

# **Women Graduate Students in Computer Science: What they Say about Themselves and The Field**

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## **Abstract**

Women Graduate Students in Computer Science: Their Experiences

I would like to present the preliminary findings of my study of the effect of constructions of gender shape on the choices and expectations of women graduate students in computer science. Women who do graduate work in computer science still operate in an environment where they are in the minority. This study seeks to study how constructions of gender -- including participants' own understanding of what it means to be a woman, as well as the messages they receive from their environment -- shape the choices these women make and their career goals and expectations. The following research questions were used to guide this research:

1. What are women graduate students' career aspirations?
2. How do they feel about their chances to succeed in their chosen career and field?
3. How do women graduate students in computer science construct the idea of gender?
4. What are their constructions of the discipline of computer science?
5. In what ways, if any, do they believe their gender has affected their experience in their graduate programs?

I interviewed women graduate students from four different schools about their experiences and perceptions, looking for common elements among their experiences. Graduate students are, by definition, successful computer scientists with a passionate interest in the field. Knowing more about how they became interested in computing, and what factors played a role in their successes could guide schools in attracting other women to the field and effectively supporting them in their studies.

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