



# **Women's Underperformance in Chess:**

## **The Armenian Female Champions**

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# Men's and Women's World Chess Champions

Magnus Carlsen (Norway)

Age: 28

FIDE rating: 2861 (May 2019)

Peak rating: 2882 (May 2014)

World Ranking: No. 1



Ju Wenjun (China)

Age: 28

FIDE rating: 2590 (May 2019)

Peak rating: 2604 (March 2017)

Ranking No. 283



# INTRODUCTION



- There are 1668 active Grandmasters (the highest title in chess) worldwide, only 29 of whom are females.
- As of May 2019, the highest rated female player, China's Hou Yifan ranks No. 87 in the world. In 2005, however, Hungary's Judit Polgar, who finished her career in 2015, was ranked No. 8 in the world.
- Armenia has 48 Grandmasters and only one of them is female.
- Female players constitute around 10% of all FIDE registered players.
- As of January 2019, there are 4737 registered chess players in Armenia and only 487 of them are females.

# LITERATURE REVIEW



The term stereotype threat “is defined as a situational predicament in which individuals are at risk, by dint of their actions or behaviors, of confirming negative stereotypes about their group” (Steele as quoted by Inzlicht and Schmader, 2011, p.9).

Rothgerber and Wolsiefer (2014) use data from 12 scholastic chess tournaments in the USA to show that the performance of female participants worsened significantly when they faced a male opponent.

Women's performance is consistent with the expectations given to them based on their number (Bilalic, Smallbone, McLeod, and Gobet, 2009). The vast disparity in the number of male and female tournament participants statistically affects the probable gender of the best chess players.

# KEY TERMS AND DEFINITIONS



## FIDE

The World Chess Federation is referred to as FIDE because of its French acronym, Federation Internationale des Echecs. It acts as the governing body of international chess competitions.

## FIDE Rating System

The FIDE Rating system is a numerical system that produces “scientific measurement information of the best statistical quality” to estimate chess players’ strength (FIDE, 2017). Based on their performance in rated tournaments, chess players receive rating points, which indicate their level of play.

## Chess Titles

Titles, like the ratings, are given to players based on their tournament performance. FIDE acknowledges eight titles, among which Grandmaster (GM) is the highest one.

# RESEARCH QUESTIONS



There are three main questions discussed in this project:

- What are the issues that restrain Armenian female chess players from being rated as high as male players?
- Why only few Armenian female players decide to choose a professional career in chess when they grow up?
- How do Armenian female players feel about the stereotypes generally imposed on them and do they stereotype themselves?

# METHODOLOGY



This project used a qualitative methodological approach to attain a profound understanding of the existing problems.

- Interviews: 10 people, four members of the Armenian women's national chess team, their coach, and five champions of the 2018 Armenian Youth Chess Championships under different age categories.
- Statistical analysis: the correlation between female players' performance in a given time period and the amount of practice they did during that period.



# RESEARCH FINDINGS AND ANALYSIS



## Practice

- Armenian female players rarely practice chess on their own and rely mostly on training sessions with their coaches. They “feel lazy” when there is no one to supervise their training and spend much time on other things, such as their appearance.
- The younger players devote little time to chess, because they prioritize their high academic standing.
- Marriage is deemed to signify an end for Armenian female chess players in terms of both their inability to spend time on practicing chess and their husbands’ disapproval of their active career.

# RESEARCH FINDINGS AND ANALYSIS



## Participation rates

- Fewer female players play chess. Only 10% of the registered players in Armenia are females.
- Many female players quit chess when the time of entering university comes.

## Different attitudes toward male and female players

- Chess coaches often express disbelief toward their female students' success.
- Playing like a man means playing well, while playing badly means playing like a woman.

# RESEARCH FINDINGS AND ANALYSIS



## Stereotypes

- Some female players play easier against male opponents at a younger age when they are unaware of male dominance in the field.
- Some consider that men may have an inherent intellectual advantage over women.
- Most female players reject that they are affected by stereotypes.
- All players agreed that if the expectation of them were higher, they would approach the game and their careers more seriously.

# LIMITATIONS AND FUTURE RESEARCH



A limited number of interviewees:

A considerably big number of players were left out from the survey, which can result in the disregard of a range of opinions and suggestions.

Only one interview with a male player:

It would be an attractive avenue for future research to explore the male viewpoints on female issues in the field.

# CONCLUSION



Answering the research questions:

- The main issues that restrain Armenian female chess players from being rated as high as male players are little amount of practice and faith in themselves.
- Only few Armenian female players decide to choose a professional career in chess, because they prioritize their education.
- The Armenian female players have little awareness about the effects that stereotypes can have on them. However, most of them are vulnerable to the stereotypes.

# IMPORTANT REFERENCES



Bilalic, M.; Smallbone, K.; McLeod, P.; and Gobet, F. (2009) "Why are (the best) women so good at chess? Participation rates and gender differences in intellectual domains." *Proceedings of the Royal Society B*. doi: 10.1098/rspb.2008.1576.

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