

CREATING A NEW IMAGE FOR WOMEN IN POKER



'THE GRINETTES' ARE ON A MISSION

BY RACHEL KRANZ



Jamie Kerstetter



Jennifer Shahade



Katie Dozier



Katie Stone



t's late on the evening of Day 2 of the World Series of Poker's Ladies' Tournament and Katie Dozier, Jennifer Shahade, and Katie

Stone have gathered in the Amazon Room to rail their friend Jamie Kerstetter, who has made it down to the last three tables. A few weeks earlier, Kerstetter was rushing to the Rio to rail Katie Stone, who was deep in the 6-handed no-limit event, watching her finish 37th out of a very tough field. Earlier that summer, Shahade, Kerstetter, and Stone were gathered in the Palazzo's poker room to sweat Katie Dozier's final table in the Venetian Deep Stacks series, where she eventually finished third. And earlier still, Shahade, Stone, and Dozier were there to cheer for Kerstetter's first-place victory in the Venetian Deep Stacks PLO tournament.

In the Ladies' Tournament, Kerstetter is shortstacked, and she eventually busts in 20th place. Shahade sighs. "I wanted to be there for Jamie at her final table," she says, brushing her long, red hair out of her face. "So I didn't want to register for tomorrow's tournament. Now I guess I can."

Support, solidarity, and a nonstop poker schedule. That's the basis of the four-woman team of full-time professional poker players who call themselves "the Grindettes."

A New Kind of Grinding

The idea for the Grindettes was born in April 2011 when fulltime online player Katie Stone made a conference call to her three fellow female grinders.

"I remember the first thing I said was, 'I think I have a good idea *about*

a good idea,'" Stone recalls. "And I didn't even know what the idea was. I just knew that the four of us would be a great group."

The goal, she explains, was to create greater recognition for a type of female player who fit neither the stereotype of the sexy spokesmodel nor the frequently televised woman who was already well-known to a poker audience.

Stone and her friends saw themselves as a far less visible poker demographic: highly educated women with prior professional experience in other fields who had cut their teeth on online play and learned to make a full-time living at the game. Proud to be "grinders" – steadily profitable players who approach the game as a business, play within their bankroll, and grind out a regular schedule of weekly play – the women dubbed themselves "the Grindettes."

"When people see women posting in poker forums or playing in open events, the stereotype gets slowly stripped away," Stone says. "They see, 'Oh, she really does know what she's talking about.' Or 'Oh, she's playing the European Poker Tour circuit – she's really serious.' When women in poker become more commonplace, our recognition will grow, and our image will change.

"I think that's the overall goal for everybody, to just be treated equally and with respect. We are looking to compete alongside you. We don't need any special considerations."

Diverse Backgrounds – and Poker in Common

Each of the Grindettes had one or two other careers before making their way into poker. Katie Stone is a

chess entrepreneur. Right out of high school she co-founded USA Chess, the largest children's summer-camp chess organization in the United States. When she sold most of her share in the company in 2004, she decided to devote herself to poker full time. After a couple of false starts, she turned herself into a profitable online player playing under the screen name 'katie75013', and earned more than \$160,000 in 14 months. She also became a successful live player who made three final tables at WPT Marrakech in 2009.

Stone's friend Jennifer Shahade also came from the chess world, as a two-time U.S. Women's Chess Champion and Women's Chess Grandmaster.

"Jen is an amazing person," says Stone. "She's one of the most interesting people in my life. She's definitely the most famous American female chess player to come out of the U.S. chess scene."

As an NYU undergraduate, Shahade majored in comparative literature – then went on to write *Chess Bitch*, *Play Like a Girl*, and co-author *Marvel Duchamp: The Art of Chess*. She has taught in Greg Raymer's poker seminars and has had both live and online tournament success playing online as "jenium." Last spring she made two final tables: at the Wilmington Race Track Main Event and at a preliminary EPT event in Monte Carlo.

Stone met Jen through chess but she met Jamie Kerstetter through poker.

"It's pretty impossible not to know who Jamie is if you play poker on the East Coast, because she's everywhere," Stone says. "I just remember watching so many of her final tables online, where she played as 'and the law won' and just sitting there in awe,

thinking, ‘Oh, she’s so good!’ just watching and learning.”

Although a full-time poker career leaves her little time for practicing law, Kerstetter is also a licensed tax attorney in the state of New Jersey. A highly successful multitable online player with more than \$275,000 in earnings, she has also had her share of live success. Before winning the Venetian Deep Stacks Omaha tournament in June and taking 20th in the WSOP Ladies Event a few weeks later, she had a profitable WSOP circuit run earlier this year, qualifying for the WSOP’s National Championship.

Stone met Katie Dozier through Dozier’s husband, the well-known sit-n-go expert Collin Moshman, who staked Stone online.

“So Katie Dozier and I became friends on Skype, and we literally thought we were like long-lost sisters, because we had so much in common,” Stone says. “So much about our lives was so similar, and our beliefs and things that we liked to do.”

Dozier also has a set of non-poker skills: she majored in creative writing and attended French culinary school. With Moshman, she has co-authored two books: *Pro Poker Strategy: The Top Skills*, a poker strategy book, and *The Superuser*, a poker thriller. She’s a lead tournament coach with Team Moshman, creates tournament coaching videos for Poker Strategy and Drag the Bar, and has earned more than \$110K online, winning a #1 ranking on several Sharkscope Leaderboards playing under the screen name “hot-jenny314.” This year, she took third in a Venetian Deep Stacks event and had deep runs in both a WSOP bracelet event and the Main Event.

“Everybody gets along so brilliantly,” says Stone. “Everybody

complements each other, because we all have different strengths and weaknesses. And it’s such an amazing support group, because we all are so like-minded in so many ways, especially when it comes to women in poker.

‘When people see women posting in poker forums or playing in open events, the stereotype gets slowly stripped away’

We’re all trying to change stereotypes and assumptions and show that normal regular woman are actually making a living at poker.”

A Place for Women in Poker

This year, women comprised only 3 to 5 percent of the World Series of Poker – a minuscule percentage that makes it all the more surprising that two women won bracelets (Vanessa Selbst in the \$2500 10-game Mix-6-handed and Allyn Schulman in the Seniors event). Likewise, only 211 women played in the \$10K Main Event, out of a total field of 6895 – yet women took both 10th and 11th place in the Main Event. Clearly, women *are* able to excel in the male-dominated world of poker tournaments – and just as clearly, very few women choose to do so.

Stone says that women’s under-representation is a complex question that involves both external and internal barriers. She says that the poker world is often hostile to women; but then, in a vicious cycle, women may avoid aspects of the poker world for fear of that hostility.

For example, when women post on twoplustwo, the premier online poker forum site, Stone says they are often met with gender-specific insults, anything from “she must be on her period” to “she needs to get laid.” While men troll each other routinely in online poker forums, she says their mockery of each other is more generic. If a male poster doesn’t agree with another man, he might call that man stupid – but he won’t blame the stupidity on being a man; he’ll take issue with the argument itself. Women are told they are stupid *because* they are women, which makes it harder to argue.

In response, Stone founded the first twoplustwo women’s forum, “That’s What She Said.”

“Women may feel underrepresented, and they may feel timid, and they want more of a smaller, encouraging way to start,” she says. “There have been so many women who have posted in our forum who say, ‘I’ve been lurking for years, reading for years, but I’ve never dared try writing anything because I would just get trashed, or get trolled.’” She hopes that the experience of posting in a women’s forum may help women become more comfortable with posting in open forums, just as the experience of playing in a women’s tournament may help women become more comfortable with playing in open events.

Sometimes the hostility to women shows itself at the poker table. Stone often gets resistance from asking men how many chips they’re playing that she has come up with a whole different voice and manner to use when

making the request.

“If I wanted to ask a woman, I say in a normal monotone way, ‘About how much do you have behind?’” she says. “But if I say that to a man, oftentimes that’s considered bitchy.” She recounts a recent incident where the man refused to push his chips forward while a second man started yelling at her for holding up the game. The dealer began to argue with her as well, insisting that she could see the chips and didn’t need to ask, even though she was sitting in the one seat and the chips she couldn’t see belonged to the player in the ten seat. With two players and a dealer berating her – and the action indeed delayed – Stone eventually had to call the floor.

“I’ve never seen anything remotely like that happen with a man,” she says. “But it happens to me often enough that I’ve actually had to change the way I ask to see a stack.

I do it in a very cutesy way to not piss anybody off. So I might smile, and say, ‘Oh, wait, you have a big stack, in fact, you have *two* big stacks!’ and I kind of tease them a little bit, because otherwise, they’re going to become defensive, so I kind of raise my voice a little and maybe smile and act a little bit submissive...”

She pauses and shakes her head. “Why do I have to do that, though?” she wonders. Then she shrugs. “But I *do* have to do that,” she says. “So I do it.”

A Double-Edged Sword

Stone is quick to acknowledge that being a woman can also be an advantage at the poker table. “I definitely don’t want people to think I know what I’m doing, because I want to get paid off,” she admits.

Then she shakes her head again. “But what it also does is it just kind of creates a different dynamic at the table,” she says. “It makes for a different playing environment. And that can really affect the action. And so your decisions then become based on the emotion at the table, which it is in poker anyway. But in this case, there’s lots of leveling. Sometimes that just makes things a little trickier – more tricky than they need to be. So I’ve just found that it’s better to keep it as neutral as possible, so that your decisions are simpler.”

At this point, Stone says, she’s become better known in the poker world, and that adds yet another dimension to her table image.

“Weaker players tend to give you more credit, and they tend to believe you more,” she says. “So you tend to be able to get away with more things on a poker table – more creative and different lines. Because many people don’t understand what you’re doing, the default assumption often is, ‘She must *really* know what she’s doing, and I’d better get out of the way.’ I’m aware of that, so I try to use it a little bit to my advantage as well.”

Moving Towards the Future

When Stone thinks about all the ways in which women face hostility at the poker table, she can become somewhat frustrated. But when she consid-



Katie Stone & Jennifer Shahade



Katie Dozier

Katie Dozier

ers prospects for the Grindettes, she's highly optimistic.

"I think that a group like this has great mass appeal, because it shows the other side of poker," she says. "People can see that there are normal women doing it – it's not just the young online kids, it's not just the rich guys."

Because of the difficulties of playing online in the U.S., three of the Grindettes are planning to live abroad either part- or full-time. Dozier and her husband will spend at least part of their year in Mexico. Stone is moving to Vancouver, where Kerstetter will join her later in the fall.

Meanwhile, professional opportunities continue to open up. For example, Kerstetter was recently signed as a

Felt Stars pro and to make training videos for Tournament Poker Edge.

When Stone considers the future of women in poker, she becomes even more optimistic.

"Just look at this summer!" she says. "That is where women in poker are going! The scales are becoming more balanced. So many women have made so many deep runs this summer – including the Grindettes.

"So this is the future. We're going to see more women coming out and playing, more women getting better and tearing down the stereotypes and not being afraid and not being intimidated, and realizing that they can play the game just as well as everybody else. I think next year it'll get even better and we'll see even more wom-

en. More women will just say, 'Hey, I can play too, and better than you, and I'm gonna show you, cause I'm gonna take your chips!'"

Ultimately, Stone's hope is that the Grindettes will play a role in improving the overall status of women in poker.

"I think the more people see strong, smart, successful women in poker – such as the Grindettes – women who are not taking their clothes off to get attention – I think that will be inspiring for other women, too," she says. "It will be inspiring for women to realize that you can have a future in this industry. You can have a future in this game by using your brain – and not just using your lack of clothing!" ♠

'That's the overall goal, to just be treated equally and with respect. We are looking to compete alongside you. We don't need any special considerations'



Jennifer Shahade (left)
& Jamie Kerstetter (right)