



RSGC  
Royal St. George's College

# The Young Researcher

2024 Volume 8 | Issue 1

To what extent does the consumption of media featuring female role models in the gaming community influence how likely female adolescents are to self-identify as a “gamer”?

Joella Lin

#### Recommended Citation

Lin, J. (2024). To what extent does the consumption of media featuring female role models in the gaming community influence how likely female adolescents are to self-identify as a “gamer”? *The Young Researcher*, 8(1), 84-95.  
<http://www.theyoungresearcher.com/papers/lin.pdf>

ISSN: 2560-9815 (Print) 2560-9823 (Online) Journal homepage: <http://www.theyoungresearcher.com>

All articles appearing in *The Young Researcher* are licensed under CC BY-NC-ND 2.5 Canada License.

# To What Extent Does the Consumption of Media Featuring Female Role Models in the Gaming Community Influence How Likely Female Adolescents Are to Self-Identify as a “Gamer”?

Joella Lin

*Abstract:* Compared to male players, female players are much less likely to identify themselves as gamers due to the stigma associated with gaming. Currently, no research has been conducted on how female role models, in this case content creators, influence female players’ decisions regarding their gamer identity. Nine semi-structured interviews were conducted to explore how the content consumed by female players influenced their gamer identity. Results suggest that, while there is a relationship between the two variables, the influence of content creators varied. In particular, there was a trend of female players expressing distaste towards some popular female content creators, suggesting that, in some cases, the influence of female content creators on the gamer identity of female players may be negative. As gaming becomes increasingly more popular, it is important that we understand how to best support female players so that they feel they belong in the gaming community.

*Keywords:* Gamer Identity, Female Role Models, Content Creators, Female Adolescent Gamers

## Introduction

According to the Entertainment Software Association, female gamers made up 45% of the total gamers in the United States in 2021 (Entertainment Software Association, 2021). Yet, when people think of gamers, they don’t tend to think of women (Kuss et al., 2022). The stereotypical “gamer” image consists of being male, unsociable, and intensely obsessed with playing video games, specifically games that are classified as “hardcore” (Paaßen et al., 2016). The general consensus is that hardcore video games tend to contain violence and action, with a popular example being first-person shooters (Loporcaro et al., 2013). Heavy investment in hardcore games, especially competitive

titles such as *Valorant* or *League of Legends*, is considered one of the key traits of a gamer.

A trend that has been observed in the gaming community is that more male players associate themselves with the gamer label than female players, despite the high population of female gamers (Entertainment Software Association, 2021; Vermeulen et al., 2017). This begs the question, why? And what factors are influencing female players from not identifying themselves as gamers?

This paper aims to answer the following research question: to what extent does the consumption of media featuring female role models in the gaming community influence how likely female adolescents are to self-identify as a “gamer”?

## Literature Review

There are many reasons why female players may choose to not identify as gamers, but the main ones are misogyny and perceptions of the gamer identity. Misogyny runs deep in the gaming community and industry, from the design of games themselves to the environment that surrounds many popular game titles. Common stereotypes in the gaming community such as female players being less adept than male players negatively impact female players and their efficacy in gaming (Kaye & Pennington, 2016). Additionally, female characters are often sexualized in video games, further contributing to the objectification of women in gaming spaces (Kuss et al., 2022) and possibly leading to an increase in harassment towards female players. During the mid-2010s, the event #GamerGate, which was a harassment campaign that targeted women in the game industry, further exposed the misogyny in the game community and led to negative press in the mainstream media (Mortensen, 2016).

Sexist stereotypes and attitudes towards female players have also led many female players to go out of their way to avoid encounters that may lead to negative experiences; this coping mechanism has been termed “avoidance” (Fox & Tang, 2017). It has been shown that female players commonly hide their gender in an effort to protect themselves from misogynistic comments and sexist treatment (Fox & Tang, 2017). This sort of practice is called “gender masking,” where female players will choose to use male or gender-neutral terms and avatars in an effort to conceal their gender (Fox & Tang, 2017). Presumably, strategies such as gender masking would lead to a decrease in the likelihood of being harassed online; however, it has been noted that gender masking would further make female players invisible, especially to other female players (Fox & Tang, 2017). These types of strategies are also prevalent in professional gaming, with many female players in E-sports tournaments going through entire matches without ever mentioning their gender for fear of being discriminated against (Madden et al., 2021).

Harassment against female players is prevalent in-game and in spaces involving content creation, with female video game streamers often being objectified or harassed. Due to the toxic environments that surround many “hardcore” games, many female players

make the intentional decision to avoid them, leading to a disproportionate number of male players in the genre (Hopp & Fisher, 2017). Fox and Tang (2017) noted that experiencing sexual harassment can lead to rumination, which involves repetitive thoughts about negative experiences and distress, and subsequently can lead to withdrawal from specific video games or the gaming community.

It has been shown that social factors are also key motivators for players, especially those who seek out multiplayer games, but female players struggle to find social support in gaming spaces (McLean & Griffiths, 2018). The lack of social support has negatively affected female players’ well-being and self-efficacy (McLean & Griffiths, 2018). Many female players report that they enjoy gaming less, especially in regard to competitive and hardcore games, because they feel the need to prove themselves, adding on internal pressure. A lack of organizational support for female players is also apparent as game companies and organizations remain unresponsive to many issues that female players face (Fox & Tang, 2017).

The combination of coping strategies that female players employ to avoid harassment and other unwanted experiences as well as the lack of support received from gaming communities and organizations has contributed to the player base for “hardcore” video games being dominated by male players. Popular E-sports culture reflects this, with the majority of professional E-sports players being male (Kuss et al., 2022). This has led to a lack of female representation in E-sports, as professional female gamers in E-sports are considered a minority, with even fewer who are considered “successful” (Kuss et al., 2022).

In the video game streaming space, female streamers also face more challenges than male streamers, leading to fewer female gamer representations. In a study conducted by Uszkoreit (2017), viewers deemed that personality was equally important for both male and female video game streamers, but gameplay or skill was not considered nearly as important for female streamers. For female streamers on Twitch, appearance and sex appeal were considered more crucial by viewers in order to achieve success. This perception further demonstrates that female players are objectified and sexualized in gaming spaces, as a female player who is skilled at a game but not deemed conventionally attractive or chooses to not use a camera is

less likely to be popular. With attractiveness posing as another barrier to success in the field, there are fewer popular representations of female players in content creation.

In E-sports, tournaments are often divided by gender. In the study conducted by Madden et al. (2021), organizers pointed out that it was to create space for female representation and allow female players to build confidence. Interestingly, a female interviewee who competed in E-sports disagreed, saying that skilled players should compete against each other.

Sexism and misogyny are some of the biggest barriers for female players to being heavily involved in gaming communities and feeling included in the gamer identity, but the perception people have of the gamer identity is another reason why female players choose not to identify with it. In many ways, the gamer identity clashes with the female identity because of what it represents. In a study conducted by Vermeulen et al. (2017), female players who felt closely connected to other women or had stronger in-group ties were less likely to identify with the gamer identity; as gaming is still viewed by many as a masculine pastime, having strong in-group ties (to women) could discourage female players from identifying with the gamer label and conform to the majority.

In addition to the factors mentioned above, the lack of female representation in gaming spaces can pose a psychological barrier for female players wanting to pick up gaming as a hobby or a profession, especially in regard to hardcore games. It has been shown that female representation plays an important role in helping combat stereotypes and influence the aspirations of young women (Olsson & Martiny, 2018). Positive female representation can lead to increased engagement in STEM fields, which has close ties with video games. Exposure to stereotype-incongruent role models (role models that contradict what is typically expected of their identity group) in the gaming space could help female players feel more comfortable and confident in their gamer identity (Olsson & Martiny, 2018). Dasgupta and Asgari (2004) found that after exposure to stereotype-incongruent female role models, female students were quicker to associate leadership with women. Another study conducted by González-Pérez et al. (2020) found that girls who participated in information sessions with positive female role models in math showed increased prefer-

ence for a STEM career and a decrease in the effects of gender-role stereotypes. The researcher hypothesizes that similar effects will also be evident in regard to exposure to female representation in video games and female self-identification as a gamer.

While research into the impact of female role models has been conducted in regard to STEM fields, politics, business, and leadership, few studies touch on the topic in game studies. Research on the experiences of female gamers is also lacking in comparison to the experiences of male gamers, with female gamers only becoming a focus in recent years.

This study aims to help fill those gaps by looking at the relationship between consuming content created by female gamers and its impact on how likely female students are to identify as gamers. As Vermeulen et al. (2017) noted, identification as a gamer can have implications pertaining to digital literacy and pursuing a career in tech-based industries; more female representation could lead to more female players identifying as gamers and potentially encourage more females to enter STEM fields. Thus, it's important that this gap is addressed to provide more insight into female identification as gamers.

## Method

Interviews were conducted to observe the effect of consuming gaming content featuring female role models on female-identifying gamers. Semi-structured interviews were chosen as the main method as it was used by Madden et al. (2021) and Kuss et al. (2022) in their respective studies on female players and their gamer identity. Additionally, semi-structured interviews allow for deeper insights into the perceptions of the participants as well as the experiences that led to the participants' decisions to identify as gamers or not identify as gamers (Knott et al., 2022). Role models include but are not limited to streamers, YouTubers, and E-sports players, all of whom can fall under the umbrella term of content creators; some examples of female role models within gaming include Pokimane, Valkyrae, and Kyedae, all of whom either stream gaming content or compete in E-sports. Within the context of this study, the terms role models and content creators may be used interchangeably.

After receiving approval from the ethics board, a

Google consent form containing information about the study was sent out using purposive sampling as the study had multiple requirements that participants had to fulfill prior to participation in the study. The consent form informed participants of possible risks and their right to withdraw from the study in addition to providing other necessary information (please see Appendix 1). The study required participants: to be female-identifying; play video games; follow and/or actively watch gaming content creators, with content creators being anyone who created content centred around gaming, regardless of genre; and be between the ages of 16 to 18. The reason why the study was not open to all women but rather those who are female-identifying is because there are more factors to consider when looking at the experiences of all women; thus, they were excluded from the study due to scope and feasibility.

Before the interview began, participants were again informed that they were being recorded (if they had given prior consent), their right to not answer a question, and their right to stop the interview at any time and withdraw. The interviews conducted were semi-structured with nine total baseline questions. Following each interview, the recording was transcribed in order to conduct a thematic analysis to look for themes and trends.

Transcripts were reviewed once for open coding, to look for recurring trends and patterns. Following the initial coding process, codes would be categorized into larger themes, and a second reading of transcripts would take place.

Although interview questions varied between interviews depending on the participant's response and interests, each interview started with a question about what the participant's definition of a gamer was. This question was followed up by whether or not the participant believed they complied with their definition of a gamer. Further interview questions can be found in Appendix 2; these questions acted as a baseline for the interviewer, but would sometimes be modified to fit the participant's interests and responses.

## Findings

Using thematic analysis, four major themes were identified.

## Results & Discussion

### Recurring Theme #1: I am a gamer, but...

The majority of participants gave very similar definitions for what they considered to be a gamer. Participant 1 said, "I think as long as you play any kind of game, you're a gamer." Participants 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 8, and 9 all had very similar definitions as well. Participant 7's definition of a gamer was a little stricted in terms of time commitment, but still followed the trend, saying, "[a gamer is] someone [who] actively seeks out and enjoys playing video games, and plays them often."

However, when asked if the participants themselves identified with the label, eight of the nine participants expressed some sort of hesitation and only identified as gamers with justification, with the main two reasons that deterred them from confidently identifying as a gamer being: gaming as only a hobby; and lack of interest in hardcore games or strong interest in video game genres that participants believed are not viewed as conventional by most gamers and the general public (for example, otome games which are romance heavy). Many participants acknowledged the hypocrisy as they understood they objectively fit under their own definition of a gamer, but were not confident in identifying as one. Participant 5 explicitly stated that, "Just someone I guess who enjoys games [I would consider a gamer]. I don't think there's strict requirements for someone to identify as a gamer. I would be hypocritical because personally I don't think I- like I wouldn't say I'm a really heavy gamer. I feel like there's different levels. Like you can be- it could be like an occupation, you could be a full-time gamer, as your job. But I like it as a hobby." This stood out to the researcher not only because the participant explicitly notes the hypocrisy but because major time commitment was not a requirement to be a gamer in the majority of the definitions given by participants, yet participants 1 and 3 also expressed the idea that a true gamer games as an occupation; for that reason, they could not be a true gamer but rather a "causal" gamer. The idea of true gamers gaming as an occupation aligns with the descriptions of gaming

THE INFLUENCE OF FEMALE ROLE MODELS IN THE GAMING COMMUNITY

Table #1: Definition of Themes

Theme	Definition
I am a gamer, but...	Many participants expressed that they were gamers, but only when certain conditions were met (these conditions were specific to the individual). Codes include: I game as a hobby/ low commitment; I don't play hardcore games; high gaming content consumption, but not actively playing games.
Exposure to Genre Representation, but not Identity Representation	The majority of participants stated that they felt represented in terms of the genres of games or video game titles they like to play, but not in terms of gender identity. Codes include: My interests in game titles and genres are represented; My interests in game titles and genres are not represented; I feel represented as a female gamer; I do not feel represented as a female gamer.
Rejection of Female Content Creators	Participants expressed distaste for female content creators for a variety of reasons; this led them to avoid consuming content by female content creators and/or felt that some female content creators gave female gamers a bad reputation. Codes include: I disliked how female content creators presented themselves/ their fan base; I felt turned off.
Influence on Gamer Identity	Participants noted the influence that content creators may have had on their game identity, which ranged from an overall negative influence to no influence to a positive influence. Codes include: positive influence; no influence; negative influence.

content creators, who make a living off of their gaming.

Meanwhile, Participant 2, who used to stream her gameplay on Twitch, also expressed hesitancy toward associating with the gamer label due to her lack of interest in hardcore games: "I don't know, I guess it's [unintelligible]. Especially 'cause I used to be a Twitch streamer too. When I stream, I wouldn't stream, I don't know, games like *Valorant*. So, I didn't really consider myself a gamer."

Similarly, participant 4 stated her interest in non-hardcore games and how that discouraged her from identifying as a gamer: "I play a couple games on rotation. Otome games, basically. But I don't think I would call myself a gamer... 'Cause like the games she [my friend] played was like COD and Dota, those types of games that are more mainstream."

All nine participants identified with the gamer label to some degree, but many stated that they were cautious about associating themselves with the gamer label outside of private circles. The existence of the

stereotypical gamer image also appears to be extremely prevalent as participants referenced one or more aspects of it. Some participants expressed that the negative perception they have of gamers can be partly attributed to the content and content creators they watch; this will be discussed further under Recurring Themes #2 and #3. Overall, the hesitancy that participants exhibit towards identifying with the gamer label is not surprising as it is also reflected in the literature (Kuss et al., 2022).

**Recurring Theme #2: Exposure to Genre Representation, but not Identity Representation**

Overall, participants felt that they could find content and content creators who played the same game titles as they did or shared similar tastes in video games. Participant 4 stated that, "whatever game I want to play there's going to be a few creators that

have played them, so there is that representation. I've never not been able to find a game that I wanted to watch." No participant mentioned that they could not find their desired content in terms of genres, although participants 3 and 4 both expressed that some game genres were more easily accessible and had more content than others; participant 4 added to their answer, "I feel like the representation is definitely not as covered [in indie games] as some other genres. But there is still that representation."

In terms of representation regarding gender identity in the gaming space, participants felt that it was lacking. The majority of the participants said they watched mostly male content creators, with content made by female content creators making up less than half of the content they consumed; many reflected that this was not intentional but rather occurred naturally. This is likely because male gaming content creators are more popular on platforms such as YouTube and Twitch, and thus are more likely to be pushed forward by the algorithm. One participant said: "[T]he recommendation system maybe [is the reason why I don't watch many female content creators], it just didn't really recommend me any female content creators." This sentiment was echoed by other participants, many of whom said they discover content creators through features such as the "For You" page which uses the recommendation system. The majority of participants, except for participant 8, stated that they were not aware of the disproportionate ratio between genders among the content creators they followed. While participants 6 and 4 expressed that they tended to avoid female content creators citing reasons explored under Recurring Theme #3, they were not aware of the gender ratio among the content creators they followed.

When asked if they felt that female gamers were properly represented in the gaming space, participant 2 had this to say: "No, I don't think so. I think there's definitely a lot of people trying to make it big but there's only a few that are [representative of female gamers]. I think that when you seek out people it's easier to be represented. Like for example, CutieCinderella specifically tries to make people feel represented, and so when I'm watching that, I do feel represented, but when I'm just looking at [the gaming space in] a general view, I don't think so." Similarly, participant 6 said, "I don't think so. I think the community is so

male-dominated... I feel like there's not that much support from females towards female content creators because there's a lack of female gamers." In addition to participant 6, participants 1, 4, 7, and 9 noted that female content creators were either less popular than male content creators or much less promoted on media platforms. Participant 7 said, "I feel like gaming in the stereotypical sense is more of a male thing and I think female gamers don't get enough representation. For example, when I search on YouTube, usually the first few videos I see are made by male content creators."

Overall, participants felt that representation in their respective gaming interests was present, but gender representation in the gaming space and their specific interests fell short due to the lack of popular female content creators. This may have contributed to the image participants had that gamers are male as participants felt less represented in terms of their gender identity across all genres of gaming content that they consumed; this is specifically evident in participant 7's quote.

### **Recurring Theme #3: Rejection of Female Content Creators**

Despite the fact that the majority of participants did not feel that female gamers were represented, there was also an apparent distaste for existing representation through female content creators in almost half of the participants (four out of nine). Those who rejected female content creators in the gaming space noted that the portrayal of the "gamer girl" image deterred them from wanting to consume the content of said creators. The "gamer girl" image in this instance is one that often sexualizes the female gamer and caters to the male gaze; the behaviours mentioned by participants below are usually associated with the gamer girl image. Participant 9 stated, "While I won't say all female content creators do this, a lot of the popular ones really don't embody what I think are female values that some other females might embody. I think that they portray themselves as a specific type of female that I don't think I associate myself as." While talking about female VTubers (content creators who use digital avatars instead of their real faces), Participant 4 also expressed distaste towards some of them, saying, "certain [female] VTubers have a very high-pitched



voice, and it feels a bit like they're forcing it... they kind of put me off, so I avoid watching their content because I don't like their voice." Participants 5 and 6 echoed similar sentiments that some popular female content creators catered to the male gaze, which made them uncomfortable or was something they did not want themselves to associate with.

These participants expressed that the "gamer girl" image portrayed and perpetuated by popular female content creators in the gaming space made them much more cautious of the gamer label and identity, and thus less likely to identify with the label.

Participant 5 commented that the image perpetuated by some popular female content creators may also contribute to a positive feedback loop, saying:

"[the fanbase's] demand for a female gamer is that they're maybe hot or they have a hot body or they look really great. And because of this demand, sometimes female content creators might produce that kind of [inappropriate or suggestive] content... and as the community continues to be like that, we continue to view female gamers in that way, in that lens."

Participant 5's mention of the toxicity of some female content creator fan bases and how that may further be contributing to the negative image she has of some female content creators was also expressed by participant 9. Moreover, while participant 5 commented that she wishes to be supportive of all women in the gaming space, she explicitly stated that she felt this specific type of female content creator does not represent her.

These sentiments shown that some female content creators may actually have more of a negative influence on female self-identification as gamers for many female players.

### **Recurring Theme #4: Influence on Gamer Identity**

The influence of content creators on the self-identification as gamers for female adolescents varied among participants. Five of the nine participants reflected and expressed that content creators had no influence or negative influence on their choice to self-identify as gamers. For example, participant 3 said, "I feel like when I consume content it's like I feel like I

need to kind of like work towards where they are... otherwise it's like I'm not good enough to be a gamer, you know?" This shows a negative influence of content creators as the participant feels that consuming the content of content creators increases the pressure for her to perform well in games in order to consider herself a gamer. Participant 4 also expressed that watching content creators made her feel as though she needed to be more skilled to identify as a gamer herself. Participant 9 said that content creators, specifically those that perpetuate the negative gamer girl image as mentioned under Recurring Theme #3, led her to be more cautious of revealing her gamer identity, but did not influence her choice to identify as a gamer personally.

Two of the nine participants explicitly stated that, overall, watching content creators had a positive influence on their choice to identify as gamers. Participant 6 said that watching content creators, regardless of their genders, made her feel more integrated into the community: "having played more games and being more engaged in this gaming community, I feel like I kind of integrated myself into the definition of gamer that I have. I feel like by watching them [content creators], I belong in the community and therefore I can classify myself as a gamer." When asked about how content creators influenced her decision to identify as a gamer, participant 7 said, "I don't play a lot of competitive games but I watch content creators who does a lot of indie game reviews, and if they define themselves as gamers, I might be more likely to call myself a gamer based on their definition."

In general, it seemed that the responses were mixed, with a variety of factors that extended beyond the influence of just the content creators themselves. Participant 4 believed that social factors played a more important role than content creators or role models in influencing her choice as to whether or not to self-identify as a gamer. Referring to some of her previous social interactions, participant 4 said:

"I feel like it's more of a social factor [that influences my definition of a gamer], because I used to consider myself a gamer... it's only when I'm asked what types of games do you play that I had to re-evaluate that. Like 'Oh, am I going to get laughed at if I say I play story games?' [...] I mean I probably didn't think of myself as a gamer afterwards."



Overall, based on the interviews and extrapolated quotes above, it is difficult to say the exact impact that content creators have on female adolescents and their choice to self-identify as gamers or not.

### Limitations & Future Directions

Before concluding, there are some limitations to this study that are important to keep in mind. For one, although this study aimed to observe the effects of female content creators, participants were not required to watch female content creators exclusively or heavily. This was to allow a variety of experiences to be studied and to compare the experiences between female adolescents who consumed content by male content creators and those who mainly consumed content by female content creators. However, there was a lack of perspectives from female adolescents who exclusively or mostly watched female content creators. Another limitation to keep in mind is that it may be more difficult to generalize the findings of this study to the general population due to the selective and snowball sampling method and small sample size. Furthermore, this study did not include all women but only female-identifying women, meaning some perspectives were not included. These limitations can be addressed in future studies, with a more inclusive and larger population, whose media consumption centers around gaming content created by female role models.

Finally, this study does not look at how social factors may intersect with the influences of content creators; for example, looking at the fan communities of the content creators and their influence. These were ideas brought up by a number of participants during their interviews when touching on other factors that influenced their decisions around identifying with the gamer identity. These limitations are possible areas of study for further research.

### Conclusion

The research question, “To what extent does consumption of media featuring female role models in the gaming community influence how likely female adolescents are to self-identify as a ‘gamer?’” can be partially answered by the four themes found in this

study: I am a gamer, but...; Exposure to Genre Representation, but not Identity Representation; Rejection of Female Content Creators; and Influence on Gamer Identity. While this study can not give a definitive answer as to what extent female content creators influence female adolescents to identify with the gamer label, it does establish there is a clear relationship between the two factors. For example, the current female gamer image perpetuated by some popular female content creators seems to have a negative impact on female adolescents and their willingness to self-identify as a gamer. However, positive representations such as skilled gamers, regardless of their gender, also seem to have a negative influence on the gamer identity of some female adolescents. The findings did not align with the researcher’s hypothesis but indicate that, while content creators and role models appear to be just one pillar of the gaming community, it is a topic that should be explored further.

As video games grow increasingly popular each year, it is important to understand why many female gamers, who make up such a large part of the gaming community, feel that they do not belong in said community. In addition to the implications that the gamer identity has pertaining to digital literacy and pursuing a career in tech-based industries for female gamers (Vermeulen et al., 2017), a study by McNamara et al. (2021) also shows the importance of community identity as it can help reduce loneliness and improve well being. Therefore, it is vital that we determine factors that may help female gamers to feel more included in the gaming community. This study provides deeper insights into how role models, through content creators, can help to positively and negatively influence the gamer identities of female gamers. Furthermore, this research suggests that exposure to female role models in gaming may have a negative influence on female adolescents and their gamer identity depending on how the female role model portrays herself. Moreover, this study gives direction for potential future research in order to flesh out the ideas that have been discussed in this paper.

## References

- Dasgupta, N., & Asgari, S. (2004). Seeing is believing: Exposure to counterstereotypic women leaders and its effect on the malleability of automatic gender stereotyping. *Journal of Experimental Social Psychology, 40*(5), 642–658. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jesp.2004.02.003>
- Entertainment Software Association. (2021). *2021 Essential Facts About the Video Game Industry*. Entertainment Software Association. <https://www.theesa.com/resource/2021-essential-facts-about-the-video-game-industry/>
- Fox, J., & Tang, W. Y. (2017). Women's experiences with general and sexual harassment in online video games: Rumination, organizational responsiveness, withdrawal, and coping strategies. *New Media & Society, 19*(8), 1290–1307. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1461444816635778>
- González-Pérez, S., Mateos de Cabo, R., & Sáinz, M. (2020). Girls in STEM: Is it a female role-model thing? *Frontiers in Psychology, 11*(2204). <https://doi.org/10.3389/fpsyg.2020.02204>
- Hopp, T., & Fisher, J. (2017). Examination of the relationship between gender, performance, and enjoyment of a first-person shooter game. *Simulation & Gaming, 48*(3), 338–362. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1046878117693397>
- Kaye, L. K., & Pennington, C. R. (2016). “Girls can't play”: The effects of stereotype threat on females' gaming performance. *Computers in Human Behavior, 59*, 202–209. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.chb.2016.02.020>
- Knott, E., Rao, A. H., Summers, K., & Teeger, C. (2022). Interviews in the social sciences. *Nature Reviews Methods Primers, 2*(1), 1–15. <https://doi.org/10.1038/s43586-022-00150-6>
- Kuss, D. J., Kristensen, A. M., Williams, A. J., & Lopez-Fernandez, O. (2022). To be or not to be a female gamer: A qualitative exploration of female gamer identity. *International Journal of Environmental Research and Public Health, 19*(3), 1169. <https://doi.org/10.3390/ijerph19031169>
- Loporcaro, J., Ortega, C., & Egnoto, M. (2013). Proceedings of the New York State Communication Association: The hardcore scorecard: Defining, quantifying and understanding “hardcore” video game culture. *New York State Communication Association, 2013*, 7. <https://docs.rwu.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1073&context=nyscapceedings>
- Madden, D., Liu, Y., Yu, H., Sonbudak, M. F., Troiano, G. M., & Hartevelde, C. (2021). “Why are you playing games? You are a girl!”: Exploring gender biases in Esports. *Proceedings of the 2021 CHI Conference on Human Factors in Computing Systems*. <https://doi.org/10.1145/3411764.3445248>
- McLean, L., & Griffiths, M. D. (2018). Female gamers' experience of online harassment and social support in online gaming: A qualitative study. *International Journal of Mental Health and Addiction, 17*(4), 970–994. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s11469-018-9962-0>
- McNamara, N., Stevenson, C., Costa, S., Bowe, M., Wakefield, J., Kellezi, B., Wilson, I., Halder, M., & Mair, E. (2021). Community identification, social support, and loneliness: The benefits of social identification for personal well-being. *British Journal of Social Psychology, 60*(4). <https://doi.org/10.1111/bjso.12456>
- Mortensen, T. E. (2016). Anger, fear, and games: The long event of #GamerGate. *Games and Culture, 13*(8), 787–806. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1555412016640408>
- Olsson, M., & Martiny, S. E. (2018). Does exposure to counterstereotypical role models influence girls' and women's gender stereotypes and career choices? A review of social psychological research. *Frontiers in Psychology, 9*. <https://doi.org/10.3389/fpsyg.2018.02264>
- Paaßen, B., Morgenroth, T., & Stratemeyer, M. (2016). What is a true gamer? The male gamer stereotype and the marginalization of women in video game culture. *Sex Roles, 76*(7–8), 421–435. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s11199-016-0678-y>
- Uszkoreit, L. (2017, August 8). *Video Game Live Streaming and the Perception of Female Gamers - ProQuest*. [www.proquest.com/dissertations-theses/video-game-live-streaming-perception-female/docview/2183258961/se-2](http://www.proquest.com/dissertations-theses/video-game-live-streaming-perception-female/docview/2183258961/se-2)
- Vermeulen, L., Van Bauwel, S., & Van Looy, J. (2017). Tracing female gamer identity. An empirical study into gender and stereotype threat perceptions. *Computers in Human Behavior, 71*, 90–98. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.chb.2017.01.054>

## Appendix 1. Consent Form

### 1. Project Title

Consumption of Gaming Media Featuring Female Role Models on Female Self-Identification as a Gamer

### 2. Study investigators

Researcher:

Affiliation:

Contact information:

Advisor:

Affiliation:

Contact information:

### 3. Funding source

Funding is not applicable for this study.

### 4. Invitation to participate

You are being invited to participate in a research study. Choosing whether or not to participate is entirely your choice. If you decide not to participate, there will be no negative impacts on your relationship with the researcher. The information provided in this form tells you about what is involved in the research, what you will be asked to do, and any potential risks or benefits. Please read this form carefully, take all the time you need, and ask any questions you may have.

Consent is an ongoing process. During the research study, we will tell you about any significant finding that could affect your willingness to continue to participate in this study.

### 5. Purpose of the research study

Identifying as a member of a community can increase one's sense of belonging and improve one's well-being. This study aims to explore female-identifying players and their gamer identity. The purpose of this research study is to explore how media consumption of gaming content featuring female role models may impact how female players identify as "gamers". By exploring this topic, we hope to further the understanding of female players in relation to the gamer community.

### 6. What you will be asked to do

Participants will be invited to participate in an interview conducted online through Zoom or Google

Meet or in person. With your permission, the interview will be recorded and then transcribed. The semi-structured interview will ask participants to reflect on their gaming experiences that may have influenced their relationship with the gamer identity.

### 7. Who can take part in the research study

Participants must be between the ages of 16 and 18, female-identifying (cis-woman), play video games, and consume long-form content and follow content creators related to gaming. Long-form content includes but is not limited to gaming videos over ten minutes, live streams, and viewing of E-sport tournaments. The type or genre of video games played does not matter.

This study aims to recruit at least 20 participants.

### 8. Possible risks and benefits

#### Risks

The harms or discomforts are no greater than what an average person would expect to experience in everyday life.

While the interview is structured with great care, spontaneous topics may arise that participants may find sensitive; for example, reflection on one's experiences in the gaming space could lead to discussions about harassment and other negative experiences. In such cases, participants will be guided away from those topics and be provided with resources at the end of the session. During the interview, participants may also choose to not answer questions that make them uncomfortable or withdraw their participation. This will not negatively affect the participant's relationship with the research in any way.

By agreeing to participate in this research, you are not giving up or waiving any legal rights in the event that you are harmed during the research.

#### Benefits

There is no guarantee that you will benefit directly from participating in this study. However, your participation will advance knowledge about the importance of female representation in the gaming field and female self-identification as gamers. This may benefit female gamers in the future and provide insights for researchers interested in this area of study.

## 9. Compensation/reimbursement

Participants will not be offered compensation of any kind for their participation in this study.

## 10. Privacy and confidentiality

Information about participants that will be collected includes age, sex, gaming habits, and content consumption habits. You will not be identified by name in the completed study, and your information will be de-identified. Participants may also choose to not have their direct quotations used in the final report of the completed study. All copies of interview recordings will be destroyed upon being transcribed.

Contact information will be collected solely for the purpose of contacting participants for follow-up interviews and/or to share the study results if requested.

Only the researchers directly involved in the study will have access to the collected data, including the participant's contact information, and all collected data will be stored electronically on a password-protected computer.

### Limits to confidentiality

Please be aware that we can not guarantee anonymity to interviewees due to the nature of interviews (i.e. the interviewer will hear and/or see your appearance). However, as stated above, the identities of all participants will be de-identified in the final study, and interviewees will have to option to not have their direct quotations used.

No personal information will be shared with anyone outside of the core research team, unless required by law. Instances where researchers are required, by law, to breach confidentiality include the following: child abuse or neglect that is ongoing and unknown to police, cases of imminent risk of physical harm to oneself or another, cases of sexual abuse, sexual assault, or sexual harassment by a health professional.

### Data or sample retention

Recordings of interviews will be destroyed by deleting them off all hardware after they are transcribed. Collected data from interviews will be deleted shortly following the completion of the final study report.

## 11. Reporting of results

Participants can choose to be informed of the study results; in which case the completed study will be sent

to them upon completion. Only group results will be reported, thus individuals will not be identified in any way. Direct quotes from participants will be anonymized and will not be attributed to a specific individual to protect the privacy of all participants.

The final study report will be submitted to the College Board to be evaluated. The final study report will potentially also be published in research journals or other publications. You will not be identified by name in any report of the study.

## 12. Withdrawing from the study

Your participation in this study is completely voluntary and you are under no obligation to participate. You may choose to withdraw at any time without consequence, and your decision to withdraw will not affect your relationship with the researcher in any way. If you choose to withdraw from the study, all collected data pertaining to you will subsequently be deleted and taken out of the study if possible. Please see below for specific points in time at which data removal will no longer be possible.

If you decide to withdraw after your interview, it will not be possible to remove your data as your data will be anonymized. It will not be possible to withdraw your data following the completion of the final report of the study.

## 13. Conflicts of interest

There are no conflicts of interest in this study.

## 14. Questions and contact information

If you have any questions about the study, please contact:

Researcher:

Affiliation:

Contact information:

## Appendix 2. Interview Baseline Questions

What do you think makes someone a gamer?

Do you personally believe you fit the definition you gave?

Why or why not?

Have you ever previously questioned or reflected on this aspect of your identity?

How often do you watch female content creators?

What percentage of your following list would you say are female content creators?

Is this [you have many/few female content creators in the list] something you're aware of?

Seeing your response to the previous question, do you actively seek out female content creators in the gaming space?

Why? Please elaborate on your response

Do you feel that the type of content you consume and the content creators you choose to watch have influenced your definition of what a gamer looks like in any way?

Do you feel that the content creators you choose to watch have influenced your choice to self-identify as a gamer?

Based on your response, you enjoy watching certain genres of video games (genre depends on the participant's answers)

Do you play any of the games or genres that you watch?

If you don't play any of the games/genres you watch, why do you choose to watch the genres or games you've selected?

If you do play them, do you think the content creators you watch have influenced your own gameplay experience and how you perceive yourself as a gamer? If so, how?

Do you usually watch content creators because you like them as a person or because of the genre and games they play?

If you usually watch content creators because of the creators themselves, do you feel that they represent you as a gamer in any capacity?

Overall, within content creation in the gaming space, do you feel that female gamers are properly represented? Do you feel you are properly represented?