

How female video gamers experience being part of a male dominated community

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Abstract

The video gaming community consists of 1.8 billion gamers, 55% are male and 45% are female, suggesting a male majority in the gaming sector (Statista 2019). The aims of the current study were to; (a) allow women to have their say about their experiences, (b) to improve women's gaming experiences (c) to improve the way the community perceive female gamers and lastly (d) to fill the gap in research. An online questionnaire consisting of eight open ended questions was conducted. Two master themes were identified: 1. being a female video gamer and 2. the masculine scene. The analysis suggested that although participants disassociate as having a gamer identity, they did feel included within the community: 'Very included. I have often played other games online and feel that I am able to play just as well if not better' (Kelsey 207-208). They expressed that gaming is a hobby, however feel a community connection. Furthermore, they mentioned that gender is not linked to gaming, labels such as 'gamer-girl' are unnecessary. Moreover, that stereotypes are formed from childhood upbringing: 'I feel like gaming is male-dominated because of them mostly being in the "male" sections in stores such as the Argos catalogue when I was a child' (Rebecca 384-386). The reason the community is male dominated is because children are taught what is stereotypically acceptable which carries through to adulthood. Finally, limitations and future directions were discussed.

Keywords: *Video games, gamers, experiences, community, male dominated*

The video gaming industry and community has been a growing sector over the past ten years and is consistently continuing to grow. In 2014 there were 1.8 billion video gamers worldwide. Between the years of 2008 to 2018 there have generally been less female than male video gamers. In 2008 the number of female video gamers was 40%, however in 2018 there was 45%. As we can see from these online statistics there has been an increase of women being a part of the video gaming industry and community (Statista, 2019). The United Kingdom (U.K.) have slightly different statistics of female to male percentages. In the U.K. between the years of 2011 to 2014 there has been a slight increase of female video gamers. 2011 had 49% female gamers whereas 2014 increased to 52%, briefly dominating numbers of gamers; traditionally a field dominated by men. As for the United States (U.S.) they have similar statistics, these figures are reflected in gaming figures from the U.S. (Statista, 2019). This gender divide in the video gaming community has caught the attention of many individuals in the video gaming industry as well as educators to research the phenomenon as well as to discover strategies to resolve the gender gap. Although women are growing in numbers within the industry and community they tend to play more “casual” games such as Tetris and Solitaire, games that do not entail a lot of action or skill. Whereas men typically play “hard-core” games such as first-person shooters and fantasy games, games that tend to involve experience, action and skill (Hayes, 2005). However, the definition of casual vs hard-core games is not clear, therefore sorting games within these labels may be incorrect (Boyer, 2009), and indeed these figures may well be distorted by some of the mechanisms for gathering these statistics.

Digital gaming has many potential benefits to an individual, however only a small portion of those who play games identify as a gamer. According to social identity theory there are two sites of identity construction, these are; the social context of the player and the cultural milieu. Research suggests that a gamer identity is formed from stereotypical behaviours from consumption logic; suggesting that friendship groups give the person an environment wherein their gamer identity can be expressed. Overall, this study suggests that gamer identity stems from stereotypical behaviours and friendship networks (Grove, Courtois & Looy, 2015). Furthermore, there are many implications of defining the video gaming community with a definitive definition. Often times the definition of a video gaming culture has been defined with common sense; it is a culture in which individuals play video games. However, looking deeper at the characteristics of this culture we can understand the dynamics

of the culture as well as name it. This may probe issues with how video games and the video gaming community is researched. Shaw (2010) claims that this explanation of video gaming culture has lessened the onset of further useful research into video games. However, some suggest that gamer identity is linked to other identities such as; gender, race and sexuality. Minority groups tend to be underrepresented in games, these groups have been demanding their identities to be represented. Furthermore, if an identity is underrepresented or negatively associated to gaming this could encourage these individuals to not play games, therefore to not identify as gamers. This could be a reason why there appears to be fewer female gamers. Perhaps in their experience of gaming they were misrepresented, this could have discouraged them to identify as a gamer or to game (Shaw, 2011).

Whilst this may be true, the gamer's stereotypical behaviours or friendship networks might not define their gamer identity and members of the gaming community may have their own definition. It could be inaccurate to suggest that minority groups are discouraged from video games due to underrepresentation as there may be other factors involved such as online gaming harassment additionally with a lack of social support. These two factors proved to cause general anxiety and loneliness as females avoided communication or any form of interaction during their online gaming experiences (McLean & Griffiths, 2019).

To suggest video gaming could be a positive activity, a study using a Smartphone App measured the flow and positive mood within a gaming context (Kaye et al., 2017). Results found that positive mood was linked to in-vivo flow during gameplay within a few hours playing per week. Furthermore, positive mood was higher when players played online with friends compared to players playing alone. Therefore, community vibes could have been enjoyable to the player, feeling wanted and accepted by players. Overall, this study implies that positive mood can shift depending on gaming environment and flow (Kaye et al., 2017). One study looked to examine social processes in gaming with individuals and the group flow within the gaming context. Results indicated that social - belonging, networking and integration for game enjoyment is important. However, Kaye and Bryce (2012) state that social gaming can bring on frustration. This could stem from high competitiveness. Furthermore, improved group flow occurs in cooperative gameplay (Kaye & Bryce, 2012). When looking at these results as a whole, they generally suggest that social gaming improves emotional experiences in gameplay. Therefore, suggesting that playing together as a group or team might be more beneficial for gaming experiences (Kaye & Bryce, 2012).

Within the video gaming community there are many different minority groups. A content analysis studied top-selling video game magazines and 149 video game covers, both demonstrate underrepresentation of female characters in video games. Both studies depicted minority males as being generally aggressive and dangerous whereas white Caucasian males would typically be in military combat and utilising various technology. This study might show that stereotype is a real threat to how females are perceived and treated in the video gaming community and could influence how they perceive and treat those within the community (Burgess et al., 2011).

Gender assumptions are a common form of stereotype within the gaming community, this is mainly portrayed in media. Where men talk and engage, they show leadership in games, female representation is either minimal or represented as negative (Mou & Peng, 2009). Being exposed to these images of women could have a negative effect on female perception. A common example is that women are typically portrayed as weak, submissive and overly sexualised; women might feel less interested in engaging in video games which could be the reason for there being fewer female gamers (Mou & Peng, 2009). A content analysis using video game magazines consisted of 83% of male characters being portrayed aggressive whereas for female characters it was 62%. Furthermore, it was also found that 60% of female characters were portrayed in a sexualised manner, whereas for male characters it was 1%. Moreover, some claimed that stereotypes of males being aggressive, and females being sexualised are perceived even by people who are non-gamers, which could lead them to stray away from gaming, therefore fewer female gamers (Dill & Thill, 2007). Continuing to look at this stereotype, a recent study examined the gameplay performance and attitudes of females who were exposed to explicit stereotype priming. The findings show that by giving a negative label on the stereotype does not impact gameplay performance or attitudes. Moreover, avatar gender did not impact gameplay performance or attitudes. These results show that although some women might feel threatened by these stereotypes, there are some females who do not let these stereotype threats affect their gaming experience (Kaye, Pennington & McCann, 2017). Suggesting that games portray women as weak and submissive could be seen to be a relative historical issue; more recently games represent women as independent and strong, games such as; *Detroit Become Human* (Cage & Williams 2018). Video games and character representation has changed significantly over the past twelve years. Therefore, some of the research presented is slightly outdated. Games like;

Beyond Two Souls (Cage, 2013) and The Last of Us (Druckmann, 2013) have strong female protagonists.

Research has suggested that when females were assessed on their gaming performance with a targeted stereotype towards them their gaming performance, self-perceptions were not affected. This may prove that females do not perceive the negative gender gaming stereotype to be an accurate representation of their gaming ability. However, the study did not consider the stereotypes in hard-core gaming contexts. We might not be aware of female gamer's experiences if only certain types of games are explored (Pennington, Kaye & McCann, 2018). In another article Norris (2005), states that women are less likely to play violent computer games because typically women are brought up passive and non-aggressive. They found that women who played computer games viewed their online relationships as more unfriendly, however experienced less sexual harassment and were more aggressive. Their gender identity, sex role stereotype and sexual violence did not differ significantly compared to women who did not play video games (Norris, 2005). Furthermore, women are not the only ones who experience harassment online. More minority groups are thought to experience online bullying (Cote, 2015). Despite this being the case, the majority play games despite harassment and have developed coping and resilience strategies to cope with this. Interviews with female gamers were conducted, they were asked what coping strategies they use. The most common factor was managing their media which helps secure a positive online environment. However, some hide their gamer identity, or they may lure more harassment. Their outsider label still affects their gaming experience (Cote, 2015).

Based on the above literature, the purpose of the current study and research question is; how female video gamers experience being part of a male dominated community. This kind of research is important because women will have the opportunity of sharing their unique gaming experiences which could potentially change the way the gaming community perceive female gamers. This might therefore further improve the unique gaming experiences for women. Data collection will be via an online questionnaire and data analysis will be analysed using a thematic analysis.

Methodology

This research project was analysed from a critical realist perspective. Roy Bhaskar (1975; 1979; 1994) states that the universe and social world is a “stratified and open system of emergent entities”. This means that it is a combination of general science, transcendental realism and social science. As for the method of analysis, the current study is adopting thematic analysis (TA). TA offers an easily accessible and theoretically-flexible method when working with qualitative data. TA looks for themes and patterns within the raw data to construct an overall claim (Braun & Clarke, 2006). As the current research is being analysed from a critical realist perspective, this will consider the participant’s responses at face value, with no interpretation. This type of analysis allows the author to construct meaning from participant’s responses while simultaneously acknowledging the role of the author’s own role as a researcher while analysing the raw data (Smith & Osborn, 2003).

Research Design

The current research used online questionnaires because some video gamers are online gamers, and the majority of these gamers could have easy internet access. Therefore, they could be more likely to participate. Open ended questions seemed to be the most preferred choice of questions, as this gives high insight into participant’s experiences (Reid, Flowers & Larkin, 2005).

Constructing the Questionnaire

An open-ended style questionnaire was conducted, this was split into three separate sections in order to create flow and keep responses organised. By constructing open ended questions this may have given the participant enough freedom to write as little or as much information as they desired. This could be beneficial to finding rich and meaningful data. The three areas that were explored were; questions about you, questions about you as a gamer and questions about gaming being male-dominated. The first section consisted of general questions about the participant to see if they met the criteria of the study and to get an idea of what kind of gamer they are. Questions such as; age, gender and what type or specific video games they play. The second section included questions about them and what being a gamer means to them. With questions such as; “why do you play video games? E.g. stress relief, to

play competitively” and then focusing on the more meaningful factors like; “how included do you feel in the gaming community?”. The final section explored their unique experiences being in a male dominated community such as the gaming community. Questions consisted of; “do you think gaming is a masculine activity?” and their opinions on more complex areas of gaming that clearly show the gaming community being dominated by men, like; “how do you feel about the world of e-sports being mostly male players?”. The structure made analysis easier because it gave a clear picture about each aspect of the community to make conclusions about each.

Sampling and Participants

The current research consists of a homogenous sample for the purpose of gathering rich data into the experiences of female gamers within the male dominated gaming community. Participants included in the study had the following inclusion criteria; they are over the age of 18, they identify as female and they identify as a video gamer. Exclusion criteria were the following; if they do not have an interest in video games at all and if they do not play video games, however do play other types of games such as; board games, card games, puzzle games. These were excluded as the aim is to explore experiences related to solely digital games. There was a total of 38 participants who took part in the online questionnaire. Participant’s age ranged from 18 to 51. Every participant was given a pseudonym to protect their identity and confidentiality (Seidman, 2013).

Reflexivity

The author was made well aware that her own personal experiences may influence how the research is treated. Although the author was not able to completely detach herself from her own personal experiences, Langridge’s (2007) ten questions were followed and reflected on throughout the research process. Overall, the author used these questions as a guide to change any questions and themes created. The author is a female gamer herself, therefore she expected to somewhat relate to the participants. Furthermore, the author expected that she would be influenced when constructing the questions and when analysing the data. In order to avoid this, she took a step back when she felt herself influencing the research and returned when she had a clear mind about the topic.

Analytical Guidelines

Braun and Clarke (2006) produced the thematic analysis (TA) six phases of analysis. Familiarity with data, and writing is essential from the initial phase, and throughout, to the coding and analysis process phase. These phases are not a one-way process, the need to move back and forth is crucial this is to ensure flexibility and to fit the current research (Patton, 1990). Lastly, this process should not be rushed, taking time to work through the phases is important as analysis develops overtime (Ely et al., 1997).

Analysis and Discussion

The following contains analysis and discussion, collected using a thematic analysis from the raw data.

Analytical Overview

There was a total of two master themes with their emergent themes from the raw data. All master and emergent themes identified are presented below.

1. Being a female video gamer
 - a. Just a hobby
 - b. Forming friendships
2. The masculine scene
 - a. Gaming is not always gendered
 - b. Starts in childhood

Master Theme 1: Being a female video gamer

This master theme explored participant's gaming world. Here they discussed how gaming contributes to their identity and their involvement in the community. The majority of participants expressed that they do not identify as a gamer, however they feel connected to the community. The first emergent theme was; (a) just a hobby. Participants disclosed that they do not identify as a gamer, meaning they do not consider video games to be a significant part of their identity. They mention that video gaming is just a fun hobby, to fight boredom and to pass the time. The next emergent theme was; (b) forming friendships. Although participants did not consider themselves gamers, they do feel connected to the gaming

community. Overall, they feel included and experience positive community vibes. Participants stated that they form friendships with people whether they are playing online or even offline games. Moreover, they frequently chat about video games and attend events such as conventions and Local Area Network (LAN) parties. Lastly, they stated that they feel genuinely included even by men; they said that feeling included is easy as everyone in that community shares common interests on the same level as each other.

Emergent Theme 1a: Just a hobby. Participants shared a common perception that video gaming is not something that is part of their identity. During the coding process many participants used similar language and words to describe how gaming was not a part of their identity. Furthermore, they describe how video gaming is just a fun hobby to do in times of boredom and to pass the time. The factor of importance is heavily common in the data, most said that video gaming was not important to their identity. Rachel states this quite effectively by saying that gaming is not a major important aspect of her life:

‘Not very important. It's expendable - I don't have to play video games on a regular basis...’ (Rachel: 97-98)

Here Rachel is stating that video gaming is not important to her identity or her life, therefore video gaming is expendable. This could mean that she would supposedly be neutral if she did not have access to video games. She confirms this by saying that she does not have to play games on a day to day basis. The next quote is from Deanna, she states that gaming is not important to her identity but rather just a fun hobby.

‘Not particularly important and I play games but would not define myself as a gamer. So, the overall image of being a gamer I feel does not contribute much to my identity. Playing games is a hobby and not an integral part of myself...’ (Deanna: 120-123)

Like the previous quote, however here we see that although Deanna does not associate video games as part of her identity or a major part of her life, she classes it more as just a fun hobby. She plays video games but does not label herself as having a gamer identity. Therefore, she does not see herself as part of the group of people who do associate with having a gamer identity. Lastly, she views her video gaming habits as more of a fun hobby to do when she has an opportunity for relaxation, however nothing more than this.

Emergent theme 1a suggests that participants do not always associate with having a gamer identity but rather see gaming as just a fun hobby to do when bored or to pass the time quicker. Grove, Courtois and Looy (2015) suggested that gamer identity stems from stereotypical behaviours, these being what one is accustomed to and what they might conform to. Whilst this study was refuted by the current findings as participants did not even identify as being a gamer, Shaw's (2011) research implies that minority groups such as females are typically underrepresented or negatively portrayed in video game culture. Furthermore, states that these individuals do not identify as gamers because of their negative association in video games. Women may have been mistreated and possibly discouraged to play games or admit to having a gamer identity. Which could be the reason why these minority groups do not identify as gamers. However, the current study did not look specifically at the effects of stereotype treat and the potential negative experiences. Paaben, Morgenroth and Stratemeyer, (2016) mention that women are not identified "gamers" as they tend to play more casual unskilful games than men. This study supports current findings, perhaps why they refuse to identify as "gamer" is because they adhere to stereotypes.

Emergent Theme 1b: Forming friendships. Although participants said; they do not consider themselves gamers they did however consider themselves part of the community. This theme explores the extent to which participants feel connected to the community. Many have said that they feel involved and experience positive community vibes. Furthermore, they have even made friends both online and offline. They stay connected through chatting and attending events like conventions where they can meet in person. Lastly, most feel included by the majority even men and it is easy to feel included as everyone has common interests. Rory states exactly this expressed in one of her responses:

'I feel very included in the community especially now where a lot of developers have been implementing features that are relevant to both male and female gamers...'

(Rory: 149-150)

Rory is suggesting that she feels highly involved and accepted in the gaming community since game creators are developing to attract females to their work. She mentions how she played games regardless of the gender demographic, however is appreciative that over time the gaming industry has developed their titles for all genders. Furthermore, she states that

there are many different types of games which have their own communities, therefore makes it easy to become a part of the community; there are as there are many types of games as there are multiple communities for people to bond and connect.

‘Everyone is happy for females to play. In fact I find men are more accepting than other females as the males don’t find a lot of females play’ (Stacy: 186-188)

Stacy implies that most people are generally welcoming and accepting of women joining the community and implies that they rarely come across any kind of physical or emotional harassment when attempting to join or are already part of the community. She goes on to say that men are generally more welcoming and accepting than women. Suggesting that perhaps men do not encounter many women who play games. Therefore, men could be more intrigued and happier when women join the community and perhaps want to celebrate a more gender balanced community.

Emergent theme 1b implies that although participants did not identify as a gamer, they do however feel part of the gaming community. Regardless if they associate as having a gamer identity or not, they still feel this strong connection with various individuals whom they connect with and have a common interest being video games. Kaye et al.’s (2017) study suggested that when players played online with friends as opposed to players playing by themselves, they experienced a more positive mood meaning they felt wanted and accepted by the gaming community. This study supports the current findings as participants admitted to feeling welcomed and included within the gaming community. Additionally, Kaye and Bryce’s (2012) research implied that group flow improved when in cooperative gameplay and that gaming in social settings could improve gaming experiences. This suggests that playing as teams could improve gaming experiences. This research supports the current findings as participants mentioned that they feel connected to individuals who share the same interests as they do. They feel connected regardless as there are so many different types of video games with their own individual communities. Therefore, they managed to feel welcomed and included in at least one type of gaming community.

Master Theme 2: The Masculine Scene

This master theme looks at participant's opinions on video games and men. The majority of participants agreed that video gaming itself is gender neutral and that video games have become a more unisex activity overtime. However, the majority agree that video gaming is comprised of mainly men in the community. The first emergent theme was; (a) gaming is not always gendered. The common opinion from participants was that gender does not depend on whether they game or play certain games. Furthermore, participants were also referring this to the infamous gamer-girl label. If someone identifies as a gamer, adding their gender after the label is unnecessary. Moreover, state how the gamer-girl label is an unfair term as there is no gamer-boy label. Lastly, state how the gamer-girl label creates this sense of rarity that girls do indeed game and adds to the stereotype of video games being a male activity. The next emergent theme was; (b) starts at childhood. Participants said that the community is male dominated because it starts at childhood. Boys are generally brought up with video games more so than girls. Furthermore, the way the media portrays video games is typically directed towards the male demographic.

Emergent Theme 2a: Gaming is not always gendered. Participants stated that gender is not connected to gaming or playing a certain genre of game, that gaming and gaming genres are for all genders. They also spoke about the gamer-girl label and how it is used and portrayed negatively; they mentioned that adding someone's gender after the gamer label is unnecessary as gender should not be correlated with an activity of enjoyment. Additionally, participants mention that the gamer-girl label is used unfairly, as men do not get labelled as gamer boys, feeling that the label fuels the stereotype that women do not play games.

'I feel that it shouldn't have as much of a derogatory label anymore as the number of female players in gaming has risen to where it could eventually hit the 50/50 mark...'

(Monica: 203-204)

Monica is talking about unnecessary use of the label as there will be equality for gamers in the future. She states that gender is not important when identifying as a gamer, if they have a gamer identity they should be treated equally to all gamers. Also, how the gamer label is a sign of unity within the community, this means that if they are a female gamer the gamer

label should not have separate labels to segregate them from other gamers. However, Samantha emphasises more about the potentially damaging stereotypes:

‘I don’t believe in gender stereotypes. I play games there for I’m a gamer, my gender has nothing to do with it. The word “girl” is infantile which makes me think that “gamer girls” are lesser than men playing, but in fact I’m better than a lot of males that I play with...’ (Samantha: 239-241)

Samantha talks about how gender stereotypes do not exist and how her gender has nothing to do with her gamer identity; she says that the gamer girl label implies that women are not skilled in gaming like men. She disputes this by stating that she is more skilled than men she games with and that women are known to be fragile and lower on the rank scale, however disproves this by saying that she puts up a good fight in games. She felt the label implies that women do not game, however gaming is unisex.

Emergent theme 2a suggests that someone’s gender identity does not correlate with whether they identify as a gamer or whether they enjoy stereotypical video game genres, furthermore, that the gamer-girl label is unnecessary terminology as it is used in a negative light. Participants state that it gives the impression that females do not play games or identify as gamers. Mou and Peng’s (2009) study somewhat refutes the current findings; they suggested the way in which the gaming media portrays female gamers is in a highly stereotypical light. They imply that men show more leadership and women are represented to a minimum or as weak in games. These could be the reasons why women are less interested in gaming or do not identify as a gamer. Therefore, implying that it is only linked to the way it is advertised. However, Kaye et al.’s (2017) research support the current findings when examining to discover if the game’s avatar had an effect on stereotype threat and game performance. The results indicated that although some women feel the stereotype threat, there was no negative impact on female’s game performance or experiences.

Emergent Theme 2b: Starts in childhood. Participants had a common opinion that video games were centred around catering for the male demographic, agreeing that video games contain the stereotypical male themes such as driving and violence to appeal to the male audience. Apart from the video games themselves, the method of advertising video

games also contained these themes to attract the male eye. Participants agree that video gaming is portrayed as a male activity, and that this stems from childhood experiences that boys are typically brought up with video games or activities that relate to the themes portrayed in video games.

‘I think it is a male dominated community from the traditional bringing up of kids perspective...’ (Lorelei: 370)

Lorelei states that children’s upbringing plays a significant role with video games being male dominated. She spoke about girls growing up to contribute in typically more productive tasks and that these experiences would eventually stay with them until they were grown women. Whereas boys would typically be brought up to achieve success, whether this be success in work or in competitive scenarios, which she believes is why it is not abnormal for males to be gamers. She then goes on to say that these stereotypical methods of bringing up children is still ongoing today, however to a lesser degree.

‘I think that males are within that community at a much younger age for example they are playing on the x-box or play station as a child or adolescent whereas girls don't tend to grow up using them...’ (Lydia: 377-378)

Similarly, Lydia also makes the claim that boys grow up playing video games whereas girls are not. She mentions that the parents play a significant role, as they tend to provide their children with the stereotypical game genres for their child (i.e. girls playing casual games and boys playing hard-core games). Furthermore, she states that if children are exposed to these stereotypes they could comply without question.

Emergent theme 2b suggests that male dominance in video game culture stems from childhood upbringing and experiences. Participants mention that from a considerably young age children are taught what is stereotypically expected of them. This being the gendered stereotypical preferences; girls playing with dolls and boys playing with toy guns. Participants agreed that these stereotypical preferences are what drives people to prefer video games and video game genres. Norris’s (2005) study supports the current findings by stating that girls are brought up passive and non-violent, therefore when they become women, they are less likely to engage in violent video games. They found that women playing on the computer experienced hostile relationships online, experienced less sexual harassment and

were more aggressive. Meaning that these computer games influenced these women's behaviours to be more aggressive. However, Chalabaev et al. (2013) suggest that stereotypes are formed and internalised with two approaches; 1) the situational approach (stereotype threat theory), presence of stereotypes influence individuals, and 2) the content of stereotypes approach (stereotype content model), this is the ambivalence of stereotypes which could legitimise the norm. Therefore, this study disputes the current findings as researchers do not mention stereotypes in childhood upbringing and experiences.

Summary of Analysis

The aim of the current study was to investigate the experiences of female video gamers within a male dominated community, in this case the video gaming community. The analysis suggested that female video gamers do not tend to label themselves as gamers, however do feel included within the community. They view gaming as just a hobby, however have a circle of friends associated with gaming. Additionally, they consider the gaming world to be male dominated as an activity and within the community. They said that this stems from stereotypes forming from a young age and from childhood upbringing and experiences.

Limitations

The current research did have some limitations within the overall design and data collection process. Perhaps a written questionnaire might have been slightly overwhelming for participants and could have discouraged them from either participating entirely or from writing sufficient information for data analysis. Future considerations such as; creating less extensive questions, however re-worded for more access for meaningful data might have benefited. Another issue could have been the assumption of participant's knowledge. Some participants misunderstood one of the questions which caused them to either answer with the wrong idea in mind or ignore the question entirely. Future considerations such as; providing definitions of certain words before or after the question could make participants aware of what they are basing their answers on. Lastly, I did not take advantage of the possible locations to collect more meaningful data. I limited myself to mostly university students, however did not take advantage of gaming communities both offline and online. Communities such as Facebook groups and Twitch streams I frequently follow and am subscribed to.

Future Directions

I hope to convince female gamers that they have rights to accept and express their video gaming interest without shame. By reading this they might realise that there are other female gamers among them. Furthermore, I anticipate that this research could make video gaming a more gender-neutral activity. I aspire that the general public will read this and have their perspective of video gaming stereotypes altered. A larger goal of mine would be for the video gaming industry to equalise gender representation in advertisements and video games themselves. Therefore, a more effective method for challenging video gaming stereotypes. In terms of further recommendations after this research based on the current findings; further research is necessary exploring female's experiences in video gaming. This could help individuals realise and understand that video gaming is slowly becoming a more gender-neutral activity. Furthermore, could improve the way the video gaming industry advertises and portrays video games to the general public. This more accurate form of female portrayal could potentially rid the ongoing stereotypes that some parents adhere to when raising their children. With further research there could be a change in perspective and therefore a stereotype could eventually be somewhat eliminated. Finally, perhaps doing a follow up study exploring the male perception of men dominating the video gaming community. This may highlight further, or challenge, where apparent reliance on traditional stereotyping may, or may not prevail.

Conclusion

Overall the aim of the current study was to explore female video gamer's experiences within a male dominated community, this being the video gaming community. The current research findings were; that female gamers do not typically identify as "gamers", meaning they do not label themselves as a "gamer". Therefore, they see gaming as just a hobby and nothing too important to their lives. However, they do form friendships offline as well as online through the gaming community, therefore feel highly included within the community. Furthermore, found that although participants agree that gaming is a masculine environment, they state that gaming is not always gendered and gaming is becoming more gender neutral overtime. Lastly, participants mention that stereotypical norms are taught, internalised and adhered to through childhood upbringing and experiences. Therefore, individuals are taught from a significantly young age that gaming is a masculine activity due to the "masculine"

themes within them. This is what potentially starts the endless cycle of teaching children about stereotypical norms about gaming. This sort of research is important because this gives female gamers the opportunity to speak about their experiences within a safe place. The current study could be a starting point to make gaming more gender neutral. Furthermore, this could alter people's perspectives about gaming stereotypes both in the public and industry.

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