

Gaming Industry: Hardships, Stereotypes & Factors That Can Enhance Female Presence and Security

Andrea Garcia-Portela¹ and Johnny Lopez-Figueroa[#]

¹Commonwealth-Parkville School, Puerto Rico

[#]Advisor

ABSTRACT

The Esports sector is a significant phenomenon that has proliferated worldwide, resulting in the rise of professional players to celebrity status and accelerating technical improvements. Nevertheless, even with this growth, gender-based challenges that prevent women from participating at all levels mean that gender underrepresentation is still a problem. This circumstance not only upholds unfairness but also hinders the community's potential to grow in all directions. Understanding the many challenges faced by women in this field reveals systemic discrimination and limited opportunities, which manifest as exclusionary practices and demeaning exchanges. Despite these statistical disparities, the issue is not limited to statistics; it also involves objectification, sexualization, and stereotyping. It is crucial to address these deeply rooted stereotypes and structural flaws to establish an Esports community that is more equitable and inclusive, enabling everyone, regardless of gender, to develop their strengths and contributions to their full potential.

Introduction

Even though the E-Sports industry has grown tremendously over the previous years, it has become a worldwide sensation, attracting millions of enthusiasts. Professional players have risen to celebrity status due to the massive audiences they have received from tournaments and streaming services. This expansion in the gaming industry has also helped technological advancements by forcing internet accessibility to improve. Nevertheless, amid the augmentation of the gaming community's population, the issue of the underrepresentation of women shines through. These problems are caused by structural barriers that keep women from engaging in the Esports industry at all levels. This predicament causes worry since it sustains injustice and hinders the community from flourishing in various ways. Understanding the circumstances allows for a thorough examination of the challenges faced by women in the field. When compared to men, some women in the professional video game industry, or women who enjoy the games, face discrimination and a lack of opportunities. Even so, the limitation of female participation is beyond statistics. Women must endure frequent exclusion as well as derogatory statements such as sexualization, stereotyping, and objectification. The tremendous growth in the industry and its concerns about diversity continue to exist since women are still disproportionately underrepresented. All the prejudice, sociocultural factors, and limited opportunities contribute to the imbalance between men and women in the gaming industry. By identifying, analyzing, and fixing these problems, the Esports community can flourish and learn how to maximize everyone's ability, regardless of gender.

Problem Statement

Esports is "the practice of multiplayer video games, especially networked; [where] all competitions [are] dedicated to this practice" (Larousse, 2022). The term goes back to the late 90s when video games were introduced and people started participating in professional events. Nonetheless, some people connect Esports with the beginning of computer science because it is an "integral part of the evolution of computers" (Vo & Le-Anh, 2022). A game created by William Higinbotham in 1952, known as "Tennis for Two," is closely linked to the beginning of competitive games. The game is known as the "genesis" of the modern video game industry because of the inclusion of battles between two players from the very beginning of conception. Later, the famous "Space Invaders" helped the industry skyrocket by allowing an international competition to occur, gathering over 1,000 participants. With the introduction of international-level competitions, the economic and cultural footings for developing the Esports industry were created, opening the door for exceptional opportunities for those interested.

Purpose

This investigation aims to outline and analyze women's experiences in the Esports industry from 2000 to 2023. The research aims to delineate the hardships, stereotypes, injustices, and factors that contribute to the underrepresentation of women and their lack of presence. It seeks to shed light on the injustices and social barriers women face in the male-dominated field, aiming to create a more inclusive community where everyone can thrive regardless.

Justification

This study is noteworthy because it shows the difficulties women encounter while looking for work in the gaming field and how the research seeks to identify the root reasons for these difficulties. The study attempts to disprove the assumption that women are restricted to certain activities in the video game business and demonstrate that they are equally capable of adopting leadership roles alongside their male colleagues. It tries to change attitudes toward women's challenges in e-sports by providing personal tales and emphasizing environmental problems. It provides a critical viewpoint that may educate industry players, including game developers and designers, on the crucial need for gender equality in video games by studying the injustices and problems experienced by women in gaming. The magazine wants to be a force for change by fighting for inclusiveness, diversity, and a more equal future for women in the gaming industry. Finally, it works to enhance gender equality in gaming by raising awareness of these challenges, which are more prevalent than one might think.

Research Questions

1. How do social and cultural factors influence the experiences of female gamers?
2. What are the predominant stereotypes surrounding women in esports?
3. What factors contribute to the enhanced presence of women in the gaming industry?

Research Objectives

1. To understand how social and cultural factors affect female's experience in video games and the importance of promoting equality, inclusivity, and challenging gender stereotypes.
2. To investigate and analyze perceptions and stereotypes that exist about women who play esports, as well as, to understand the discrimination and the challenges that come with it.

3. To understand the dynamics of women's participation in the gaming industry, to gain a deeper understanding of social shifts, economic implications, and industry trends.

Theoretical Framework

Women's participation in gaming communities is impacted by the intersectionality of their social identities and the widespread threat of stereotypes, which might hinder their performance unless multiple social identities are deftly managed to offset such detrimental impacts. The way women are depicted in the media as video game characters, whether or not they are sexualized, has a significant impact on how players view themselves, including their feelings of self-worth, body confidence, and self-efficacy. Self-objectification and gender stereotypes follow from this. Hypermasculine norms in gaming contexts not only discourage women from engaging in gendered conversation, but they also marginalize female gamers. Because of this, many women adopt male personas or conceal their identities in order to cope with discrimination, harassment, and objectification in gaming environments. The frequency of gendered interactions and cyberbullying, particularly in first-person shooter games, highlights how important it is to identify and address structural issues in order to advance diversity. By sharing their experiences and promoting a more inclusive and diverse gaming culture, encouraging more women to join gaming communities would benefit both female gamers and the greater gaming community.

Definition of Terminologies

Esports are video games that are played in a highly organized competitive environment. These games can range from famous, team-oriented multiplayer online battle arenas (MOBAs) to single-player first-person shooters, survival battle royales, and virtual reconstructions of physical sports (Leroux-Parra, 2020). A stereotype is a widely held, simplified, and essentialist belief about a specific group. Groups are often stereotyped based on sex, gender identity, race and ethnicity, nationality, age, socioeconomic status, language, and so forth (Rommes, 2006). The phrase "gender gap" refers to the difference between how men and women are treated in society or between what men and women do and achieve (Cambridge Dictionaries, n.d.).

Review of Literature

The Harassment Women Face in Video Games

Women who have spoken out on the harassment, discrimination, and sexual assaults they have faced underscore the need for an increase in diversity and inclusion within the gaming industry. The purpose of this source is to present the experiences of several women who have spoken out against sexual assault, harassment, and discrimination in video games. Recent allegations of sexual assault and gender-based harassment in the gaming industry have been made by more than 70 persons, predominantly women. They shared their stories on social media platforms like Twitter, YouTube, and Twitch. The relentless barrage of claims led to the CEO of a talent management firm stepping down, which allowed the industry—which has previously witnessed sexism, bullying, and abuse—time to reflect. Straight white guys created the gamer's identity as this "exclusive possession," the culture of sexism and sexual harassment is particularly pervasive in the gaming industry. When women, LGBTQ+, or people of color attempt to enter the field in ways that typically result in sexual assault and bullying, the "toxic geek masculinity" pushes back. Now that it is clear that there is a need for a wide variety of video games that appeal to different demographics, more diversity among game producers is required, leading to reforms in the industry. The article goes into detail by stating that:

Already, the response has been a far cry from Gamergate in 2014, when women faced threats of death and sexual assault for critiquing the industry's male-dominated, sexist culture. Now, some are optimistic that real change could come. Gamers began sharing their stories after a Twitter user who posts as Hollowtide tweeted about an unnamed "top" player of the online game Destiny on Friday night, referring to the person as a "scum lord." Three female streamers, JewelsVerne, SheSnaps and SchviftyFive, saw the post and decided to come forward about their experiences with the gamer in question, who is known online both as Lono and SayNoToRage. The women posted their allegations, including nonconsensual touching, propositioning for sex and harassment, on Twitter using their streamer handles. (The streamers did not provide their legal names to The New York Times. In years past, women gamers who have spoken out against the industry using their legal names have been subjected to further harassment, hacking and doxxing.) In interviews with The Times, when asked to describe their experiences with Lono, the streamers asked a reporter to refer to their public statements on Twitter, TwitLonger and Twitch. (Lorenz & Browning, 2020)

This source is crucial to the study because it sparked a tremendous movement inside the gaming industry, where more than 70 people have come forward to report incidents of sexual assault and harassment based on their gender. It provides a crucial frame of reference for comprehending the scope and significance of these charges. The material in this source improves the research by offering insight into the movement's beginnings, which started when gamers on Twitter posted their experiences of harassment in reaction to a disparaging remark. Not only did the accused player apologize after this occurrence, but it also sparked an extensive debate among those who stream. The source also emphasizes the adverse effects of the charges, such as the CEO of a talent management organization resigning, showing how the allegations have affected the real world.

Furthermore, the source demonstrates how the movement grew when additional broadcasters opened up about their interactions with prominent individuals, indicating a pervasive problem inside the gaming sector. Companies' responses, some rapidly severed relationships with alleged streamers while others had difficulties, show that the industry must address these problems. In the end, the coordinated efforts and backing from other streamers, fans, and businesses for the women who spoke out highlight how urgent reform is in an industry that has long been plagued with misogyny and harassment. This source clarifies how social media and public uproar may amplify voices and push for accountability, possibly resulting in substantial changes to the culture and practices of the gaming industry with wider consequences for gamers' identities as a whole.

Gamergate and the Females in First-Person Shooter Games

The 'Gamergate' scandal exposed the industry's misogynistic culture to have a deeper understanding of the extent of the harassment and sexualization faced by women. The source sheds light on how female gamers engage with first-person shooter games. Women are rarely the focus of these studies; therefore, more engagement will be immensely useful in exposing how women feel and behave in a sexist environment. A considerable controversy, known as "Gamergate," impacted the gaming industry in 2014. The incident was the result of a protest by female video game industry employees, including the founder, Zoe Quinn, who spoke out about all the misogynistic behavior of the industry. As the harassment increased, many females chose to step away from public appearances and requested police protection. The outbreak generated a contentious discussion about the issue of the quickly growing video game industry and the sexism within the industry. The percentage of female players is increasing by the year and reached 48% in 2014. The perception that men dominate the gaming business provides extra difficulties for female players. The fast-evolving medium of video games contains a variety of distinct game types. Both young and older people may participate in either a professional or leisure activity as well as men and women. Games are not going away; somewhat, they are evolving. Virtual reality is the newest popular trend, and it will be interesting to see how gamers could engage in these second-by-second "realities." The article elucidates that by outlining that:

Women gamers may face more difficulties because of stereotypes of gaming as a male-dominated environment. Plus, players may take their existing knowledge of gender with them into the gameworld. They may reinforce gender stereotypes that exist outside of games and recreate gender stratification within game-worlds. Being outside of the “norm,” women gamers often experience different reactions due to the surrounding stereotypes. With stereotypes in mind, when other 8 players encounter a female gamer, hostile behaviors may be elicited. Gray (2011) experiences this directly when playing an online game: when the leader becomes upset that she isn’t communicating with the team, she inserts her microphone and prepares her apology – her voice then gives away her female identity, and a barrage of insults ensue which blame her gender for a poor performance. Likewise, Matthew (2012) finds in her study that 79.3% of 874 participants believe that sexism is prominent in the gaming community and that female players are four times more likely to have experienced forms of taunting or harassment from fellow players. (McDaniel, 2016)

All the summarized information within the source delves into the complexities of the gaming industry, focusing in particular on the controversies and power relations related to gender stereotypes, harassment, and the gaming experience. The importance of this source lies in its analysis of social issues in the gaming industry, focusing on the "Gamergate" controversy and further misogyny encounters. The data describes women's challenges and discrimination in the gaming industry by providing an essential sociocultural context to understand the complicated interaction of said stereotypes in the enterprise. The source highlights the "rise of female gamers" and their growing presence in the gaming community. The increase in the female population is crucial for further research as it challenges the stereotypical notion that gaming is a male-dominated industry. This study emphasizes the necessity to explore women's experiences, especially in genres usually considered masculine, such as FPS (First-Person Shooters). The focal point of this source concerning the investigation is understanding why women choose these games and how they navigate male-dominated spaces. The research can shed light on the stereotypical roles of gaming. All the while covering the impact of game design on the gameplay experience and portrayal of female characters; moreover, it provides insight into how game design can affect these roles in virtual environments and the potential effects of game design on players, especially women. It is fundamental to acknowledge these events because it highlights the need to look at the impact of games and the experiences/ perspectives of players – which are often overlooked. It also addresses harassment and discrimination against female players, making an essential contribution to research by emphasizing the negative experiences that prevent women from fully participating in the game, therefore underscoring the importance of creating an inviting and inclusive environment in the communities to promote diversity and equal participation. Doing so draws attention to the different coping mechanisms of women, such as hiding their identity and showing the resilience and determination of female gamers despite the challenges they face. Overall, this resource provides a critical analysis of gender dynamics, discrimination, and the evolving community of the gaming industry, promoting the experiences of female gamers and the extensive social impact of gender on gaming.

The Effects of Stereotypical Threats on Women and their Performances

Increased inclusivity is needed to end prejudice and stereotypical threats in the gaming industry, and this can be accomplished through the increase in female social identities. The source assesses if changing the availability of alternative social identities substantially mitigates performance decrements and the effects of stereotypical threats on the performance of female gamers. The study examines how stereotypical threats affect female gamers and what happens when exposed to such threats. According to the data presented, female gamers underperformed when faced with stereotypical threats compared to their male teammates. The decline of female gamer percentages may be slowed if the community improves and females identify strongly with their social identities. However, according to the source, numerous social identities act as an intervention - even if it is slightly mitigating - to help female gamers be "shielded" from said performance decrements. Depending on the circum-

stance, different implicit attitudes regarding gender skill-based roles emphasize the need to dispel discrimination in the gaming industry and advance with creating more inclusive gaming environments. The article goes into detail by arguing that:

Stereotypical attitudes towards women in gaming raise further concerns. When exploring previous research on character representation in digital games, there is a key distinction between male and female characters (Leonard, 2003, Thompson and Zerbinos, 1995, Williams et al., 2009). For example, within a sample of games studied, Williams et al. (2009) found that 40% did not include any female characters. Furthermore, in games that did include female representation, these were in secondary roles with females portrayed in overly sexualized ways or as victims of aggression (Burgess et al., 2011, Dietz, 1998, Dill and Thrill, 2007, Ivory, 2006, Leonard, 2003, Provenzo, 2000, Williams et al., 2009). Additionally other studies have demonstrated the impact of a female avatar's sexualized appearance on acceptance of rape myth and sexism (Fox & Bailenson, 2009). Evidence indicates further that females are often perceived as passive or dependent on men, and deemed less competent (Ivory et al., 2014, Mou and Peng, 2008), which is further supported by research demonstrating how male game characters engage more frequently in leadership and achievement-based tasks compared to females (Thompson & Zerbinos, 1995). (K. Kaye et al., 2016)

The data extrapolated from this source and its pertinence to this investigation offers significant fresh viewpoints on the pervasive stereotype danger in female online gaming. The results show that the negative stereotypes about online gamers — often viewed as outcasts and low-status individuals—have obstructive effects, mainly on female gamers. According to the study's experimental methodology, female gamers perform worse than their male counterparts who are not exposed to said stereotype threats. This reduction in performance illustrates how preconceptions impact gaming results, suggesting that assumptions about female gamers have real-world effects. Additionally, the study offers a novel intervention strategy that involves changing various social identities to reduce the harmful effects of stereotype threat. The results demonstrate that this intervention effectively avoids performance decreases caused by stereotype threat in female gamers. This tactic assists in reducing the negative consequences of negative stereotypes while paving the way for more inclusive and equitable gaming environments by providing female gamers with a distinct, positive social identity. Finally, this study contributes to the growing corpus of research on the challenges women face in a society usually rife with adverse stereotypes. It highlights how these biases affect performance outcomes and suggests social identity modification as a potential cure. A more inclusive and equitable gaming community may be created by revealing discrepancies in implicit perceptions, and research emphasizes the need for ongoing attempts to address and destroy stereotypes.

The "Female Experience" and Gender Gap in the Gaming Industry

Issues such as self-image, sexism, harassment, and objectification are essential to address in order to improve the gaming community's environment. This source aims to investigate the female experience and close the gender gap in the video game industry by "unraveling several positive experiences as well as some harmful tendencies" (Kuss et al., 2022). Due to misconceptions, sexism, harassment, and objectification, female gamers frequently struggle with issues such as self-image. Hence why, the majority of women tend to pick "male roles" or male characters in order to conceal their gender. Women see it as a security blanket that can prevent unwanted attention or remarks.

Nevertheless, gaming has various advantages, such as enhancing interpersonal relationships and fostering a sense of success. However, it could induce emotional suffering as well as diseases such as gaming disorder (GD). The source underlines the importance of the players' environment and recommends that interventions target young and middle-aged women. The gender inequality study emphasized the need to know female views and create games that appeal to a broad audience. Many women suffer with their self-image as a result of sexism, objectification, sexism, stereotypes, and other forms of gender violence. They can also conceal

their gaming identities, which may hinder them from engaging in social and leisure activities. The following source goes into detail by evaluating:

The stigma attached to being a female gamer has measurable negative impacts on women. Being considered a 'bad' gamer has led to poorer performance in female gamers in experimental Implicit Association Tests [11], and they are perceived as less competent gamers than their male counterparts [12]. There is some evidence to suggest that women have different motivations for gaming in comparison with men. Female USA mobile gamers play to combat boredom and for enjoyment, to be autonomous, and to create relationships [13]. Men, on the other hand, play for success and competition [14]. In addition to this, women play for competition, recreation, and social reasons. For some women, recreational and social gaming motivations are associated with internet gaming disorder (IGD), whereas in men, social gaming motivations are associated with lower IGD [15]. [...] More recently, gaming disorder (GD) has been included in the eleventh edition of the World Health Organisation's (WHO) diagnostic manual, the International Classification of Diseases (ICD-11 [17]), suggesting that for some excessive gamers, their activities become problematic to the extent that they may require professional help [18]. (Kuss et al., 2022)

According to the source, discussing female gamers' experiences in video games is critical since it bridges a vast gender gap in the area, proving its importance in studies. It can be linked to a commitment to explaining the complicated experiences of female gamers and offering illuminating information about their struggles, objectives, and the consequences of stigma and stereotypes in the gaming industry. The data from this source significantly improves the investigation in several ways. The first thing it does is attract attention to the persisting gender gap in the gaming industry, exposing the reality that women gamers make up a large portion of the gaming community while yet being disregarded and misrepresented. Furthermore, the source defines and classifies essential research-based notions such as self-image, the benefits and drawbacks of gaming, and age-related changes in gaming behavior. These principles provide a framework for understanding the complex issues that female gamers face daily. About the information in this source and its usefulness within this investigation, assumptions and gaming-related stigma on female gamers shed light on how they may influence their self-image and gaming determinations.

Furthermore, it emphasizes how critical it is to establish a pleasant and generous gaming environment to protect the welfare of all gamers. Additional research and activities to enhance education, security, and gender equality in the gaming sector may help. The survey findings, which also serve as the foundation for the inquiry, are extensively presented and address the obstacles and opportunities women in the gaming industry face. In addition to emphasizing the need for change in the gaming industry and the importance of ongoing research and action to support females and foster a more inclusive gaming community, the source advances the research process by providing a critical understanding of the experiences of this frequently understudied group.

Women's Challenges in Esports Through Surveys & Interviews

Women face more significant challenges than their male teammates; this was evident through the results of multiple interviews. The source's objective is to examine the challenges experienced by female athletes in esports, where male players predominate, through surveys and interviews. The information was gathered through several online questionnaires and then reviewed thematically by the author(s). "Many research studies on esports are more focused on the evolution of esports, factors involving esports, and the effects of involving esports. There is not much research on gender differentiation among esports athletes. Statistics showed that male athletes nominate esports compared to female." (Yusoff & Yunus, 2021). Female players face more significant challenges than male players to achieve considerable success. Female athletes face more challenges than male athletes to attain meaningful success. If the issue is not resolved, there will eventually be no more female participants. An investigation conducted in Google Scholar showcases the following:

Involvement in the male-dominated and behind-the-scenes sports industry has indirectly led to the emergence of a gender stereotype, especially to female players. Women are a minority in the esports industry.

Yee (2006) mentioned that 86% of MMORPG players were male, and 14% were female. Women involved in esports are sometimes confronted with sexism and sexual harassment (Ruvalcaba et al., 2018). [...] The capabilities of female players are often underestimated. For most male players, female players are not efficient and do not have a good game-playing technique (Witkowski, 2014). As a result, some female players deliberately hide their gender in an online game (Witkowski, 2014) and prefer to use male names to avoid gender stereotyping. [...] Challenges faced by female athletes said by previous research including the challenges to be in the main team, played the main role, often being underestimated of their capabilities and sometimes they were faced sexual harassment. The lack of the existing research is they do not explore more on how the female's athlete overcome their challenges or to what extend the challenges affect their confidence and career in esports. (Yusoff & Yunus, 2021)

The application of the focal point of this source concerning the research is that though the esports industry is rapidly increasing, male gamers have mainly dominated it. This site admits the gender difference in esports participation, citing statistics that indicate male athletes outnumber female competitors by a substantial margin. It highlights the critical issue that female players face significantly more hurdles and roadblocks in their quest for success in esports than their male counterparts. The source's emphasis on gender inequality and the obstacles experienced by female players emphasizes the critical state of this issue. If the problem changes, female involvement in esports may continue and eventually disappear, impairing the industry's diversity and inclusiveness. As a result, this source serves as a primal call to action, motivating more significant research and activities to achieve gender equity and assist female players in the esports business. It emphasizes the need to close the gender wage gap to promote esports' long-term development and competitiveness.

Exploring Women's Leadership Positions in Collegiate Esports

Interviews were held to compare women's experience in leadership positions in collegiate esports programs and how said experiences have shaped their skills; the project aimed to define and explore the essential aspects of the lived experiences of women who oversee varsity collegiate esports programs at universities. This source looks at the gender gap in leadership positions in collegiate esports programs; studies on gender discrimination often overlook these initiatives. In-depth interviews were conducted with seven women in leadership positions to hear about their lived experiences and learn more about women's involvement in leadership roles in higher education. The participants discussed the significance of their roles as directors or coaches and their prior and current experiences. It was demonstrated that the skills they acquired due to their shared experiences molded their leadership roles and enabled them to reach their full potential. The cited source can assess the following:

Recent events bring the idea of women breaking barriers to light. 2020 marked the 100th anniversary of the 19th amendment, which gave women the right to vote. Second, the recent death of Supreme Court Justice Ruth Bader Ginsberg brings to the forefront other achievements that have leveled the playing field where women are concerned. Advancements have been made over the years. Some women have broken through barriers and reached the top levels of leadership in their careers in business, academia, and athletics (Bower et al., 2015; Kobla & Li-Hua, 2017; Northouse, 2013). However, even though women are breaking barriers, perhaps even at a faster pace than in the past (Kobla & Li-Hua, 2017), much of the literature pointed in another direction – that of the specific barriers and underrepresentation (Kies, 2014) in multiple areas (Gray, 2020; Northouse, 2013). The low percentage of women in high-level leadership positions illustrates that many women have not had that experience of breaking barriers (Northouse, 2013). Though the “presence of women in leadership roles or on Boards of Directors has proven to have positive implications on an organization’s effectiveness” (Gray, 2020; Semenova, 2020), many women face obstacles in their career path to high-level leadership positions. (Johnson, 2022)

The information presented in this source validates the fact that there is a gap between women and men in collegiate esports leadership positions. The study's focus on women directors and coaches in collegiate esports provides a distinct and relevant demographic emphasis on the information gathered. Nonetheless, a descriptive (transcendental) phenomenological approach is accounted for because it offers information on what these women went through. All the data collected from the interviews were thoroughly analyzed to understand better what women in these leadership positions must undergo. The presented information is paramount for advancing this investigation because it includes detailed insight into the gender gap in leadership positions in collegiate esports programs. These programs are often overlooked and not researched, making this source important for a deeper understanding of collegiate esports programs. The investigation also touches on the preeminence of women's experiences and the skills honed because of said occurrences.

The Effects of Stereotypical Sexualization of Women in Video Games

Men and women react differently to the stereotypical sexualization of female characters, and the impacts vary depending on the person. The purpose of this study was to evaluate the effects of stereotypical sexualization and non-sexualization of female characters on video game players' self-efficacy, body confidence, self-esteem, and gender stereotyping. The source looks at how players' exposure to both sexualized and non-sexualized female characters affects their sense of self-worth, gender stereotypes, body image, self-objectification, and confidence. The results showed, after a series of "experiments," how women's abilities and confidence decreased when they were exposed to sexualized female characters for a short while. Women's presence and cognitive capacities deteriorate considerably as a result of this exposure. Upon comparing the results for the guys, it was evident that they had formed a more positive self-perception and were happier. However, different results were seen when comparing the previously mentioned impacts on all participants. In this regard, the following investigation can recognize the following:

Based on traditional media effects research, it was predicted that playing the sexualized female character would result in lower body esteem, self-esteem, self-efficacy, and greater self-objectification in women. Little support was found for these predictions. One significant relationship emerged, however, between type of character played and female self-efficacy. For female participants, playing the sexualized heroine resulted in lower self-efficacy in comparison to playing the non-sexualized heroine or no video game at all. This suggests that exposure to sexualized images of women in video games may cause women to feel less confident in their abilities to succeed in the real world. This is particularly interesting in that it supports the idea that the sexualization of strong female media models may negate the potential positive effects of being exposed to a female who exhibits many counter-stereotypical characteristics, such as physical strength, independence, and power. Given that the two characters were identical in every way except for the sexualization of their appearance, the findings from this study demonstrate that sexualized video game images of females can, just by the nature of their sexualization, negatively affect women's feelings of self-efficacy. (Morawitz, 2007)

The data extrapolated from this source, and its pertinence to this investigation is that it addresses the effects of stereotypical women sexualized and non-sexualized female characters. Some of the topics discussed include self-esteem, gender stereotyping, body confidence, self-objectification, and self-efficacy. An additional topic that the source pointed out was the possibility of game content creating false expectations of women's bodies, causing more toxicity and lowering the female's capability. The presented information is paramount for the advancement of this investigation because it addresses the lack of research on the given topic and the different ways people react to sexualized and non-sexualized characters. The results were able to clarify some doubts about how female gamers would react to the stereotypical sexualization of female characters. Contradictory results were also found when comparing the impacts mentioned earlier on all the participants, showing a difference in how people can react to certain situations. Nevertheless, the outcome of this investigation can

serve as a guide for future studies to gain a deeper understanding of how different types of video game content can affect players negatively or positively.

Structural Barriers for Women in Esports and How They Are Perceived

A survey was held to help women speak out on their experiences and perspectives on female participation in competitive gaming. This study examines several tactics women employ to foster and publicize their participation in esports and lessen discrimination. Stated differently, the objective is to investigate the perceptions held by others about women who participate in competitive gaming and to provide these women a voice. Five hundred-eleven women answered an online survey about their thoughts on esports competitions. Less than 14% of the participants said that they were considering entering the competitions above.

Conversely, some said that their lack of participation in tournaments and specific games showed little interest in them. Even if some of them were positive, many of them also mentioned gender-related concerns, which lends credence to the idea that esports are bad for women. Some women highlighted the notable and negative gender imbalance in the game business, referring to it as a "barrier" to progress. The source's examination of forums based on Overwatch talks revealed the Overwatch League's lack of female participants. It also addressed a common misconception about female gamers in general, and Mercy in particular as the support character. The insider also talked about individuals' odd responses to the announcement that Geguri became the first female player in Overwatch League history. The results generally confirmed the belief that women are not accepted in esports and that structural and societal issues lead to the underrepresentation of women at the top levels. The following excerpt will further discuss this by outlining:

In the questionnaire responses, some women said they had not considered participating in esports because of the perceived nature of the community. Not all of the responses were very elaborated: for example, one respondent simply replied with "because the community is what it is", without any further explanation. One respondent wrote she did not "have the will to develop a skin thick enough to endure that shitstorm". Another one told she had witnessed harassment related to competitive gaming, and that it was one of the reasons she did not consider esports to offer any addition compelling enough to her gaming "to cross that threshold". A couple respondents brought up their perception that the negative atmosphere is maintained by men, one of them saying she had heard that "the sports are filled with chauvinist boys" and another that while she had occasionally considered participating in esports, "the gamerhardcore men would just ruin it anyway". [...] Some respondents felt that as women competitors, they would be seen as representing their gender: one respondent explicitly wrote that "I would be scared of the pressure coming from the audience regarding my gender" and another how she "would not want to be on display as a Woman Gamer". [...] One respondent even described being a woman in esports as "pouring gasoline on the fire". (Ruotsalainen & Friman, 2018)

The source indicates that society has placed considerable pressure on women just because of their gender, which validates its usefulness in this investigation. In order to gain a deeper understanding of the situation, multiple women shared their perspectives on women's inclusivity in esports. They revealed particular concerns about the toxic, misogynistic environment and community; additionally, they expressed how women have to face gender-related hurdles because of the significant discrimination against females. The presented information is paramount for advancing this investigation because it mentions the obstacles women face and challenges that keep them from competing in esports. Through Overwatch-themed questionnaires, some of the challenges mentioned include discrimination and a toxic environment. These challenges are explained in the lived experiences the participants agreed to talk about; moreover, the reactions toward the signing of Geguri as the first woman in the Overwatch League made it evident that women are majorly discriminated against in the competitive gaming world. The source exposes the limitations society places on women in the esports industry, emphasizing the toxic environment, discrimination, and gender-based hurdles that keep women from participating in competitive gaming.

Challenges Faced by Women in Male-Dominated Esports

The source also highlights the challenges women face within the male-dominated field; this emphasizes the necessity of further research on the gender disparities in the gaming field by indicating the lack of representation of female gamers. This study aims to investigate how women are depicted in video games and the community. The examination of how women are depicted in the media brings to light the unfavorable portrayal of women as men's equals. The researcher, a self-described feminist, looked at how women are depicted in video games and how they react to gender norms. Some of the participants were trying to create safe havens for female gamers, and the data gathered from the interviews showed tendencies in the maltreatment and intimidation of women. The researcher discussed her encounters as a female gamer and her challenges in the predominantly male gaming community. The following sources support the following:

Much of the literature regarding female gamers attempts to deal with the issue of stereotypical “pink games” (Cassell and Jenkins, 1999). These “pink games” are games that feature stereotypically feminine activities and goals, for example, a cooking game or a fashion game, with the focus being entirely on a female audience, such as games in the Imagine series, including *Imagine Babies* (2007), and *Imagine Fashion Stylist* (2011). In direct contrast to this, “boys’ games” feature the main characters struggling through landscapes, fighting monsters, and saving others. In extreme cases, such as *Grand Theft Auto*, male protagonists can murder prostitutes after having sex with them, highlighting the huge difference between male and female targeted games, further increasing the marginalisation of female gamers. Thus, the work of Cassell and Jenkins (1999) brings us back, once again, to gender appropriate behaviours, a constant undercurrent throughout this research project, this time in the form of game tastes and the pleasure derived from play (Connell and Pearse, 2015). This gendered divide in game tastes also leads us to the arguments of Casual vs Hardcore games, and to the rise of harassment within gaming culture. Chess (2013) speaks about the “gamification” of stereotypes, wherein the gender roles, such as that of the female Carer or male Provider/Protector, become video game plotlines, and character definitions. (Munday, 2018)

The data extrapolated from this source, and its pertinence to this investigation highlights a comprehensive approach to addressing issues of female representation and discrimination in the gaming community. The researcher’s experiences as a female gamer give the investigation a unique perspective; this adds a sense of ethos because they have been through the problems firsthand, and it helps the audience trust them. The information presented in this source validates the fact that there are evident patterns in the portrayal of women in the video game industry. It explores how women are depicted in video games and how they are treated as the underrepresented population of the industry. Interviewing female gamers provides qualitative insights into issues such as abuse, harassment, and the creation of safe spaces within the gaming community. In addition to recording the participants’ negative experiences, the research also emphasizes the players’ resilience because they continue to play, and efforts to promote positive change within the gaming community are increasing.

The Overprivilege of Toxic Masculinity and Analysis of the Dickwolves Case

While exploring the impact of hypermasculinity in the gaming community, it becomes evident that the mindset tends to discourage women from participating. The issue also highlights how masculinity and toxic behavior are prioritized over femininity. The purpose of this research is to show how the hypermasculine identity discourages women from engaging in gendered discourse in the community and encourages an excessive priority to be placed on masculinity over femininity. The site covers various gaming-related topics after explaining how the excluded group is stigmatized. Women who defy these stereotypes encounter hatred from others since they are expected to act in a specific manner, which might mean being treated as objects of sex or disregarded as

useless. The source discusses the Dickwolves controversy, in which female gamers said that they were subjected to intimidation and discomfort. It also tackles the problem of hypermasculinity and the "vocabulary" that restricts gender diversity and dominates discussions inside at large, and to exemplify this further, the following source argued the following:

Hypermasculinity is a psychological term coined to describe the exaggeration of masculine cultural stereotypes within subcultures (Parrott & Zeichner, 2008). The term can apply to an overemphasis upon masculine-gendered physical traits and/or behavioral patterns, particularly dismissal or hostility towards feminine displays (Mosher & Anderson, 1986; Mosher & Sirkin, 1984; Parrott & Zeichner, 2003). Hypermasculine action has often been linked to media consumption (Cohn & Zeichner, 2006; Scharrer, 2004). Researchers have observed these media stimuli impacting individuals beyond the period to which they are exposed, setting a higher "baseline" for response in general (Reidy, Shirk, Sloan & Zeichner, 2009; Scharrer, 2004). Video games can often reinforce hypermasculine stereotypes (Dill & Thill, 2007), despite the continued tension of geek "masculinity" as defined in opposition to athletic masculine norms (Taylor, 2012). The appearance of characters (Kirkland, 2009), their actions (Yao, Mahood, & Linz, 2010), and their perceived role within the game society (Scharrer, 2004) have all been addressed as problematic areas in the development of players' masculine identities. Exism remains prevalent throughout this media and social sphere (Jenkins & Cassell, 2008; King, Miles, & Kniska, 1991). (Salter & Blodgett, 2012)

The data extrapolated from this source, and its pertinence to this investigation focuses on the Dickwolves controversy as a prime example of the problems associated with gender bias in the gaming community. The source draws attention to the negative responses to those women who break the stereotypes of submissive women who represent sex objects. Additionally, attention was drawn to the disagreements between the hypermasculinity of the "traditional hardcore gamer" and the increasing number of female participants. An emphasis was made on the restrictive roles that are imposed on women along with the hostile environment they have to put up with because of said roles. The information presented in this source and its usefulness to enhance the investigation is that it provides a perspective of the Dickwolves case to gain a deeper understanding of it and its implications for the gaming community. Common themes, such as the implication of stereotypical gender norms, were exposed for feeding the prejudice toward the underrepresented population while emphasizing the power of dynamics: hypermasculinity. The information given offers a foundation for further research into how gender identity plays a massive role in how each person is treated and how the patterns in the gaming industry cause additional issues.

Statistics on Women and Male Gender Pay Gap

The evident problem of gender inequality in the gaming community is highlighted by the underrepresentation of women among the top 100 wealthiest gamers, a development made noticeable by the esports industry's explosive expansion. The extreme toxicity that female players encounter and the dearth of female representation in popular esports titles compound the challenges that these players face in a predominantly male setting. The top 100 male players earned \$192.4 million, a 6,863% differential over the top 100 female players' earnings of just \$2.8 million. Sasha "Scarlett" Hostyn is the sole woman in the top 500 earners, with a salary of \$349,455. In contrast, men and women make \$1.9 million and \$28,000 on average, respectively. The report notes that because of past instances of toxic behavior directed at them and animosity toward them in esports communities, female players have been dissuaded from taking part in high-stakes games like League of Legends and Dota 2. However, the report does not pinpoint the exact causes of this disparity. Female participation and viewership surge might lead to a more inclusive esports environment by closing the financial gap and allowing integrated competition. Future efforts to level the playing field for men and women may include making events more accessible and fostering a safer environment for women, and to elaborate this further, the following source argued the following:

The full report details that the top 100 male players have earned \$192.4 million, whereas the top 100 females account for only \$2.8 million, a disparity of 6,863%. Sasha “Scarlett” Hostyn serves as the only female in the top 500 with total career earnings of \$349,455. With regards to the women, the average earnings sit at \$28,000 compared to \$1.9 million for males. This comes at a time where female participation has significantly increased compared to previous years with an estimated 30% of esports audiences are female. Though the study did not include what could be causing such a dramatic gap, various esports communities have shown hostility to women in the past and the toxicity directed towards females often go way out of bounds. We’ve seen Street Fighter legend Ricki Ortiz pausing her career after facing waves of vitriol for coming out as trans, Overwatch-players betting their careers that a female player couldn’t possibly be good and other deflating moments that may give female competitors pause. [...] If female viewership and participation continue to rise as it has, then the likelihood of a female winning a major tournament or event could open the floodgates for a more integrated player-verse. At the same time, making events more inviting for women wouldn’t be so bad as it would mean having more attention with regards to security, safety and conduct. (Howard, 2020)

The information in this source, its importance within this investigation, and its thorough analysis of the findings highlight the underrepresentation of women in esports. Reliable data and insightful opinions from an authoritative source enhance the findings' validity and trustworthiness — such as the source's expertise and experience in gender studies and esports. Furthermore, sourcing data from reputable publications, esports, or gender equality-focused groups ensures that the study is current with the industry's best practices and latest developments. Utilizing trustworthy sources for the research strengthens the foundation of the investigation and increases its relevance. The salient extrapolated data from this source and the application of its focal point concerning the investigation is that the data makes research more manageable by providing precise numbers on the pay gap between genders and highlighting trends in gaming habits, social norms, and challenges faced by female players. Particular case studies, such as the Sasha "Scarlett" Hostyn and Ricki Ortiz cases, provide insight into how discrimination impacts certain players. Though more excellent research into the fundamental causes is encouraged, it suggests that increasing female engagement provides a focus for future work. Overall, the analysis presented in the article emphasizes the urgency of addressing the gender gap in esports, motivating more investigations and other inclusiveness-promoting activities.

Methods

This investigation utilized a computer with an internet connection and an internet browser, Google, Safari, and Opra GX. In order to find the sources required for this investigation, the Google Scholar and EBSCO Host search engines were paramount for pinpointing the necessary sources to elucidate the research question. Although the internet connection was unstable at times, it proved sufficient to conduct all the required constituents of this investigation. Even though some sources are not peer-reviewed, the investigation mentor revised them and approved them while confirming their validity. All these components working in tandem created the optimal conditions for the consummation of this project.

This investigation utilized a qualitative documentary analysis design with a descriptive analysis methodology. The data collecting instruments were applied by holding interviews, questionnaires, observations, and analyzing pre-existing datasets. To populate this research, it was necessary to specify the purpose of each of the ten sources used. Furthermore, it was essential to recognize the source’s design and approach, indicate the target audience, highlight their limitations, and determine the recommendations and findings in each. An analytical component outlining the significance of the data presented in the inquiry was generated, so a descriptive content analysis methodology had to be utilized for this investigation.

Results

These results will be organized by publication date (oldest to most recent); however, the number assigned to each will depend on the order in which they are placed in the Literature Review (i.e., first source, second source, third source). The utilized search engines (EBSCO Host and Google Scholar) proved most beneficial for the selected sources of this investigation. The first and second sources do not include a publication date. Respectively, they dealt with how women often face discrimination, harassment, and assault in video games, different ways female gamers experience online first-person shooter games, and how more participation will help tremendously by uncovering how women feel and react in the misogynistic environment. The third source was not recent (2016), and it indicated that women's participation is affected by stereotypical threats and how manipulating the availability of multiple social identities can effectively eliminate performance decrements. The fourth source was very recent (2022), and it described that female gamers often deal with issues, such as self-image, due to stereotypes, sexism, harassment, and objectification; additionally, most women find it comforting to hide their identities by choosing male roles. The fifth source was very recent (2021), delving into the fact that female players confront greater hurdles than male players to achieve significant success. The sixth source was very recent (2022), and it demonstrated that women hone specific skills in leadership positions, such as courage, flexibility, organization, reflectiveness, administration, leadership, management, teaching, coaching, and drive to overcome obstacles. The seventh source was not recent (2007), and it validated the fact that stereotypical sexualization and non-sexualization portrayals of female characters in video games affect players' self-esteem, gender stereotyping, body confidence, self-objectification, and self-efficacy. Sources 8 and 9 were not recent (2018), and they elucidated the fact that gender plays a significant role in the 'barriers' that prevent women from participating in competitive esports events, two of these being the "toxic meritocracy" and "hegemonic (geek) masculinity." Additionally, how females have a great desire to continue to play; moreover, the experiences motivated them to create safe spaces within the gaming community to effect positive change. Finally, the tenth source was not recent (2012), and it clarified the fact that the hypermasculine identity encourages the over-privilege of masculinity over femininity and how it discourages women from engaging in gendered discourse within the community.

During the early stages of the investigation, the main question was:

1. "How do social and cultural factors influence the experiences of female gamers?"
 - a. The sections labeled "The Harassment Women Face in Video Games" and "Gamergate and the Females in First-Person Shooter Games" directly provided the necessary data to answer that question. The purpose of the first source is to present the experiences of several women who have spoken out against sexual assault, harassment, and discrimination in video games. Already, the response has been a far cry from Gamergate in 2014, when women faced threats of death and sexual assault for critiquing the industry's male-dominated, sexist culture (Lorenz & Browning, 2020). The second source highlights how female gamers engage with first-person shooter games. Women are rarely the focus of these studies; therefore, more engagement will be immensely useful in exposing how women feel and behave in a sexist environment. Women gamers may face more difficulties because of stereotypes of gaming as a male-dominated environment. Plus, players may take their existing knowledge of gender with them into the game world. They may reinforce gender stereotypes outside games and recreate gender stratification within game worlds (McDaniel, 2016).

As more evidence was gathered, one more question was generated to further define the variables of this investigation (harassment, objectification, discrimination):

2. "What are the predominant stereotypes surrounding women in esports?"
 - a. The section labeled "The 'Female Experience' and Gender Gap in the Gaming Industry" directly provided the necessary data to answer that question. This source aims to investigate the female experience and close the gender gap in the video game industry by "unraveling several

positive experiences as well as some harmful tendencies" (Kuss et al., 2022). Due to misconceptions, sexism, harassment, and objectification, female gamers frequently struggle with issues such as self-image. Hence why, the majority of women tend to pick "male roles" or male characters in order to conceal their gender.

Such a situation led to the final question:

3. "What factors contribute to the enhanced presence of women in the gaming industry?"
 - a. The "Structural Barriers for Women in Esports and How They Are Perceived" section provided the necessary data to answer that question. This study examines several tactics women use to foster and publicize their participation in esports and lessen discrimination. Stated differently, the objective of the source is to investigate the perceptions held by others about women who participate in competitive gaming and to provide these women a voice. Five hundred-eleven women answered an online survey about their thoughts on esports competitions. Less than 14% of the participants said that they were considering entering the competitions above.

Discussion & Conclusion

The presented sources elucidated women's experiences in the video game industry and female gamer interactions in first-person shooter games. Moreover, this investigation delineated how stereotypical threats affect the performance of said female players and how altering the number of role models can help decrease performance. Additionally, evidence was provided that there is a vast gender gap in the video game industry, where females choose male roles to hide their identity and avoid any unwanted remarks. Even with this, further data supported the investigation by stating that female gamers are not given enough credit for everything they must endure, given that they must overcome more significant obstacles. The process revealed some limitations, which might be resolved by more investigation. Generally, it would have been beneficial if the sources outlined more information on personal experiences successful female gamers have had to overcome to get to where they are today. In a general sense, the sources presented a vignette on the injustices, hardships, and stereotypical roles of females in the gaming industry. For upcoming continuing research and data analysis, recommendations include securing more years of data and requesting more study resources. Ultimately, this investigation aimed to answer how gender-based injustices impacted the participation and success of women in the E-Sports industry and, additionally, what initiatives can be developed to address these issues to promote gender equality within the community. Sources converged to provide an answer, which is that with the stereotypical and gender-based injustices, women's success is more challenging to achieve compared to their male teammates; nonetheless, in order to promote gender equality, the environment in the industry is in dire need of change. A documentary analysis design with a phenomenological approach is suggested for future studies; this is because a phenomenological approach offers comprehensive knowledge of subjective experiences, facilitating multidisciplinary understanding.

Limitations

For the investigation to come to fruition, the scope of the research question had to be more encompassing to find more information on the subject, which permitted the optimal conditions to answer the research question. If the original research question had not been changed, the essay would not have been written as well, given that the research question would have been challenging to complete. Additional internal threats had to be mitigated to preserve the investigation's internal validity, such as changing various sources that did not meet the quality threshold to elucidate the problem surrounding the conducted research correctly. Moreover, multiple

external threats had to be addressed to preserve the external validity of the inquiry, such as the instability of the institution's Internet connection, a limited database, a slow computer on occasion and lost methodological resources. The EBSCO Host database, provided by the school, needed more articles to answer the research questions fully. Much of the information needed could not be found after extensive research due to the limited information in the database. Google Scholar was used to try to address the external threat. The second database proved to have a more significant variation of the sources needed to answer the research question.

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