their male and female Sims (22%, $n = 18$).
Theme 3) Participants pick specific traits regardless of gender (18%, $n = 15$).

**Question # 17 (Qualitative question #3) Do you find your gameplay to be experimental in terms of gender roles? Do you find yourself giving male Sims feminine traits and female Sims masculine traits for fun?**

Theme 1) Participants did not mix gender roles at all (44%, $n = 36$).
  Sub-theme 1) Participants did not typically experiment with gender roles unless they created a homosexual Sim (6%, $n = 5$).
Theme 2) Participants did experiment with gender roles (38%, $n = 31$).
Theme 3) Participants felt that there were no gendered traits in the game (18%, $n = 15$).

**Question # 18 (Qualitative question #4) Do you find your gameplay to be reflective of your sexual orientation? If so, how?**

Theme 1) Participants responded that yes, it does reflect their orientation (62%, $n = 51$).
  Sub-theme 1) Many heterosexual players mentioned that they have experimented with a homosexual family at least once (43%, $n = 28$, N = 65).
Theme 2) Participants tend to play with other types of sexual orientations (34%, $n = 28$).

**Question # 19 (Qualitative question #5) Do your Sims explore other types of sexual relations that you don't usually partake in such as necrophilia (attraction to the dead), monogamy, polygamy (multiple spouses), polyamory (both partners have consensual multiple partners) or other forms of non-monogamy? If so, how?**

Theme 1) Participant's Sims do experiment with many different types of relationships (55%, $n = 45$).
Theme 2) Participant's Sims did not try sexual relations that were different from what players have experienced in real life (39%, $n = 32$).

**Question # 20 (Qualitative question #6) Is there any type of identity that you feel The Sims 3 leaves out in its game?**

Theme 1) There were no identities or traits that were left out (54%, $n = 44$).
Theme 2) There were identities and traits left out (20%, $n = 16$).
  Sub-theme 1) There should be more opportunities to gender bend or be transsexual (12%, $n = 10$).
  Sub-theme 2) Characters with disabilities are left out (4%, $n = 3$).
  Sub-theme 3) There should be the opportunity for Sims to become terminally sick (4%, $n = 3$).

**1) Describe how you design your Sim. Do you find yourself creating Sims that are similar to yourself in terms of gender identity and personality traits? Do you create all different types of Sims that vary in gender and personality?** For the first qualitative question, players were asked to describe how they design their Sims in terms of relationship to their personal gender identity and personality traits. The responses resulted in two different major themes: 1) participants create all different types of Sims that vary in gender and personality or 2) participants like to play with Sims similar to their gender and are not diverse in their Sims creation. The most common theme among the participants' answers was that they create all different types of Sims. The majority of players indicated this (60%, $n = 49$). This meant that some of the Sims reflected the players' identities and others did not. Of those, a large group of players based their Sims' traits on a character that they wanted to use in a narrative (18%, $n = 15$). A 21-year-old, male-identified bisexual player wrote, "I make a Sim based on whatever story idea came to me. I did make a Sim based off of me for random curiosity but most of the time I make a Sim that would fit the plot line best." Some players (5%, $n = 4$) created Sims based on characters of another story. This ranged from television shows and popular literature to gods and goddesses. A 31-year-old, female-identified, heterosexual player commented, "I tried to make Kali, goddess of destruction, which is the only evil Sim I have created." Others (5%; $n = 4$) reported to create Sims similar to people in their real lives. An 18-year-old, female-identified heterosexual player noted, "I usually create Sims that resembles [sic] people that I like. For example, my friends, myself, or guys I am attracted to."

The second major theme for the first qualitative question was that players like to play Sims similar to their gender. The response rate for this theme was 29% ($n = 24$). These players would give their Sims mixed traits but would still find themselves picking a male or female Sim

similar to their gender identity. Within this major theme, one sub-theme emerged. This sub-theme was that some players (11%, $n = 9$) stated that they make Sims of their ideal selves. Many players called this their "simself." A 19-year-old, male-identified heterosexual player noted, "I like to use an actual picture of myself to base the Sim off of [and] to see my "simself" in situations I would not necessarily be in reality."

2) **Do you find yourself mixing up personality traits for your male and female Sims, or is there a set of specific traits that you give to the male Sims and the female Sims? Please describe**. The second qualitative question from the online survey asked whether players find themselves mixing up personality traits for their male and female Sims or whether they select separate traits for their male and female Sims. Most players reported mixing personality traits between the male and female Sims. This was the most prevalent answer with a 74% ($n = 61$) response rate.  Fewer players (22%; $n = 18$) reported that they pick specific, gendered traits for their male and female Sims, selecting the personality traits "brave," "athletic," "strong," "love the outdoors"  for the male Sims and "family oriented," "artistic," "natural cook," and "neurotic" for the female Sims. A 51-year-old, female-identified heterosexual player commented:

> I do seem to have certain traits I prefer for female and male [Sims]. Once in a while I make a Sim that is composed of traits I never use. I am 51 and I guess you could say swing towards what I think of as kind of traditional gender roles. I prefer my females to cook, be family oriented, enjoy gardening and be hopeless romantics and bookworms. I also like [them] to have them [to] be athletic, love the outdoors, lucky and clumsy. I like [to] have neurotic females…males are preferred brave, athletic, like the outdoors,

anglers, handy, sometimes hot headed, good sense of humor, workaholics, insane at times.

Fewer still indicated that they pick specific traits regardless of the Sim's gender (18%, *n* = 15). This could be related to the player's game goals. If the player's goal is to create a large family, they might have chosen "family oriented" as a trait to aid in family production. Also other players choose traits for comic relief. A 19-year-old, female-identified heterosexual player noted, "I usually make sure the females are natural cooks and neat since I like them to stay home. Males tend to get my comic relief traits."

**3) Do you find your gameplay to be experimental in terms of gender roles? Do you find yourself giving male Sims feminine traits and female Sims masculine traits for fun?** The third qualitative question asked players if they experiment with gender roles during gameplay. Within the framework of this question, three major themes emerged. The first theme is that players indicated that they did not mix gender roles at all, with (44% *n* = 36) of participants. A 32-year-old, female-identified heterosexual player wrote, "I do not.  I am too much of a traditionalist in real life.  I don't think that would make my game fun." These players commented that they usually stick to standard masculine and feminine roles for their Sims. Although many of these people did not experiment with gender roles, some players (6%, *n* = 5) indicated that they would if they chose to create a homosexual Sim. An 18-year-old, male-identified bisexual player noted, "When I play a same-sex couple or a Sim with a homosexual sexual orientation I will swap gender roles." Interestingly, many players reported experimenting

with gender roles (38%, $n = 31$). A 31-year-old, female-identified heterosexual player commented:

> I have one family that I like a lot that is somewhat experimental in terms of gender roles. It is Jack Spratt and his girlfriend Jill. I made Jack skinny (maximum thin and minimum muscles), vegetarian, green thumb, natural cook with a high voice. He wears a little makeup. (Actually, a couple of my male musician Sims wear makeup, but not as often as females.) Jill started out fat with minimum muscles, but she is Athletic, Disciplined, Handy, and an Angler. The idea was to get them to even out in body type, and also for them to grow all their own food.

Fewer respondents indicated that a group of players (18%, $n = 15$) felt that there were no gendered traits in the game. These players felt that the traits available in the game were androgynous. One player wrote, "For me, there are no masculine or feminine traits."

**4) Do you find your gameplay to be reflective of your sexual orientation? If so, how?**
The fourth qualitative question asked if players found their gameplay to reflect their sexual orientation. Two major themes emerged among the answers to this question. The majority of players responded that yes, it does reflect their orientation (62%, $n = 51$). One 43-year-old, female-identified heterosexual player wrote that she plays the game as a reflection of her own sexual orientation because it is morally correct. She wrote, "Yes, absolutely. I grew up with strong moral values, and my Sim families are a typical mother and father raising their children. I have not gone outside the typical male/female roles in that regard." Although many of these

players did not go beyond their own experiences in terms of sexual orientation, 43% ($n = 28$, N $= 65$) of players who stated that their gameplay reflects their sexual orientation did mention that they have experimented with a homosexual Sim family at least once, even though they themselves were heterosexual. A 29-year-old, female-identified heterosexual player noted:

> I'm straight, and my Sims neighborhood tends to be 90% straight 10% gay/lesbian. I enjoy playing my gay/lesbian Sims from time to time, but I more often play and create straight Sims just because it's what I'm more used to. When I do play gay/lesbian Sims, I try to make them realistic and feel like a natural part of the community, in contrast with how television or the media tends to portray them as ultra-flamboyant or as something to be examined because the characters are unused to homosexuality.

This player's knowledge of the stereotypes of lesbians and gays is apparent. She indicated that television portrays them as overly flamboyant and purposely defies these stereotypes. It would be interesting to see how the other players characterize their gay and lesbian Sims. Do other players follow the stereotypes that television has created? A follow-up interview with theses players would be needed to determine this information.

The second major theme for the fourth qualitative question was that players do tend to play with other types of sexual orientations (38%, $n = 28$). One player wrote, "I am gay, but I typically play straight Sims due to my enjoyment of giving them children." One of the limitations in the design of the game is that gay Sims cannot genetically reproduce. This capability could be entertaining to some players, including players who identify as gay. In its previous series, *The Sims 2*, players were able have their male Sims become pregnant via alien

abduction. The male Sim would be scooped up into the sky and reappear pregnant. Many players on the *The Sims 3* community forums have indicated their disappointment that *The Sims 3* did not have this attribute. Although the ability for same sex couples to genetically reproduce has never been an option in *The Sims* series, many players might enjoy this ability. This was demonstrated by the fact that a mod, a download created by third party companies that can be installed to enhance the game, was created to do this. In addition to this, a large majority of other self-described heterosexual players chose to create homosexual, bisexual, or asexual Sims (43%, N = 65, *n* = 28).

**5) Do your Sims explore other types of sexual relations that you don't usually partake in such as necrophilia (attraction to the dead), monogamy, polygamy (multiple spouses), polyamory (both partners have consensual multiple partners) or other forms of non-monogamy? If so, how?** The fifth qualitative question asks if players explore other types of sexual relationships that they don't usually partake in. This question resulted in two major themes among answers. The first major theme included half of the players (55%, *n* = 45) and resulted in players noting that they do experiment with many different types of relationships, especially adulterous in nature. A 20-year-old, female-identified heterosexual player commented:

> I tend to make mostly female Sims, and when I do I usually have very beautiful Sims who are confident, and like to have multiple partners, etc... I find this a liberating way of playing, as it does not have the same consequences as real life. I am not as open, and do not have multiple partners. But my Sims can. It is a safe way to experiment with a different lifestyle.

This player found *The Sims 3* to be liberating in the fact that her Sim could have multiple partners without the social repercussions. This illustrates that *The Sims 3* does offer some players a safe space to experiment with other lifestyles. It would be important to ask this player in a follow-up interview if this is one of the motivations for why she plays *The Sims 3*.

The second major theme for the fifth qualitative question was that many players (39%, *n* = 32) indicated that they did not create Sim relationships that go beyond the types of relationships that they partake in. A 40-year-old, male-identified heterosexual player wrote, "When I find a wife, that's it. If I feel the need play a Sim with a new wife, I have children, or make a new Sim. When it's, 'I do,' that [is] it. Done deal."

**6) Is there any type of identity that you feel The Sims 3 leaves out in its game?** The sixth and final qualitative question asked players whether or not there were any identities that they felt were left out of *The Sims 3*. There were two major themes among the answers given by the participants: players felt that there were no missing identities or players felt that there were missing identities. Over half (54%, *n* = 44) of the players noted that there were no identities they could think of that were left out and that they were content with the game. About one-fifth of players (20%, *n* = 16) mentioned that there should more identities or traits available. This response was broken down into three sub-themes. A little over one-tenth of players (12%, *n* = 10) wished there were opportunities to gender bend or be transsexual. In fact, two players even accessed mods that allow the player to do this. A 23-year-old, female-to-male-trans-identified player noted that the Sims could not be completely gender neutral nor were the Sims able to transition, which would be a great addition to the game.

The second and third sub-themes for the sixth question were that a few players felt that the game did not properly represent people with disabilities or individuals with terminal illness. Both sub-themes had about 4% ($n = 3$) of participants note this. A 31-year-old, female-identified heterosexual woman commented:

> They have no disabled Sims. I did my most intense Sims playing after my 12-year-old died of brain cancer. I was sort of upset that this possibility wasn't available, though I don't think I would have done it anyway. Then my Sim family with the boy like my son "died" in a computer crash right before I aged him up to a teenager. The universe is cruel.

**Cross Analysis of Quantitative and Qualitative Data**

According to the qualitative results, the player's logic for picking traits had very little to do with the Sim's gender. Only 22% ($n = 18$) pick traits based on gender. One of the major ways that players determined how to construct their Sims was by looking at how the Sim would fit the narrative they had in mind. This was determined by over half (61%, $n = 50$) of the participants. This leads to the question, what type of stories are players creating? Are they heteronormative? Do these stories include people who defy the gender binary? Based on the data collected, one might assume that these stories do not defy the gender binary. Many players play games that are reflective of the social norms set in society. This includes selecting stereotypical traits for their male and female Sims as well as doing little experimentation beyond a heterosexual, monogamous relationship.

Comparing the qualitative with the quantitative results reinforces the value of mixed-methods studies. In response to the qualitative, open-ended questions, many participants noted

that they created Sims that vary in gender and personality and mix personality traits between the male and female Sims. Interestingly enough, the quantitative portion of this study shows otherwise. Many players were still picking traits that align with the stereotypical gender binary. This might indicate that some respondents might be subconsciously aligning stereotypical traits with the male and female Sims they create.

It is also important to note that although the qualitative data show that there were some players who did not experiment with gender roles (44%, $n = 36$), quite a few players indicated that they did (38%, $n = 31$). Cross-comparing this with the quantitative data suggests that players might be subconsciously choosing stereotypical traits. A large proportion of players (84%, $n = 69$) selected at least one of the stereotypically male or female traits with a 20% or higher response rate (Table 6 and Table 7). In fact, about half (55%, $n = 17$, $N = 31$) of individuals who responded that they did experiment with gender roles chose at least two traits. This suggests a couple of different possibilities. First, players were subconsciously choosing stereotypical roles for their male and female Sims. Another possibility is that players might have chosen stereotypical roles for their *most played Sim* but experimented with gender roles on other Sims. The discrepancy between the qualitative and quantitative data illustrates the importance of having mixed-methods because it shows the relationship between the players' selection of personality and aesthetic traits and their logic behind picking such traits. This will be explored in detail in Chapter 5.

Another noteworthy observation is that players who responded to the qualitative portion seemed to believe that the personality traits in the game design were not gendered. This was about one-fifth (18%, $n = 15$) of the participants. Of these players, (40%, $n = 6$, $N = 15$) chose at least two or more traits with a higher than 20% response rate for their female Sims and (30%, $n =$

5, N = 15) for their male Sims. Contradictorily, there were several other players who indicated that there were very specific traits that they give only their male Sims and females Sims (22%, *n* = 18). This illustrates that attributing traits based on gender may be perceived as androgynous but is still working under a binary context. For some of the individuals who felt there were no gendered traits in *The Sims 3*, 33% (*n* = 6, N = 18) chose the top stereotypical traits to defined their Sims. Again this supports the conclusion that players might be subconsciously picking stereotypical traits to define their most played Sims.

In terms of sexuality, the majority of players (61%, *n* = 50) indicated in the qualitative portion that they have their Sims experiment with different types of sexual orientation or have at least tried to create a couple with a different type of sexual orientation once. This was primarily prevalent for the participants who identified as heterosexual. This might be due to the fact that homosexuality is becoming more normalized within society. Players might feel more comfortable to include these types of characters in their stories or gaming process. It is important also to note many of these players did indicate that their homosexual Sims did not represent themselves or their main character but rather they wanted to include them in their gameplay.

In addition to sexual orientation, over half (55%, *n* = 45) of the players experimented with other types of sexual relations. This ranged from adulterous relationships to having their Sims have relationships with vampires, mummies, ghosts, and even the Grim Reaper. Most of these players indicated that they did this type of gameplay because they were bored, not because they were adulterous or sexually attracted to vampires, mummies, ghosts, or the Grim Reaper themselves.

Finally, when players were asked what type of identities or traits were left out as an option of the game, about half of the players (54%, *n* = 44*)* felt that there were none. This is

probably because the game does offer a lot of options or that the players found that the game

aligns with their identity. It is imperative to note that some players ($n = 3$) did find it problematic

that there were not characters with disabilities. Unfortunately, Electronic Arts has not made any

comments regarding whether or not they plan to add this to the game.

<center>**Chapter 5: Summary and Conclusions**</center>

This chapter discusses each research question in detail. Conclusions and recommendations will follow.

**Findings of the Study**

The first research question of this study asks *How do The Sims 3 players select personality and aesthetic traits when constructing their Sims characters?* The findings of this study show that although players indicated that they mix personality traits between male and female Sims, players tend to stick with specific traits when deliberately constructing their male and female Sims. In addition to this, these traits reflect the stereotypical gender norms in Western society. This might be because many players had the goal to create families and have relationships. Therefore, players were picking stereotypically female traits (e.g. *Family Oriented & Natural Cook)* for their female Sims because it would aid in Sim family maintenance. This displays that players expect their Sims to follow traditional gender roles. Female Sims were expected to have characteristics that encourage relationships and family maintenance. Conversely, male Sims did not receive relationship-oriented traits such as *Hopeless Romantic* or *Flirty.* Instead, these traits (e.g. *Brave, Athletic,* and *Good Sense of Humor*) were traits that might be perceived as stereotypically attractive traits.

One might question whether the main demographic group of players (heterosexual females) were creating male Sims that they themselves are attracted to. In society we are bombarded by figures of "perfect" men and women. Usually these individuals reflect a binary with the women having feminine traits and the men having masculine traits. Interestingly enough, *The Sims* series has been characterized as "female-friendly" in that more women play *The Sims 3* than men. Additionally, players can *choose* to objectify their females Sims rather

<center>58</center>

than the game design deciding for them. Disappointingly, the players' trait attributions rejected the feminist value of deconstructing the gender binary. Maybe this is due to the fact that this is the only type of video game offered in the United States. As previously mentioned, there has been a long line of video games that encourage the gender binary. As a result, players might not know how to deconstruct gender beyond the scripts these games have offered. In order to determine this, one would need to evaluate whether or not these players play other types of games.

The second research question asks *Are the traits that they select different for male and female Sims? Is there any overlap?* The results show that players picked traits that were more stereotypically gendered than not. Although there was a wide range of available personality and aesthetic traits, players tend to pick traits that did not overlap between the two game-designated genders. The majority of *The Sims 3* players (73-76%) were consistently selecting personality and aesthetic traits that reflect of the gender binary. This is demonstrated in the selection of traits in the quantitative portion of the study. Incongruously, approximately half of the players (60%, $n = 49$) indicated that they create all different types of Sims that vary in personality and gender. Likewise, about one-third of the *The Sims 3* players (37.8%, $n = 31$) indicated that they do indeed try to mix traits and experiment with gender. The statistical discrepancy between players picking binary traits and players acknowledging that they pick various, non-gender binary traits may indicate two things: 1) players are giving their *most played Sim* binary traits, but are mixing traits with other Sims they play with or 2) players are subconsciously picking binary traits.

Interestingly, players gave binary traits to their most played male and female Sims. The majority of players indicated that this most played Sim did not represent themselves but a character in a story or narrative (78%, $n = 64$). One might assume that a large proportion of these

stories and narratives follow a script that has binary gender roles. Reasons for this are unclear. Maybe players enjoy playing games and writing "virtual" narrative that involve distinct gender roles. This could be determined in a follow-up interview. In addition to this, players are able to upload their stories onto the *The Sims 3* forums. It would be interesting to do content analysis of the major themes these players are creating and relate them to whether or not players are deconstructing the gender binary through their uploaded narratives.

Another possibility is that players did not realize that they were assigning feminine traits to their female Sims and masculine traits to their male Sims. The design of *The Sims 3* allows players to have the ability to create characters who defy a gender binary, yet players continued to follow strict gendered scripts. Judith Butler (2004) uses Foucaudian ideology to discuss how gender is disciplined into our life. Butler writes, "When Foucault claims that discipline 'produces' individuals, he means that not only that disciplinary discourse *manages* and *makes use of them* but that it also *actively constitutes them*" (p. 50). In this case, "discipline" refers to the notion that gender is constantly policed by one another. When one defies the gender binary, it is not uncommon for these individuals to be "disciplined" back into place directly or indirectly, such as the example of the harassment and silence of trans-identified individuals. Butler takes this one step farther in stating that through repetition, one's gender eventually constitutes the person. In terms of *The Sims 3*, players have been socialized and disciplined since birth to be either male or female. This binary categorization has regulated these individuals and, as a result, characterized the individual's personality and identity. As these data illustrated, it is difficult to step away from an engrained social norm such as gender, even if players feel as though they have.

Last, the third question asks *Do most players see their most frequently-constructed Sims as a reflection of themselves in terms of gender identity, gender roles, personality traits, sexual orientation, and sexual relations? If so, how?* The results showed that a small portion of players did construct Sims as a reflection of themselves in terms of gender identity, gender roles, and personality traits. Only 10% (*n* = 9) specifically created their ideal "Simself." Instead, most players (54%, *n* = 49) created Sims that vary in gender and personality. This may be due to the fact that many (25%, *n* = 23) created Sims that are based on narratives or people they know. Although many players said in the qualitative results that they were not creating characters similar to themselves in terms of gender, the quantitative data suggest that they were still creating male and female Sims that reflect their current social norms and their personal perceptions of stereotypical gender roles. This supports Judith Butler's theory that one cannot ignore gender norms. Despite the fact that players stated in the qualitative portion that they do not create characters that reflect themselves, further investigation would be needed to determine whether players are selecting the same personality and aesthetic traits that define themselves. This could be done by using a scale to measure how individuals define themselves as *Brave, Artistic, Athletic,* and so on. Then researchers can cross-compare these traits with the traits given to the Sim character.

Even though players indicated in the qualitative results that they experiment with gender roles, over half of the players (62%, *n* = 51) noted that their gameplay reflects their sexual orientation, and a third of players (39%, *n* = 32) said their gameplay reflects how they conduct sexual relations in real life. Despite gameplay being single-player, these individuals might not feel comfortable playing with other sexual orientations and experiences. Further research would need to be done to investigate why these players do not let their Sims experiment with other

types of relationships. Alternatively, about a third of players (34%, $n = 28$) did experiment with various types of relationships. It would be interesting to see how these players experiment with other types of relationships and how this affects their opinions on taboo relationships. A follow-up interview would also be helpful in this circumstance.

Overall findings of the study indicate players might not have been creating Sims that reflect themselves, but have created stories with Sims that have personality and aesthetic traits that are reflective of social norms. Respondents stated that they attribute different traits to male or female Sims, signifying that they had intentions to deconstruct social norms. Instead, players are creating Sims that reflect a stereotypical gender binary, which Judith Butler describes as the gender norm (Butler, 2004). Butler describes a social norm as "a measurement and a means of producing a common standard, to become an instance of the norm is not fully to exhaust the norm, but, rather, to become subjected to an abstraction of commonality." Players are not fully "exhausting" the gender norm. They, themselves, are not necessarily reflective of the gender binary. This was illustrated by the fact that some players noted that they tried to mix traits between male and female Sims. Many assume that the gender binary is innate. The fact that these players acknowledged that they were mixing gender traits between the male and female Sims illustrates that players might not necessarily agree with the gender binary. Although this would need further investigation to prove, it is safe to assume that these players *intended* to mix personality traits between their male and female Sims despite gender norms. Notwithstanding their intent, the players attributed stereotypical traits to their male and female Sims.

In our society, gender is perceived as binary. From birth, men and women are expected to look and behave in a regulated fashion. When individuals defy these expectations, they are usually disciplined by social repercussions, whether that be ostracization, hate crimes, or, in

some cases, murder. This perpetuates a social norm that instills a gender binary. In this study, players selected traits that reflect these stereotypical gender norms. This parallels with the current social norms of gender today. The traits *Artistic, Athletic, Brave, Family Oriented, Flirty, Friendly, Genius, Hopeless Romantic, Love The Outdoors,* and *Natural Cook* are all considered to be stereotypical male or female traits.

The player-selected personality traits also reflect the overall *idealized* social norms. Results indicated that the male and female-identified players selected stereotypical traits for the Sim of the *opposite* gender. This might be due to the fact that players idealized these traits in their "perfect" mate. Butler mentions that the norm tends to be idealistic. In United States culture there tends to be an idealization of the nuclear family, which has been reiterated throughout history via popular culture. It is no surprise that players were creating Sims who were representative of the nuclear family.

Placing this study into the big picture of gender non-conforming technologies, one might find *The Sims 3* players do not use this technology to deconstruct a gender binary. The purpose of this study was to see if players utilized this technology to the maximum capacity, and results showed that the majority of players do not. This does not suggest that all players do this. There was a group of people (*24% n* = 22) who did pick traits at random and enjoyed deconstructing the gender binary. To reflect back on how this relates to Donna Haraway's notion of the cyborg, in order for this video game to deconstruct the gender binary, players must first be able to do this themselves. The player's choice and free will was a major factor in how one deconstructs gender. The game in and of itself cannot deconstruct gender without its players guiding it to do so. Therefore, *The Sims 3* is solely a tool that has the *potential* to deconstruct gender.

Adapting Figure 1 based on the actions of Sims players, it appears that this group of *The Sims 3* players are following a path that is more likely maintaining a gender binary than rejecting one (Figure 3). This is probably primarily due to the current social norms in American society. As previously stated in the Literature Review, individuals who defy a gender binary are persecuted and labeled as abnormal. Although there are some communities that accept individuals who defy the gender binary, the current state of this country tends to discriminate against them (Fausto-Sterling, 2000). The expectations for individuals to follow a strict gender script is so intense that players still attributed binary traits to their Sims even though they were offered the opportunity to mix male and female traits.
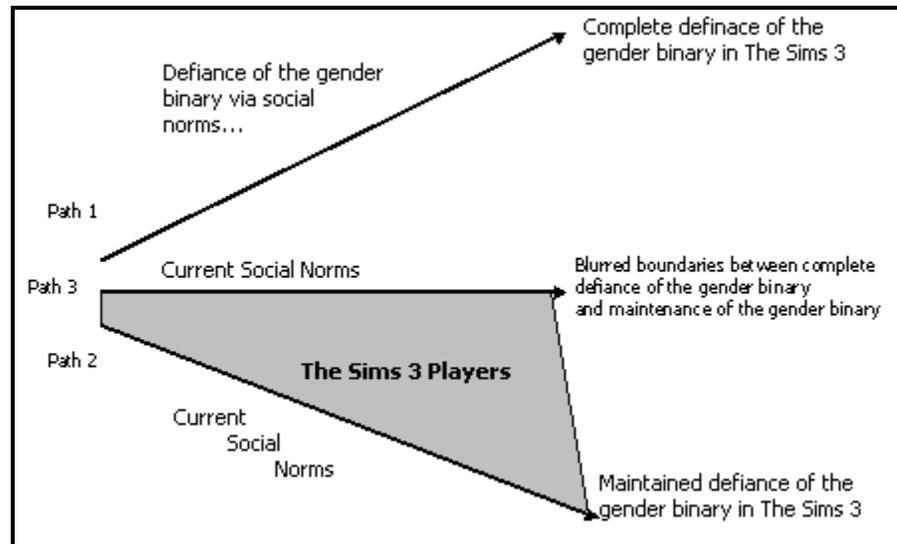


*Note: Figure created by author*

*Figure 3.* Path *The Sims 3* players followed in terms of gender binary deconstruction

**Conclusions and Recommendations**

There are many major conclusions that can be made based on the data from this study. First, although players were able to pick an array of personality and aesthetic traits, most players

gave their male and female Sims stereotypically male and female traits. This could be because players are creating narratives that have stereotypical characters. Ironically, players were stating in the open-ended questions that they did not see the traits as gendered, nor did they find that they were attributing stereotypical traits to their male or female Sims. This could be due to two different things. First, players might not realize that they are attributing stereotypical traits to male or female Sims. Due to social norms, attributing stereotypical gender traits to their Sims might be second nature to them. Second, the disparity between the quantitative data and the qualitative data demonstrates the need to used mixed methods when analyzing human behavior. If only one type of method was used, the data would have been misinterpreted.

Another major finding to this study was that female-identified players and non-gender binary individuals were more likely to pick stereotypical personality traits for the male Sims, and the male-identified players were more likely to pick stereotypical traits for the female Sims. However, this was only for the personality traits. The attribution of stereotypical aesthetic traits to the male and female Sims was evenly distributed between all gender groups. Because many players were heterosexual, one might hypothesize that players were picking traits that reflected an "ideal" male or female Sim. According to the qualitative results, not very many players created Sims to reflect themselves; therefore, they may be reflecting the social gender norms of society to create a story.

Finally, another major element in this study was that many players did not have their Sims experiment with other types of relationships. With the exception of a few players, most players kept their relationships very heteronormative. What this means is that most players had heterosexual, monogamous couples. This could be because the only way for the Sims to genetically reproduce is to have a male and female Sim copulate. This limitation to the game

65

resulted in some players to seek out mods to change this element to the game. Although there were limitations, many players still did not experiment with different types of sexual relations beyond monogamy, even when the opportunity arose.

In conclusion, gender theorists such a Donna Haraway and Eve Shapiro have argued that gender non-conforming technologies have the possibility to deconstruct gender. The goal of this study was to apply this theory to practice with a technology that has the capability to permit players to deconstruct the gender binary, *The Sims 3*. The findings of this study conclude that although the design of *The Sims 3* has the potential to deconstruct the gender binary, it is the choices the players make during gameplay that enable deconstruction of the gender binary. Results of this study suggest that there was a subconscious norm that encouraged a gender binary within this population of people. Despite the limitations afforded by the game (e.g., the lack of ability to select beyond a male and female character, lack of ability to non-heterosexual Sim couples to genetically reproduce, and the absence of characters with disabilities), players had the free will to create Sims of their own choosing.

In terms of gender, this study was relatively representative of the players who play *The Sims* series. Electronic Arts (2010) indicated that about 60% of its players were female and 40% were male. This study had 68% of its participants identify as female and 20% identify as male. Therefore, it would be beneficial to this study to survey more male participants next time. Most importantly, no data have been released by Electronic Arts regarding players who do not identify as male or female. It would be interesting to get more information on how this demographic plays the Sims compared to male and female individuals.

One recommendation for further research would be to look at several different populations. It would be beneficial to feminist epistemology to look specifically at individuals

who identified as a non-binary gender and their gameplay. This would give us better insight to how this specific demographic operate gender non-conforming technologies, particularly video games. In addition to this, analyzing a non-White population is beneficial as well. Unfortunately, there are no data on the race, ethnicity, age, education level, and class level of *The Sims 3* players. It would be important to look at this information first because it is inconclusive whether or not this study reflects the demographics of the *The Sims 3* community. Additionally, the game design also offers an array of options for race and it would be vital to this research to intersect race with gender to analyze how these populations play life simulation games. Last, it is recommended that research be done on younger populations. Due to the fact that a large percentage of gamers include people under 18 years of age, this study does not fully capture the entire picture.

Finally, the open-ended questions helped to answer the research questions for this study, but many new questions arose. For example, what type of stories are players creating? Do players deconstruct the gender binary in the plots of their stories? These questions could easily be answered in follow-up interviews. In addition to this, players are able to upload their stories to the *The Sims 3* community forum. A cross-analysis between the published story and the interview would definitely answer these questions. These are research questions I intend to investigate later in my academic career.

The research results in this study are intended to be used as a starting point for other feminist scholars to look at the linkage between video gaming and gender identity. Considering the lack of current information on the effects of video gaming and gender identity, further research is vital to understanding the benefits and pitfalls of non-conforming technologies. In addition to this, feminist researchers need to take into consideration how social norms affect the

design and usage of technology. Video game technology can be empowering or limiting, based on the features of game design and the actions of players. In conclusion, when investigating non-conforming technologies, one cannot overlook the social norms that affect the design and use of that technology.

References

American Psychiatric Association. (2000). *Diagnostic and statistical manual of mental disorders* (Revised 4th ed.). Washington, DC: Author.

Banerjee, S., & Hodge, A. (2007). Internet Usage: Within a race analysis. *Race, Gender & Class*, 14(3/4), 228-246.

Beasley, B., & Standley, T. (2002). Shirts vs. skins: clothing as an indicator of gender role stereotyping in video games. *Mass Communication & Society*, *5*(3).

Bem, S. (1974). The measurement of psychological androgyny. *Journal of Consuling and Clinical Psychology*, *42*(2).

Benedict, R. (2006). *Patterns of culture*. Boston, MA: Mariner Books.

Bornstein, K. (1994). *Gender outlaw: on men, women, and the rest of us*. New York, NY: Vintage.

Bornstein, K. (1998). *My gender workbook: how to become a real man, a real woman, the real you, or something else entirely.* New York, NY: Routledge.

Bryant, J., & Davies, J. (2006). Selective Exposure to Video Games (pp. 213-224). In P. Vorderer & J. Bryant's [Ed] *Playing Computer Games: Motives, Responses and Consequences,* New York, NY: Routledge

Butler, J. (1990). *Gender trouble: feminism and the subversion of identity*. New York, NY: Routledge.

Butler, J. (2004). *Undoing gender*. New York, NY: Routledge.

Cassell, J., and Jenkins, H. (2000). *From Barbie to Mortal Kombat: Gender and Computer Games*. Cambridge, MA: MIT Press

Chan, E. Y. (2003). Females' video gameplaying motivation and performance: examining gender stereotypes and competence goals. *Dissertation Abstracts International*: *Section B: The Sciences and Engineering*, 69(9-B), 5828. (UMI No. Unknown) Retrieved August 1, 2010, from PsycINFO Database Record.

Curlew, A. B. (2005). Liberal Sims?: simulated difference and the commodity of social diversity. Symposium conducted at the DiGRA 2005 Conference: *Changing Views – Worlds in Play*, Vancouver, British Columbia, Canada.

Daniels, J. (2009). Rethinking cyberfeminism(s): race, gender, and embodiment. *Women's Studies Quarterly*, *37*(1), 101-124.

Deaux, K., & Kite, M. E. (1987). Thinking about gender. In B. Hess & M. M. Feree (Eds.). *Analyzing gender: A handbook of social science research* (pp. 92-117). Newbury Park, CA: Sage

Dietz, T. (1998). An examination of violence and gender role portrayals in video games: implications for gender socialization and aggressive behavior. *Sex Roles*, *38*(5-6).

Dill, K. E., & Thill, K. P. (2007). Video game characters and the socialization of gender roles: Young people's perceptions mirror sexist media depictions. *Sex Roles*, 57, 851–864.

Dvorsky, G., & Hughes, J. (2008). *Postgenderism: beyond the gender binary* [White paper]. Retrieved from http://ieet.org/archive/IEET-03-PostGender.pdf

Electronic Arts. (2010, February 4). *EA's groundbreaking franchise The Sims turns ten: world's most popular virtual neighborhood celebrates a decade of simulation, innovation and reinvention* [Press Release]. Retrieved from http://news.ea.com/.

Entertainment Software Association. (2011). *Essential facts about the computer and video game industry*. Retrieved from http://www.theesa.com

Epstein, T., & Stewart A. (1991). Quantitative and Qualitative Methods in the Social Sciences: Current Feminist Issues and Practical Strategies. In M. Fonow & J. Cook's [Ed] *Beyond Methodology: Feminist Scholarship as Lived Research* (pp 85-106) Bloomington, IN: Indiana Univ. Press.

Faulkner, W. (2001). The technology question in feminism: a view from feminist technology studies. *Women's Studies International Forum.* 24(1). 79-95

Fausto-Sterling, A. (2000). *Sexing the body: gender politics and the construction of sexuality*. New York, NY: Basic Books.

Feinberg, L. (1996). *Transgender warriors: making history from joan of arc to dennis rodman*. Boston, MA: Beacon Press.

Foucault, M. (1978). *The history of sexuality, Vol. 1, an introduction.* New York, NY: Pantheon.

Fox, J., & Bailenson, J. (2009). Virtual virgins and vamps: the effects of exposure to female characters' sexualized appearance and gaze in an immersive virtual environment. *Sex Roles*, 61, 147-157.

Gailey, C. W. (1993). Mediated messages: Gender, class, and cosmos in home video games. *Journal of Popular Culture*, 27, 81–97.

Halberstam, J. (1991). Automating Gender: Postmodern Feminism in the Age of the Intelligent

Machine. Feminist Studies, 17(3), 439

Haraway, D. (1990). *Simians, cyborgs, and women: the reinvention of nature* . New York, NY:

Routledge.

Haraway, D. (2003). *The haraway reader*. New York, NY: Routledge.

Hill, D. (2005). Coming to terms: using technology to know identity. *Sexuality and Culture,* 9,

24-52

Ivory, J. (2006). Still a man's game: gender representation in online reviews of video games.

*Mass Communication and Society,* 9, 103-114.

Jansz, J., Avis, C., & Vosmeer, M. (2010). Playing The Sims 2: an exploration of gender

differences in players' motivations and patterns of play. *New Media & Society*, *12*(2).

Jenson, J., de Castell, S., & Fisher, S. (2007). *Girls playing games: rethinking stereotypes*

Symposium conducted at the FuturePlay 2007 Conference, Toronto, Canada.

Jenson, J., & de Castell, S. (2010). Gender, simulation, and gaming: research review and

redirections. *Simulation & Gaming*, *41*(1), 51-71.

Kessler, S. J., & McKenna, W. (1978). *Gender: an ethnomethodological approach*. Chicago, IL:

The University of Chicago Press.

LeVay, S. (1997). *Queer science: the use and abuse of research into homosexuality*. Cambridge,

MA: The MIT Press.

Lucas, K. & Sherry, J. (2004). Sex differences in video gameplay: a communication-based

explanation. *Communication Research,* 31(5), 499-523

McKenna, K. & Bargh, J.A. (2000). Plan 9 from Cyberspace: the implications of the internet for personality and social psychology. *Personality and Social Psychology Review,* 4(1): 57-75

McKenna, K., Green, A., & Smith, P. (2001). Demarginalizing the sexual self. *The Journal of Sex Research*, 38, 302-311

Mead, M. (1971). *Coming of age in samoa: a psychological study of primitive youth for western civilization*. New York, NY: Harper Perennial.

Naples, N. (2003). *Feminism and method: ethnography, discourse analysis, and activist research*. New York, NY: Routledge.

NPD Group Inc. (2009, May 20). *More Americans play videogames than go out to the movies.* Accessed at http://www.npd.com/press/releases/press_090520.html.

O'Brien, J. (1997). Changing the Subject. *Women and Performance: A Journal of Feminist Theory*, 9(1)

Park, P. & Manzon-Santos, J. (2010). "Issues of Transgendered Asian Americans and Pacific Islanders." http://www.apiwellness.org/article_tg_issues.html. Retrieved 2011-06-05.

Przybylski, A., Ryan, R., & Rigby, C. (2010). A motivational model of video game engagement. *Review of General Psychology*, *14*(2).

Renzetti, C., and Curran, D.J. (2003) *Women, Men, and Society*. Fifth Edition. Boston, MA: Pearson Education, Inc,

Rupp, L., & Taylor, V. (2003). *Drag queens at the 801 cabaret*. Chicago, IL: University Of Chicago Press

Schleiner, A. M. (2001). Does Lara Croft wear fake polygons? gender and gender-role

    subversion in computer adventure games. *Leonardo*, *34*(3).

Shapiro, E. (2010). *Gender circuits: bodies and identities in a technological age*. New York,

    NY: Taylor & Francis.

Shaw, A. (2009). Games putting the gay in games : cultural production and glbt content in video

    games. *Games and Culture*, *4*(3).

Smith, S. L., Lachlan, K. & Tamborini, R. (2003). Popular video games: quantifying the

    presentation of violence and its context. *Journal of Broadcasting & Electronic Media,* 47,

    58-76.

Spence, J. T., & Buckner, C.E. (2000). Instrumental and expressive traits, trait stereotypes, and

    sexist attitudes. *Psychology of Women Quarterly*, *24*(1).

Wajcman, J. (2006). Technocapitalism meets technofeminism: women and technology in a

    wireless world *Labour & Industry,* 16 (3), 7-21.

Wilchins, R. (2004). *Queer theory, gender theory*. Los Angeles, CA: Alyson Publications.

Wright, K. B. (2006), Researching internet-based populations: advantages and disadvantages of

    online survey research, online questionnaire authoring software packages, and web survey

    services. *Journal of Computer-Mediated Communication*, *10*(3).

Yao, M., Mahood, C., & Linz, D. (2010). Sexual priming, gender stereotyping, and likelihood to

    sexually harass: examining the cognitive effects of playing a sexually-explicit video

    game. *Sex Roles*, *62*

Appendix A

## *The Sims 3* **Player Competency Measure**

**1. Please estimate the TOTAL NUMBER of hours you have played *The Sims 3* in your lifetime.**
- Less than 25 hours
- 26-50 hours
- 51-75 hours
- 76-100 hours
- Over 100 hours

*Please use the following scale for the following questions:*

1= Never
2= 1-3 time/times
3= 4-6 times
4= 7-10 times
5= Over 10 times

**Over your lifetime of playing *The Sims 3* how often have you…**

| | 1<br>Never | 2<br>1-3<br>time/times | 3<br>4-6<br>times | 4<br>7-10<br>times | 5<br>Over 10<br>times |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| 2. …used a pre-made Sim? | | | | | |
| 3. …used the *Create a Sim* tool? | | | | | |
| 4. …used the *Body Modifiers* tool when creating a Sim? | | | | | |
| 5. …used the *Hair* tool when creating a Sim? | | | | | |
| 6. …used the *Make Up* tool when creating a Sim? | | | | | |
| 7. …used the *Clothes* tool when creating a Sim? | | | | | |
| 8. …used the *Personality* tool when creating a Sim? | | | | | |
| 9. …used the *Voice* tool when creating a Sim? | | | | | |
| 10. ...made your Sim use social interactions with other Sims in your Sim's household? | | | | | |
| 11. …made your Sim use social interactions with other Sim's in the town/community? | | | | | |
| 12. …switched/created a new Sim family? | | | | | |

Appendix B

**Male and Female Sim Trait Measure**

*In the following questions, please answer regarding the Create-A-Sim feature while creating your male and female Sims.*

**13. When I "Create-a-Sim" I generally pick their personality traits:**
-Randomly
-Deliberately
-I use only pre-made Sims

**14. If you answered "DELIBERATELY", which 5 of the personality traits below do you typically use to construct your MALE Sims? Check ONLY five. If you answered "randomly" or "I use only pre-made Sims", please skip this question.**

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| ☐ Absent-Minded | ☐ Friendly | ☐ Lucky |
| ☐ Ambitious | ☐ Frugal | ☐ Mean-Spirited |
| ☐ An Angler | ☐ Genius | ☐ Mooch |
| ☐ Artistic | ☐ Good | ☐ Natural Cook |
| ☐ Athletic | ☐ Good Sense of | ☐ Neat |
| ☐ Bookworm | Humor | ☐ Neurotic |
| ☐ Brave | ☐ Great Kisser | ☐ Never-Nude |
| ☐ Can't Stand Art | ☐ Green Thumb | ☐ No Sense of Humor |
| ☐ Charismatic | ☐ Grumpy | ☐ Over-Emotional |
| ☐ Childish | ☐ Handy | ☐ Party Animal |
| ☐ Clumsy | ☐ Hates the Outdoors | ☐ Perfectionist |
| ☐ Commitment Issues | ☐ Heavy Sleeper | ☐ Schmoozer |
| ☐ Computer Wiz | ☐ Hopeless Romantic | ☐ Slob |
| ☐ Couch Potato | ☐ Hot-Headed | ☐ Snob |
| ☐ Coward | ☐ Hydrophobic | ☐ Technophobe |
| ☐ Daredevil | ☐ Inappropriate | ☐ Unflirty |
| ☐ Dislikes Children | ☐ Insane | ☐ Unlucky |
| ☐ Easily Impress | ☐ Kleptomaniac | ☐ Vegetarian |
| ☐ Evil | ☐ Light Sleeper | ☐ Virtuoso |
| ☐ Excitable | ☐ Loner | ☐ Workaholic |
| ☐ Family Oriented | ☐ Loser | |
| ☐ Flirty | ☐ Love the Outdoors | |

**15. If you answered "DELIBERATELY", which characteristics below do you typically use to construct the appearance of your MALE Sims? Check all that apply. If you answered "randomly" or "I use only pre-made Sims", please skip this question.**

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| ☐ Muscles | ☐ Long Hair | ☐ A High Voice |
| ☐ No Muscles | ☐ Wears Make Up | ☐ A Low Voice |
| ☐ Short Hair | ☐ Wears No Make Up | ☐ Wears a dress |

**16. If you answered "DELIBERATELY", which 5 of the personality traits below do you typically use to construct your FEMALE Sims? Check ONLY five. If you answered "randomly" or "I use only pre-made Sims", please skip this question.**

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| ☐ Absent-Minded | ☐ Friendly | ☐ Lucky |
| ☐ Ambitious | ☐ Frugal | ☐ Mean-Spirited |
| ☐ An Angler | ☐ Genius | ☐ Mooch |
| ☐ Artistic | ☐ Good | ☐ Natural Cook |
| ☐ Athletic | ☐ Good Sense of | ☐ Neat |
| ☐ Bookworm | Humor | ☐ Neurotic |
| ☐ Brave | ☐ Great Kisser | ☐ Never-Nude |
| ☐ Can't Stand Art | ☐ Green Thumb | ☐ No Sense of Humor |
| ☐ Charismatic | ☐ Grumpy | ☐ Over-Emotional |
| ☐ Childish | ☐ Handy | ☐ Party Animal |
| ☐ Clumsy | ☐ Hates the Outdoors | ☐ Perfectionist |
| ☐ Commitment Issues | ☐ Heavy Sleeper | ☐ Schmoozer |
| ☐ Computer Wiz | ☐ Hopeless Romantic | ☐ Slob |
| ☐ Couch Potato | ☐ Hot-Headed | ☐ Snob |
| ☐ Coward | ☐ Hydrophobic | ☐ Technophobe |
| ☐ Daredevil | ☐ Inappropriate | ☐ Unflirty |
| ☐ Dislikes Children | ☐ Insane | ☐ Unlucky |
| ☐ Easily Impress | ☐ Kleptomaniac | ☐ Vegetarian |
| ☐ Evil | ☐ Light Sleeper | ☐ Virtuoso |
| ☐ Excitable | ☐ Loner | ☐ Workaholic |
| ☐ Family Oriented | ☐ Loser | |
| ☐ Flirty | ☐ Love the Outdoors | |

**17. If you answered "DELIBERATELY" which characteristics below do you typically use to construct the appearance of your FEMALE Sims? Check all that apply. If you answered "randomly" or "I use only pre-made Sims", please skip this question.**

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| ☐ Muscles | ☐ Long Hair | ☐ A High Voice |
| ☐ No Muscles | ☐ Wears Make Up | ☐ A Low Voice |
| ☐ Short Hair | ☐ Wears No Make Up | ☐ Wears a dress |

**18. If you answered "RANDOMLY", which of the personality traits below have you picked to construct your last 3 MALE Sims? If you answered "deliberately" or "I use only pre-made Sims", please skip this question.**

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| ☐ Absent-Minded | ☐ Friendly | ☐ Lucky |
| ☐ Ambitious | ☐ Frugal | ☐ Mean-Spirited |
| ☐ An Angler | ☐ Genius | ☐ Mooch |
| ☐ Artistic | ☐ Good | ☐ Natural Cook |
| ☐ Athletic | ☐ Good Sense of | ☐ Neat |
| ☐ Bookworm | Humor | ☐ Neurotic |
| ☐ Brave | ☐ Great Kisser | ☐ Never-Nude |
| ☐ Can't Stand Art | ☐ Green Thumb | ☐ No Sense of Humor |
| ☐ Charismatic | ☐ Grumpy | ☐ Over-Emotional |
| ☐ Childish | ☐ Handy | ☐ Party Animal |
| ☐ Clumsy | ☐ Hates the Outdoors | ☐ Perfectionist |
| ☐ Commitment Issues | ☐ Heavy Sleeper | ☐ Schmoozer |
| ☐ Computer Wiz | ☐ Hopeless Romantic | ☐ Slob |
| ☐ Couch Potato | ☐ Hot-Headed | ☐ Snob |
| ☐ Coward | ☐ Hydrophobic | ☐ Technophobe |
| ☐ Daredevil | ☐ Inappropriate | ☐ Unflirty |
| ☐ Dislikes Children | ☐ Insane | ☐ Unlucky |
| ☐ Easily Impress | ☐ Kleptomaniac | ☐ Vegetarian |
| ☐ Evil | ☐ Light Sleeper | ☐ Virtuoso |
| ☐ Excitable | ☐ Loner | ☐ Workaholic |
| ☐ Family Oriented | ☐ Loser | |
| ☐ Flirty | ☐ Love the Outdoors | |

**19. If you answered "RANDOMLY", which characteristics below have you picked construct the appearance of your MALE Sims? Check all that apply. If you answered "deliberately" or "I use only pre-made Sims", please skip this question.**

☐ Muscles            ☐ Long Hair            ☐ A High Voice
☐ No Muscles         ☐ Wears Make Up        ☐ A Low Voice
☐ Short Hair         ☐ Wears No Make Up     ☐ Wears a dress

**20. If you answered "RANDOMLY", which of the personality traits below have you picked to construct your last 3 FEMALE Sims? If you answered "deliberately" or "I use only pre-made Sims", please skip this question.**

☐ Absent-Minded          ☐ Good Sense of          ☐ Over-Emotional
☐ Ambitious                 Humor                  ☐ Party Animal
☐ An Angler              ☐ Great Kisser           ☐ Perfectionist
☐ Artistic               ☐ Green Thumb            ☐ Schmoozer
☐ Athletic               ☐ Grumpy                 ☐ Slob
☐ Bookworm               ☐ Handy                  ☐ Snob
☐ Brave                  ☐ Hates the Outdoors     ☐ Technophobe
☐ Can't Stand Art        ☐ Heavy Sleeper          ☐ Unflirty
☐ Charismatic            ☐ Hopeless Romantic      ☐ Unlucky
☐ Childish               ☐ Hot-Headed             ☐ Vegetarian
☐ Clumsy                 ☐ Hydrophobic            ☐ Virtuoso
☐ Commitment Issues      ☐ Inappropriate          ☐ Workaholic
☐ Computer Wiz           ☐ Insane
☐ Couch Potato           ☐ Kleptomaniac
☐ Coward                 ☐ Light Sleeper
☐ Daredevil              ☐ Loner
☐ Dislikes Children      ☐ Loser
☐ Easily Impress         ☐ Love the Outdoors
☐ Evil                   ☐ Lucky
☐ Excitable              ☐ Mean-Spirited
☐ Family Oriented        ☐ Mooch
☐ Flirty                 ☐ Natural Cook
☐ Friendly               ☐ Neat
☐ Frugal                 ☐ Neurotic
☐ Genius                 ☐ Never-Nude
☐ Good                   ☐ No Sense of Humor

**21. If you answered "RANDOMLY", which characteristics below have you picked construct the appearance of your FEMALE Sims? Check all that apply. If you answered "deliberately" or "I use only pre-made Sims", please skip this question**

- ☐ Muscles
- ☐ No Muscles
- ☐ Short Hair
- ☐ Long Hair
- ☐ Wears Make Up
- ☐ Wears No Make Up
- ☐ A High Voice
- ☐ A Low Voice
- ☐ Wears a dress

**22. Please mark the following ways you pick personality and appearance traits when creating a Sim. Check all that apply.**

-I pick traits that are more efficient than others

-I pick traits for the comic relief

-I pick traits with the intention to create a story

-I pick traits_____ (fill in the blank if needed)

-I pick traits based on gender

Appendix C

**Player Self Analysis of Attributing Traits to Gendered Sims**

**23.** Describe how you design your Sim. Do you find yourself creating Sims that are similar to yourself in terms of gender identity and personality traits? Do you create all different types of Sims that vary in gender and personality? If you have only used premade Sims, please write "N /A."

**24.** Do you find yourself mixing up personality traits for your male and female Sims, or is there a set of specific traits that you give to the male Sims and the female Sims? Please describe:

**25.** Do you find your gameplay to be experimental in terms of gender roles? Do you find yourself giving male Sims feminine traits and female Sims masculine traits for fun?

**26.** Do you find your gameplay to be reflective of your sexual orientation? If so, how?

**27.** Do your Sims explore other  types of sexual relations that you don't usually partake in such as necrophilia (attraction to the dead), monogamy, polygamy, polyamory or other forms of non-monogamy, or If so, how?

**28.** Is there any type of identity that you feel *The Sims 3* leaves out in its game? If you feel that *The Sims 3* has enough options in terms of identity please write "None."

Appendix D

## Player's Personal Demographics

**23. How would you define your gender/sex?** _____

**24. How would you define your race and/or ethnicity? (You may choose more than one**).
- American Indian or Alaska Native
- Asian
- Black or African American
- Hispanic or Latino
- Native Hawaiian or Other Pacific Islander
- White
- Other_____

**25. What is your age?** _____

**26. What is the highest degree or level of school you have completed? If currently enrolled, mark the previous grade or highest degree received.**
- No schooling completed
- Kindergarten to 8th grade
- 9th, 10th or 11th grade
- 12th grade, no diploma
- High school graduate - high school diploma or the equivalent (for example: GED)
- Some college credit, but less than 1 year
- 1 or more years of college, no degree
- Associate degree (for example: AA, AS)
- Bachelor's degree (for example: BA, AB, BS)
- Master's degree (for example: MA, MS, MEng, MEd, MSW, MBA)
- Professional degree (for example: MD, DDS, DVM, LLB, JD)
- Doctorate degree (for example: PhD, EdD)
- Other_____

**27. How do you define your sexual orientation?**
- Straight/Heterosexual
- Gay/Lesbian/Homosexual
- Bisexual
- Asexual
- Queer
- Other_____

**28. Do you currently reside in The United States of America?**
-Yes
-No

**29. Some of your answers may be used as examples, please leave a pseudonym (fake name) that investigators can use to refer to your answer. In case your name is already used, please choose two different names. This name cannot be the name you use in the forum.**
1)_____2)_____