

How do women create and manage their identity in a hostile and gendered gaming community: The case of League of Legends.

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HOW DO WOMEN CREATE AND MANAGE THEIR IDENTITY IN A HOSTILE AND GENDERED GAMING COMMUNITY: THE CASE OF LEAGUE OF LEGENDS.

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Glossary

- **ADC:** also called AD Carry, it's one of the 5 roles that a player can play. ADC is played on the bot lane along with the Support. ADC is probably the most damage-maker role, also considered as the most difficult to play as it deals a lot of damage while being fragile (does not have a lot of points of life).
- **Champion:** name given to the various characters that can be played in the game
- **E-girl:** the term e-girl originally refers to a woman who plays video games. In the LoL community, the term carries a negative connotation and defines a female player that seeks men's attention, that likes to look cute and attractive in an eccentric way and that loves playing Support and girly champions.
- **Elo:** synonym of ranking.
- **Jungle:** It's one of the 5 roles that a player can play. This one is the outsider because it is not part of the three principal lanes. In fact, it walks between those three and help one of them to achieve numerical superiority to be stronger.
- **Lane:** part of the map where players are spread out. There are 4 lanes in the whole map: Top, Mid, Bot and Jungle. The bot lane is played with 2 players.
- **LoL:** short for League of Legends.
- **Mid:** the main lane of the map and the shortest to the enemy's base. The player who plays this role must fight the enemy Mid.
- **Noob:** term used to describe someone who is bad at the game.
- **Ping:** alert used to inform other players about any problems or recommendations. You can ping for help or to tell someone is in danger, for example.
- **Randoms:** term used to qualify players you do not know personally. Randoms are players that have been assigned as your teammates or enemies randomly by the game.
- **Soft and hard gamer:** a soft gamer refers to someone which involvement in the game is considered as low based on its desire of success, number of hours played on the game and ranking. Conversely, the opposite can be said about a hard gamer.
- **Streamer:** someone who shares live content on the internet and refers mainly to video games.
- **Support:** it's one of the 5 roles that a player can play. Support is played on the bot lane along with the ADC. The main goal of the Support is to help his/her ADC to carry, by healing him, shielding him, or any other kind of boost or protection.
- **To carry the game:** when a player makes the majority of the team's kills.
- **To dodge the game:** when a player quits a game during the champion and lanes selection before that game has effectively started.
- **To be elo boost:** is when someone asks a more skilled player to raise his or her ranking by playing for him/her.
- **To mute:** game functionality which enables a player to not receive chat messages from a specific player, the whole team, or the entirety of the players (teammates and enemies).
- **To report:** making a report of an aggressive player to the banishment system created by Riot to get him/her banned.
- **To spam ping:** pings are usually used in game to ease communication between teammates. It consists in a temporary "warning" that a player can place on the map to help the team. However, practising spam ping (also called spamming) is when a player uses pings excessively, not to warn of danger, but to upset a teammate.
- **To tryhard:** refers to individuals who do their best to achieve their objectives. In Leagues of Legends, the goal of "tryharders" is to move up in ranking.

- **Top:** it's one of the 5 roles that a player can play. This lane is on the top of the map played in one-on-one.

1 Chapter 1: Introduction

1.1 *Context*

The gaming market is a sector that has known constant growth worldwide for several years. Thanks to the Covid-19 crisis, it registered a 23.1% increase in value in 2020, placing the industry as one of the fastest-growing economic sectors (EAE Business School, 2020). The gaming market is expected to keep on growing, with a hypothetical revenue of 206.5 billion in 2023 (Wijman, 2021).

As of today, the gaming industry counts 2,9 players worldwide and nearly half of those players are women (Wijman, 2021). Indeed, the percentage of female gamers is increasing every year (Brune, 2021). For instance, the percentage of female gamers went up by one percent between 2020 and 2021 to reach 42% in the US market (Comscore, Inc., 2021).

League of Legends, a MOBA, was the most popular PC game worldwide (PC Gaming Statistics 2021, 2021) and generated a revenue of 1.7 billion USD in 2020. The game was launched in 2009 by Riot Games and has become one of the most important international types of e-sport. League of Legends functioning relies on two teams of 5 gamers who must defend their nexus and destroy the enemy one's by playing a champion. Based on microtransactions, players get the opportunity to buy Riot points, the game currency, and purchase champions, skins, icons, and other items related to the universe of League of Legends (Clement, 2021) (Appendix I).

The League of Legends community can be considered as a virtual or online community which is defined as a network of people connected through a specific consumption activity or related group of activities that share social interaction, social ties, and a common space (Kozinets, 1999). In this context, the network of gamers is articulated around collaboration between teammates. Like many other entertainment activities, gamers get to interact in-game and create working relationships to build tactics or exchange advice, for example, or simply socialize, which can bring disruptive behaviours. Based on the interaction and co-play that is necessary to play multiplayer video games, video games can also lead to negative relationships and disruptive behaviours, which origins will be addressed later in the literature review (Fox and Tang, 2019). As cited in Lee et al. (2019), disruptive behaviours can be defined as "antisocial behaviours such as malicious cooperative denials, intentional violations, and verbal attacks, including insults hurled at other game participants".

The online gaming landscape is renowned for its toxicity, discrimination, and sexism patterns (Hayday et al., 2020; Xue et al., 2019; Mortensen, 2016). League of Legends is no exception to this well-established phenomenon, since 73% of US players have experienced harassment in 2020 while playing and 36% of players cited the game as one the most hostile environments to play (ADL & NewZoo, 2020).

In a study undertaken by Lee and al (2019), results demonstrate that moral behaviour (selection of an "evil" champion), competitive motivations (pursuing victory and success) and player's temperament offline (level of aggression) had a positive impact on disruptive behaviours among League of Legends players.

As a consequence of this behaviour, 38% players (who experience harassment while playing any video game) said they were changing the way they were playing (e.g., not using in-game voice chat or changing username) but the impact reaches also private life as between 7 to 10% of respondents said that harassment encourage them to change the way they "socialize, considered self-harm or took precautions to ensure their physical safety because of negative experiences" (ADL & NewZoo, 2020).

According to a survey undertaken by ADL & NewZoo in 2020 in the United-States, identity harassment also exists and is mainly directed at women or LGBTQ online players since 41% and 37%

of these gamers experienced harassment while playing. Indeed, the systemic pattern of online harassment directed primarily at women was already massively called out in 2014 during the GamerGate controversy (i.e., a Me-Too movement). However, ever since, this issue is still widely present in the gaming culture as proven by another research conducted by Bryter in 2020. Although men and women both experience abuse, female gamers are more likely to experience sexual harassment and to be excluded from games.

Harassment can therefore be considered as an important and specific type of social interaction of the participants of the League of Legends online community. Through all the social interactions and ties of an online community, participants can develop and shape multiple identities (Pinto et al., 2015; Williams and Kennedy, 2011). This process of identity creation is interesting when focusing on women who play in hostile gaming environments since they may develop specific identities or strategies to survive disruptive behaviours (Schelfout et al., 2019; Fox and Tang, 2019).

1.2 Motivations

From a managerial perspective, the phenomenon of online harassment is an essential topic for the gaming industry. Indeed, according to NewZoo, a specialist within the gaming sector, reducing toxicity and promoting inclusion and diversity within gaming ecosystems is one of the top 5 challenges of this year (Wijman, 2021).

In addition, inclusivity, which can be defined as “the fact or policy of not excluding members or participants on the grounds of gender, race, class, sexuality, disability, etc” (Collins, 2021), has been at the centre of our society but is also an important gamers' preoccupation according to a survey undertaken by EA's Consumer Global Insights. Indeed, more than half of respondents believe that it is crucial for companies to make video games more inclusive (Electronic Arts, 2019).

However, as presented in the context, this problem has been present for several years now and is only starting to be taken into account by gaming companies. Therefore, investigating the impact of a specific hostile gaming environment on gamers identity creation is in line with the current context of the gaming environment, this context being one of the most important and predominant preoccupations of the industry.

Then, as previously introduced, women within the gaming market are a particularly interesting topic to investigate since the industry seems to be slow to adapt to the current reality. Indeed, for several years now, female gamers have become more and more numerous and despite this important growth, there is still room for improvements in terms of adapting to this growing segment (from different perspectives: workforce and community player) (Yokoi, 2021). Given the importance of harassment towards female gamers, it is therefore relevant to investigate how these women create their identities and how they interact while playing. This perspective can therefore be interesting for practitioners to better understand those gamers.

Additionally, as previously explained, the League of Legends gamer community is famous for its toxic and aggressive behaviour which makes this game interesting from an identity creation perspective (Stummreiter, 2021; Forge of Empires, 2020; J, 2021)

From an academic perspective, online brand communities have been addressed by researchers for several years now and have been shown to be crucial for marketers. As of today, brand and online brand communities have widely been studied from a customer-brand relationship perspective. Indeed, since the years 2000s, brand community participation and identification, both offline or online, were demonstrated to help customers deepen their relationships with brands in terms of brand loyalty, community engagement, knowledge sharing and brand-related purchasing. (Brodie et al., 2013; Dessart, 2017).

Identity creation within communities can also be considered as a well-researched concept in the existing literature. Studies on the topic can be found from various angles such as customer-customer relationships within brand communities (Wang et al., 2017), identity creation and value creation for the customer (Seraj, 2012), customers in relation to their own identity creation within anti-branding community setting Dessart & Cova (2017) ...

However, scarce studies can be found on this concept in relation to gaming communities. Pinto et al. (2015) studied how gamers construct their identity in experiential online communities and Xue et al. (2019) explored narratives and identity construction of gamers in a social media platform.

However, video games communities have been at the centre of several studies, namely in relation with aggressive behaviours and discrimination (Adachi et al., 2015; Nguyen et al., 2022; Esmaeili and Woods, 2016). In relation with those papers, the topic of discrimination and online communities has already been investigated by few of scholars (Tynes et al., 2008; Lewis et al., 2015)

When it comes to research associating women and gaming environments, a concept studied for nearly a decade now, few studies can be found. Indeed, Schelfhout et al. (2019) studied how a woman competing in esports balanced her gender and gamer identities. Lopez-Fernandez et al. (2019) focused on female gamers profiles and the pattern of developing problematic behaviour. From gaming companies' point of view, Chess (2017) investigated female gamers and female representations in games. Few existing studies also focused on female gamers' motivations or the effect of sexualised avatarisation in video games on women (as cited in Lopez-Fernandez, 2019; Eklund, 2011). Finally, in 2016, Fox and Tang assessed women experiences in gaming environments in relation to sexual harassment. This study explored how harassment happens and its consequences on women players (behaviour and coping mechanisms).

Nevertheless, a gap still exists regarding identity creation of women within gaming communities. Indeed, even if Fox and Tang (2016) already took an interest in the consequences of harassment towards women gamers, the impact of harassment and the developed coping mechanisms on the identity of women. In addition, the previous research did not focus on a specific game environment, which can lead to different results. In addition, the various fields of research covered by this topic have all been investigated in the past, however no researchers have ever focused on those different concepts and perspectives simultaneously which proves the relevance of this research purpose.

In addition, this topic is important from a societal point of view as virtual behaviours and social interactions have already been proven to have an impact on psychological well-being (Erfani & Abedin, 2018; Lewis et al., 2015). Moreover, as cited in Fox and Tang (2016), sexual harassment can have an important impact on individuals: emotional distress, diminished self-esteem, anxiety, sleeplessness, depression, and post-traumatic stress disorder...

1.3 Problem statement

In light of those insights, this research aims to understand how female gamers create and shape their own identity through participating in the League of Legends community, a community renowned for its toxicity and disruptive behaviours. This study will look into the attitudes and feelings of women who experience harassment to understand what mechanisms they put in place, consciously, to keep on enjoying playing the game.

In relation with the previous objective, the study will also try to determine the reason underlying those mechanisms and the overall nature and characteristics of those actions and beliefs that help them build their identity.

Finally, the last main objective of this research is to discover if women create multiple and different identities such as the gender and gamer identity, a concept determined by Schelfhout (2019).

1.4 Contributions

By investigating the topic introduced above, insights will be added to the existing literature knowledge on identity creation within virtual communities. Simultaneously, this study will bring another perspective to research focusing on women in relation to gaming.

Additionally, this research will try to understand how female gamers participate and play at League of Legends while being exposed to disruptive behaviours from other players. The results will bring knowledge regarding processes and mechanisms used by those women to survive in this environment, leading to the creation of specific, unique, or multiple identities.

Another contribution brought by this study will be the possible confirmation of the idea of multiple identities shaping in this context (Schelfhout, 2019).

Finally, this research will complement the literature focusing on identity dilemmas by focusing on this concept but within an online community.

By investigating this topic, gaming marketers will also gain insights on the disruptive behaviours impact on a particular group of players. Indeed, as cited in Lee et al. (2019), it has been proven by research that disruptive behaviours (such as online harassment) are seen as a severe threat to having a great playing experience. However, practitioners have limited knowledge on the impact on the identity creation of female gamers. Consequently, this study will help them better understand this group from a deeper and more qualitative angle.

In addition, this study, with further investigation, might be considered as foundation work to help practitioners implement better communications and strategies too. Those strategies might in the end assist marketers in reaching online communities' benefits (e.g., customer engagement, brand loyalty and advocacy, information sharing...).

1.5 Approach

In order to answer the research purpose, a literature review of the concept of identity creation within online communities, gaming communities and women in relation to gaming will be provided. The concept of hegemonic masculinity and the theory of identity dilemmas will also be addressed. Then, propositions will be created on the basis of the main concepts and theories discovered in the literature reviews. Further, the chosen research design will be detailed, and the data collection process will be defined and justified. Next, the data collection technique will be determined, and the results will be disclosed and discussed. Lastly, the theoretical and managerial implications will be displayed along with the recommendations, possible limitations, and discussions about future research.

2 Chapter 2: Literature review

2.1 *Online & virtual communities*

The concept of online or virtual communities has been widely studied for the last two decades, with studies dating back to the end of the nineties. Kozinets defines virtual communities in 1999 as a network of people connected through a specific consumption activity or related group of activities that share social interaction, social ties, and a common space. This study mainly focuses on virtual communities that emerge from a consumption activity, which refers to consumption-related interests. He argues that identification to those communities is based on two non-independent factors, being the relationship with the consumption activity and the intensity of relationships with members of the community.

In 2007, Sproull and Arriaga define online communities as open collectives of dispersed individuals with common interests who are not always known or recognizable, which have an individual and collective dimension. This definition adds a new notion in comparison to the definition given by Kozinets which is the concept of identification of members. Indeed, members of an online community cannot always be identified. This notion of anonymity or social ambiguous identities has been studied by Faraj et al. in 2011 in the context of knowledge collaboration within online communities. This research explains that due to the permeability of online communities' boundaries, identifying information (such as name, location, intent...) have minimal values in such a context as the members involved lack the social links that allow for unambiguous interpretations of this information.

Dholakia et al. (2004), bring another category to online communities, which is the distinction between network-based and small-group-based communities. This way of categorising stems from the observation that online communities can vary depending on the type of internet venues used to create a community. Network-based communities are defined as a "specialized, geographically dispersed community based on a structured, relatively sparse, and dynamic network of relationships among participants sharing a common focus". This category encompasses communities where members join in the first place because they are interested in the main subject of the community and not by the socialising aspect of it.

In a more recent paper, Pinto et al. (2015) addresses the topic of virtual communities in a gaming context from a different angle by identifying another type of community: experiential communities. According to that research, these experiential communities provide a wide range of opportunities for gamers to construct and reinvent their identities through active engagement and consumption of the game.

As of today, brand and online brand communities have widely been studied from a customer-brand relationship perspective. Indeed, since the years 2000s, brand community participation and identification, both offline or online, were demonstrated to help customers deepen their relationships with brands in terms of brand loyalty, community engagement, knowledge sharing and brand-related purchasing. (Brodie et al., 2013; Dessart, 2017). However, the concept of online communities is also widely studied from other angles, such as customer-customer relationships or customer to himself relationships.

2.2 Internet aggression, disruptive behaviours and discrimination

A phenomenon close to virtual communities is the concept of internet aggression. As cited in Xu et al. (2015), internet aggression is also known as cyberbullying, and it encompasses actions such as unpleasant, humiliating, threatening, or harassing remarks, unwelcome sexual comments, and exclusion towards each other online.

In online gaming, the concept of internet aggression can be translated to the term “disruptive behaviours”. As cited in Lee et al. (2019), disruptive behaviours can be defined as “antisocial behaviours such as malicious cooperative denials, intentional violations, and verbal attacks, including insults hurled at other game participants”.

An important component of disruptive behaviours is the deviant and negative behaviour called “flaming”. Flaming can be defined as offensive, unpleasant, and abusive verbal attacks, as well as insults and threats. Flaming also carries a notion of crime as (criminal) acts such as defamation and sexual harassment are included in flaming (Hwang et al., 2016). The latter term can also be linked to the notion of “trash talking” that represents a planned style of verbal communication for both positive personal motivations (i.e., motivation, enjoyment) and disruptive ones toward opponents (i.e., distraction, intimidation) (Conmy et al., 2013).

The motivations behind flaming are diverse. One motivation explaining this kind of behaviour is the desire to exert dominance over others, show superiority or strive for competitive success (Hwang et al., 2016, Conmy et al., 2013). Another reason explaining this phenomenon is that flaming became a norm, an acceptable way of interacting in virtual communities. In some communities, flaming can be considered as a manner to conform to the group and be part of the community (Lee, 2015). Members of online gaming communities can therefore act aggressively -since it is one of the community’s norm- to feel pride (Ballard & Welch, 2015). In addition, trash-talkers can also associate this behaviour to positive outcomes such as winning experiences as it is seen in sports competitions (Conmy et al., 2013). Finally, it is also suggested by the authors that another motivation behind this kind of behaviour is the will to exert social dominance or power over others. In a gaming context, game rank represents social dominance and power (Ballard & Welch, 2015).

Another type of disruptive behaviour is trolling, which refers to a pattern of behaviour done on purpose that elicits negative responses from others and jeopardizes cooperation by reiterating toxic behaviours to annoy and hurt others (Lee et al., 2019). A concrete example of trolling in a game is when a player, due to various reasons (e.g., does not want to play anymore because he/she thinks the game is already lost, has been flamed previously by its teammates...), will play badly on purpose to make the enemy team win faster.

2.2.1 Underlying reasons explaining this type of behaviour

As already discussed above, an important component of online communities is the notion of ambiguous social identity or anonymity (Faraj et al., 2011). The consequences of anonymity have already been widely researched in the past, resulting in the conceptualisation of one main concept: deindividuation (Diener, 1980 as cited in Xu et al., 2015). Deindividuation can be defined by two main elements. The first one is that a deindividuated individual loses the sense of his/her own values and, when in the company of others, adhere to group norms. The second one is that deindividuation implies a diminished ability to observe and alter one's behaviour in response to the repercussions of one's actions (reduced self-monitoring). Some scholars studying the concept of deindividuation in computer-mediated context (CMC) reported an existing relationship between anonymity and deindividuation, especially when anti-social behaviour occurred (as cited in Haines & Cheney Mann,

2011). Consequently, one can argue that deindividuation, caused by anonymity can be linked to anti-social behaviours, that statement even more true in a CMC context (Ballard & Welch, 2015). Indeed, in comparison to face-to-face contacts, previous research has found higher levels of interpersonal misunderstanding, hostility, and aggression, as well as nonconforming conduct, in people's online interactions (As cited in Xu et al., 2015; Ballard & Welch, 2015).

Internet aggression can be influenced by both individual and contextual variables. It has been suggested that the attitudes and normative ideas of younger users regarding various types of aggressiveness are connected to their internet violent activities (as cited in Xu et al., 2015). In addition, it has been found that individuals who interact socially more frequently online are more likely to behave aggressively online. Indeed, internet aggressors differ from non-aggressors in their patterns of internet use: people who communicate socially more frequently online are more likely to behave aggressively online (Patchin and Hinduja, 2006).

Other reasons can explain aggressive behaviours as cited in Xu et al. (2015): familial relationships and monitoring, the time spent online, and normative beliefs.

In a gaming context, the propensity to get involved in disruptive behaviours have been found to be influenced by moral positioning while playing League of Legends. "Moral positioning is the process whereby, to understand the situation, an individual in a social conflict grants a moral identity to a subject based on his or her own moral experience" (Lee et al., 2019). It has been argued by the literature that one's behaviour can be influenced by the moral choices he/she does make in different contexts. Those choices can refer, when taking a gaming perspective, to the selection of a character to play with during a game. Lee et al. (2019) research showed that if an individual chooses to play with a champion that looks or seems "evil" or "bad" or that is designed to kill or harass, it can stimulate antisocial behaviours against other players in-game. Moreover, aggression and competition were found to have a favourable impact on players' moral posture according to the same research conducted by Lee et al. (2019). In this context, aggression can be defined as an intrinsic propensity to harm others psychologically or mentally. In parallel, competitive motivations, which implies killing another player and seeking victory, can get players to become more dissatisfied and frustrated with other players who are not skilled (enough) at team play than those who are motivated by other factors, and may consequently engage in disruptive behaviours (Seo and Kim, 2015 as cited in Lee et al., 2019). Moreover, as explained by Lee et al. (2019) League of Legends players must engage aggressively in the game to win (i.e., destroy nexus, kill the opposite team, kill monsters...). This specific context can therefore prompt more easily disruptive behaviours of players, especially if that player selected an evil or aggressive champion.

The notion of competition is another important topic in the literature when studying aggressive behaviours and online (gaming) communities. Adachi et al. in 2015 investigated intergroup conflicts in a gaming context which showed that intergroup competition and cooperation may impact intergroup attitudes and behaviour. As cited in this paper, aggressive behaviours such as discrimination or prejudice are less important in the context of collaboration. In opposition, negative behaviours are more likely to be observed in the context of competing against another player, meaning a player will be aggressive towards his opponent. This research, therefore, argues that the gaming industry should promote more cooperative online arrangements in which players work together on the same team.

However, as alleged by Lee et al. (2019) in their paper about disruptive behaviours in League of Legends, the argument brought above by Adachi et al. (2015) can be discussed. Indeed, when studying such behaviours in League of Legends, it has been observed that aggressive behaviours are directed mainly at other members of a single team and not toward the opposite team. In this specific context, we can therefore conclude that the notion of collaboration does not always bring a positive influence, contrary to what is claimed by Adachi et al. (2015). Ballard & Welch (2015) also found that players could be cyber-bullied and cyber-victimized by both opponents and teammates.

2.2.2 Consequences of this type of behaviour

Such behaviours can have repercussions on the victims who endure aggressive comments, insults, harassment... The first consequence is that these actions impede voluntary cooperation and fair competition among players and have thus been identified as a primary cause of discomfort for them, robbing victims of their enjoyment and immersion in the game (Lee et al., 2019). Another important consequence is that those behaviours can turn into even more aggressive practises such as discrimination and various forms of harassment, online games being a favourable site to it (Fox and Tang, 2016).

Discrimination can be defined as a form of bias such as harmful behaviours and actions, toward members of subordinated groups (as cited in Nguyen et al., 2022). According to Lewis et al. (2015) and Ballard & Welch (2015) minority groups tend to experience discrimination because of their social identities such as their gender, race, sexual orientation.... The current literature on discrimination in online communities supports this observation. On the one hand, Nguyen et al. (2022) discovered that discrimination can be directed at individuals based on their age or skills. The results suggest that younger people and low-skilled players are more likely to experience discrimination while playing. On the other hand, Tynes et al. (2018) propose that race is as an antecedent of discrimination since individuals experienced more commonly vicarious discrimination (experiences aimed at people of the same race and those of different races) than individual discrimination. Fox and Tang (2016) focused on gender-based discrimination by investigating gender-based discrimination and sexual harassment directed at women gamers. Fox and Tang (2016) define gender-based discrimination refers to sexist statements that can indicate inferiority or inequality based on gender, unwelcome sexual or romantic approaches, or rape threats or jokes.

Discrimination and sexual harassment can have consequences on victims ranging from emotional distress, anxiety, and lowered self-esteem (Larsen & Fitzgerald, 2010) to withdrawal (from game or community), rumination and specific coping strategies. In the article written by Fox and Tang (2016), those coping strategies are gender masking, avoidance (of social interactions), denial (i.e., putting up with harassment), self-blame.

2.3 *Identity creation*

Through all the social interactions and ties of an online community, participants can develop and shape multiple identities (Pinto et al., 2015; Williams and Kennedy, 2011).

Identity creation within communities can also be considered as a well-researched concept in the existing literature since studies on the topic can be found from various angles. Wang et al. (2017), investigated customer-customer relationships within brand communities by focusing on peer identities and peer relationships. In an online setting, this research explores how the attractiveness of a brand community's identity and peer relational identification affects brand community identification. The findings suggest that peer identity qualities and peer relational identification account for a significant percentage of online brand communities' identification variation, putting more emphasis on the pride of members of a community when analysing identification. Seraj (2012) decided to explore the value creation process of participating in online communities. According to this research, the perceived value of online communities exists thanks to three different characteristics: intellectual value (co-creation and content quality), social value (interactivity through social ties) and (self-governed community culture). Additionally, results imply that each member of a community can take a specific role that produces value. Later, Dessart and Cova (2017) analysed customers concerning their own identity creation within an anti-branding community setting. While trying to understand if a distinction exists between product and corporate brand hate, this research

also suggests that brand hate should be seen via the lens of identity work, since participants in the same brand hate community use specific types of boundary practises.

However, research concentrating on the concept of identity creation in online or virtual communities under the prism of gaming is scarce. As already addressed before, Pinto et al. (2015) studied how gamers construct their identity through self-extension in experiential online communities. Findings reveal that gamers expand their online selves through virtual possessions, using their avatars and virtual assets to create and display their position in the community. In addition, this study shows that other members of the community influence identity construction through self-aggregation. This implies that the self-extensions of an individual are recognised and valued by others by namely collaboration and sharing. Finally, Pinto et al. argue that each game's cultural norms (i.e., game history, possibilities, and rules) provide the gamer with a plethora of opportunities to build identities at the community level.

In an esports community, Xue et al. (2019) explored narratives and the identity construction of gamers in a social media platform. The first conclusion brought by the authors is that there exist different identities and points of view in the process of identity construction through narration. Moreover, results suggest that to create an identity in this type of community, an individual merges its individual experiences with the collectivising potentialities afforded by the emerging esports modalities (e.g., commercial possibilities, digital media environment, cultural norms...). The narratives analysed showed that individuals had a dual perspective of technology in the construction of esports players' identities by either promoting "inclusion and possibility" or "exclusion and division" through cyberbullying, discrimination and exclusionism based on gender and investment.

Another important angle to study identity creation in communities is to concentrate on identity dilemmas (Bonnes, 2019; Ezzell, 2009; Armstrong et al., 2014; Dunn and Creek, 2015). Bonnes (2019) decided to investigate women's responses to sexual harassment in the military workplace, an organization dominated by men. In her research, the author explores how those women manage their opposing identities: women identity and military identity. In another article focusing on a gendered organization, Schelfhout et al. (2019) analysed how a female gamer managed her women identity and gamer identity in a competitive esports setting.

2.4 Hegemonic masculinity and video games communities

Video games have always been associated with a man's space where masculinity, competitiveness, dominance, and aggressiveness are prevalent norms (Fox and Tang, 2019; Schelfhout et al., 2019; Ballard & Welch, 2015). Those norms can be associated with the notion of hegemonic masculinity. Hegemonic masculinity can be defined, according to Connell (as cited in Schelfhout et al., 2019), as a "configuration of gender practise which embodies the currently accepted answer to the problem of the legitimacy of patriarchy, which guarantees (or is taken to guarantee) the dominant position of men and the subordination of women". Hegemonic masculinity can also be identified in other contexts such as in sports or in relation with "male jobs" (e.g. militaries, firefighters...) (Ezzell, 2009; Bonnes, 2019). The presence of this type of masculine culture is not only constraining women, but also men who do not necessarily embody that kind of masculinity (Fox and Tang, 2014).

Linking gaming communities to the concept of hegemonic masculinity in the perspective of identity management and harassment is relevant since, unlike men, women will struggle to maintain their women and gamer identity (Schelfhout et al., 2019). This situation will lead to identity dilemmas, which will be addressed after. In addition, it has already been argued by the literature that sexism, misogyny, homophobia, or the dominant masculine culture of video games might increase the likelihood of cyberbullying during playing, proving the relevance of the community norms (Ballard & Welch, 2015).

2.5 Coping strategies

An important concept that is important to address in the literature review of this research is coping strategies. To handle discrimination or harassment, women can use specific coping strategies. Fox and Tang (2019) found in their research that the possibilities created by computer-mediated communication offer women various coping techniques. They found that, out of 31 possible coping mechanisms, the ones proven significant were: gender masking, avoidance, denial, seeking help, self-blame. Most of the identified mechanisms were the same as those used to cope with offline harassment, proving that similarities exist between online and offline harassment and discrimination. The only item that differs is gender masking, which is logical since online context allows individuals to become anonymous.

2.6 Theoretical framework

To understand how female gamers create and manage identities by being exposed to gender-based discrimination and sexual harassment in a gendered organization, the concept of identity dilemmas represents an important theory.

2.6.1 Identity dilemmas

As of today, the theory of identity dilemmas has been addressed by several authors (Charmaz, 1994; Dunn & Creek, 2015; Schwalbe & Mason-Schrock, 1996; Goffman's, 1963; Bonnes, 2019). This concept can be defined as a situation when individuals have identities that are in opposition with one another and that can end up being stigmatising for individuals. Charmaz (1995) in her article based on the duality of identities developed by ill men, describes identity dilemmas as "knotty problems and hard decisions" that arise while experiencing their illnesses that affect who they are and can be. In addition, she explains that individuals suffering from identity dilemmas lose their valued identities. According to Bonnes (2019), this concept happens when an individual cannot use only one identity due to his environment and experiences.

The environment and experiences can be interpreted partly by Goffman's perspective (1963). In the article *Stigma: Notes on the management of spoiled identity focusing on stigma and identity management*, Goffman affirms that perceptions people have of themselves stem from interactions with others, especially if the representations others create are negative and lead to stigmatised identities. In 1985, Schur, using labelling theory, states that women are often oppressed by men to follow certain pre-established gender norms, always resulting in the use of labels. Those norms usually refer to appearance, sexual activities, and behaviours. According to the author, gender by itself is enough to result in someone being labelled and the accuracy of a label is not an important condition for a label to be maintained. The consequences of stigma are powerlessness and reinforcement of subordination to power authorities (Schur, 1985) which forces victims of identity dilemmas to find ways to avoid feeling those negative emotions (Goffman, 1963). Identity dilemmas are therefore difficult situations that have no "right" or "easy" resolution (Bonnes, 2019).

One resolution of identity dilemmas is the creation of a new identity that is called a blended identity. This concept can be defined as an identity that conforms to all the conflicting identities by creatively combining them (Schur, Schwalbe and Mason-Schrock as cited in Bonnes, 2019). Dunn (1998) provides an example of the concept in the context of young women who experience a dilemma regarding their sexual activity. Those young women are either labelled as "slut" if they are sexually active and of "virgin" if they are chaste. To avoid those two negative labels, some women decided to get the status of "girlfriend" which allows them to be sexually active but with a single person, making it impossible for others to call them sluts or a virgin. Bonnes (2019) also discovered that service-

women who suffer from harassment in the military use the harassment they suffer to create a blended identity to become insiders of the community: by enduring harassment, those women show men that they are tough and masculine. The concept of identity dilemmas and blended identities can also be observed in the article by Xue et al. (2019). Indeed, they argue that to create an identity in the esports community, an individual merges its individual experiences with the collectivising potentialities afforded by the emerging esports modalities, which can be understood as a “blended identity process”.

According to Dunn and Creek (2015), blended identity is not as ideal as it may seem since some individuals have to give up part of their identities for that blended identity to exist. Indeed, an example of this loss is explained by Bones (2019): service women, to maintain their blended identity and feel part of the military distance themselves from feminine emotions and feminism.

Another response to identity dilemmas is the process of stigmatising others, namely, to protect oneself. In this case, deflecting stigmas on others is a way of creating a new line between “good” or “bad” which benefits them (Armstrong et al., 2014). This phenomenon also refers to defensive othering, which stems from the theory that people who suffer from oppression will adopt their oppressor’s norms, values, and behaviours. By reinforcing stigmas, they are “the exception to the stereotype” (Ezzell, 2009). Ezzell (2009) in his study about female rugby players discovered that the women analysed created an “heterosexy-fit identity” (in contrast to the stereotype that all women playing “male sports” are homosexual and masculine) that enabled them to be seen as serious and strong while staying sexy and feminine. This new identity can be defined as a blended identity. However, this same identity was also a way for those women to exert defensive othering, since they were reinforcing the existing stereotype of women playing rugby. The context studied by Ezzell, therefore, proves that two different responses to identity dilemmas can be used simultaneously by victims.

2.7 Propositions

Based on the literature review in the preceding pages of the thesis, some propositions are developed to address the question of how female gamers create and manage their identities through participation in the League of Legends gaming community, a hostile and gendered gaming community.

Those propositions will serve as a structure to develop data collection material.

2.7.1 P1: Female gamers have two conflicting identities: their women identity and their gamer identity

As argued by Schelfout et al. (2019) women, compared to men, struggle to maintain both their women and gamer identity. Indeed, according to their article, these two identities do not complement or overlap each other. The main element explaining why women and gamer identities are conflicting is because, still today, a gamer identity is associated with hegemonic masculinity. As explained previously, the expected norms within gaming communities are masculinity, competitiveness, dominance, aggressiveness and even sexism or homophobia (Schelfout et al., 2019; Fox and Tang, 2019). Overall, identities naturally associated with women are at the opposite, especially in a gaming context.

2.7.2 P2: Gender-based discrimination may be the source of identity dilemmas for female gamers

As seen in the article “Service-Women’s Responses to Sexual Harassment: The Importance of Identity Work and Masculinity in a Gendered Organization” by Bonnes (2019), being the victim of sexual

harassment can be the starting point to develop an identity dilemma. Indeed, the existence of sexual harassment is proof that service-women are considered outsiders to the military community which lead some of those women to question their identities. In the results of the same research, Bones discovered that women who decided to recognize sexual harassment had developed an identity dilemma.

Discrimination directed at women within gaming communities is a phenomenon that is recognised by both scholars and gaming communities (Schelfout et al., 2019; Fox and Tang, 2019; Ballard and Welch, 2015). Female players are typically categorized by men as “oddballs,” “anomalies,” or “intruders” rather than insiders of gaming culture (as cited in Schelfout et al., 2019).

Consequently, being the victim of gender-based discrimination may be the salient reminder that leads female League of Legends gamers to develop identity dilemmas between their gender identity and their gamer identity.

2.7.3 P3: Female gamers may create a blended identity to cope with gender-based discrimination and identity dilemmas

Once an individual develops an identity dilemma, he/she will try to resolve this uncomfortable situation. As already addressed before, a blended identity is a common resolution type that consists in the creation of a third identity that brings together the initial conflicting identities in a creative way, to conform to expected norms (Dunn, 1998; Dunn & Creek, Schwalbe & Mason-Schrock, 1996; Bonnes, 2019; Ezzell, 2009).

Thanks to the research and the literature review, it can therefore be considered that female gamers of League of Legends who develop an identity dilemma -because their gender and gamer identities are conflicting- try to resolve it by creating a blended identity. This possibility has already been suggested by Xue et al. (2019) who explored the narratives, identity, and community in esports. Indeed, according to them, in esports communities, an individual merges its individual experiences with the collectivising potentialities afforded by the emerging esports modalities (i.e the expected norms), which can be understood as a “blended identity process.

2.7.4 P4: The game rank of a female gamer may have an effect on the way female gamers manage their identity and react to gender-based discrimination

Bonnes (2019) argues that in the context of the military, the fact of having combat experience affects the reaction and response of service-women to harassment. More particularly, those women do not accept (i.e., avoid or downplay) sexual harassment and do not present identity dilemmas. Indeed, they considered themselves as insiders of the military community thanks to this “characteristic” which give them standing to confront and report sexual harassment.

Combat experience represents a way for women to gain inclusion because it displays hegemonic masculinity and hence corresponds to the expected norms of the military community. Consequently, individuals who can show such characteristics can gain prestige, a certain form of power and recognition from others. In addition, in the military, it is the combat experience that serves as a structure to construct hierarchy (the more combat experience you have, the more at the top will you be positioned), which shows the importance of combat experience in the community.

In gaming communities, the rank of a player can be considered as an indicator of dominance and power, giving players access to a more valued status (Ballard & Welch, 2015). Having a high rank is a synonym of being seen by other gamers as a successful player, a valuable partner, and a worthy opponent (Jordan, 2010 as cited in Ballard & Welch, 2015). Ranking is also the primary reason for cyberbullying and cybervictimisation (Ballard & Welch, 2015). Furthermore, as cited in Ballard &

Welch (2015), women and gay players are often the victims of aggressive behaviour when they are lower-ranking players.

Based on those findings, we can therefore imagine that female League of Legends players who have a high rank in the game can react differently to discrimination than lower-ranking women. For instance, they may confront it, like service-women, or they could, in their turn, start to cyberbully others.

2.7.5 P5: Some female gamers may use defensive othering to cope with gender-based discrimination and identity dilemmas

Defensive othering is one potential solution to identity dilemmas management that has been identified by scholars (Armstrong et al. 2015; Ezzell, 2009; Bonnes, 2019). In a different context, some individuals in subordinated groups (i.e., a group dominated by another group), used defensive othering to cope with the identity dilemmas they were suffering from. Bonnes (2019) discovered that some service-women, to be considered as insiders of the military community, were considering other females who were confronting harassment as “weak”. In a rugby team, a specific group of female players were acknowledging the stereotype given to women rugby players by wanting to prove that they were an exception. Those women were arguing that all other female rugby players were masculine and homosexual and that they were the only ones who could be tough but sexy and feminine (Ezzell, 2009).

In addition, it has already been observed that cybervictims frequently commit cyberbullying in the same place where they were victimized earlier, “meaning that the roles of bully, victim, and bystander blur together readily in online contexts” (Ballard & Welch, 2015).

2.7.6 P6: The type of coping mechanisms used by women may impact how they manage identity dilemmas

Fox and Tang (2019) discovered that female players of various games developed coping mechanisms to prevent or mitigate harassment. They found that, out of 31 possible coping mechanisms, the ones proven significant were: gender masking, avoidance, denial, seeking help, self-blame. In parallel, Bonnes (2019) argues that some service-women when facing harassment develop “individual strategies” that allow them to escape harassment. Some strategies imply denying harassment which allows those women to position themselves as outsiders (because they do not confront men) and to avoid questioning male dominance. In this case, those women resolve their identity dilemma by accepting that they will never really be part of the military community and therefore abandon their “military identity”. Another strategy identified is downplaying sexual harassment by arguing that harassment is part of the military and that women are weak if they cannot endure it. Women deciding to use this specific mechanism use defensive othering to resolve their identity dilemma as explained previously. Seeking help is also an important coping mechanism used by service-women, a strategy mainly used by women who consider themselves as insiders (thanks to their combat experience) and for whom sexual harassment is not a starting point to develop an identity dilemma. We can therefore argue that the kind of coping mechanism or individual strategy used by an individual may be connected to one’s style of identity management.

Since those coping mechanisms are used by female gamers (Fox and Tang, 2019), women who play League of Legends may therefore use particular identity management according to the coping mechanisms they chose to endure gender-based discrimination.

3 Chapter 3: Research design

3.1 *Choice of gaming context*

The gaming industry can be divided into three main categories based on the device used to play games: PC, mobile and console. Mobile accounts for tablet and smartphone games and represents the biggest segment with 90,7 billion (in 2021). The second segment is represented by the console devices with 49,2 billion. Then, the last one, the PC segment, is divided into two categories: browser PC games and boxed/downloaded PC games (35.9 billion) (Wijman, 2021).

Among boxed and downloaded games, which is the most important category, the online microtransaction PC games represent the biggest and fastest-growing segment of the market. This type of game, also called free-to-play, involves the sale of virtual goods in games and related services while the game is free to download (The Business research company, 2020). Microtransaction games can be found in various genres, namely the Multiplayer Online Battle Arena genre (MOBA).

League of Legends, a MOBA, created by the company Riot in 2009, is one important free-to-play PC game which counts more than 175 million registered players in 2022. Among those, approximatively 20% are women, allowing us to qualify the LOL community as a gendered community (Galov, 2022). In addition, the latter is renowned for the toxicity of its players as explained in the Context (page 3). All those characteristics make this specific gaming community, an interesting and relevant environment to attempt to discover and understand the identity creation implications of one of that community minority: women.

3.2 *Methodology*

This research is exploratory by nature, using an inductive approach as this specific topic can be defined as a gap in the literature and is based on the existing literature on identity creation, papers on women concerning gaming and literature investigating the concept of identity dilemmas.

A qualitative research design has been produced as this specific strategy is the most suitable to understand how the population studied acts and what mechanisms are put in place to live in this specific environment. To collect data, 19 in-depth interviews have been conducted. Indeed, the practise of interviewing is one of the most common ways of collecting data regarding the perceived behaviour of individuals in brand communities or tribes (as cited in Dessart et al., 2016). In addition, interviews allow for nuanced and complex explanations and responses from respondents (as cited in Bonnes, 2019). This data collection method is also preferred by practitioners investigating other communities regarding harassment such as Bonnes (2019) and Ezzell (2019).

This qualitative technique offered the easiest way to probe participants individually, which was necessary given the topic at hand, focusing on identity construction of the population. Moreover, some parts of the interview guide can be considered sensitive. Therefore, it was important to avoid social pressure on participants which could have influenced the answers given by individuals (compared to focus groups) (Malhotra et al., 2017).

3.2.1 Sample

This qualitative study was focused on League of Legends female players. In practise, 19 semi-structured interviews were administered to different kind of players. This table shows the main characteristics of respondents related to the game:

Table 1. Respondents' characteristics

	Age	Experience	Ranking ¹	Versions played ²	Frequency of playing
1	25	2,5 years	Not ranked	Arams, classic	5h/week
2	22	8 years	Silver	Arams, ranked	10h/week
3	28	10 years	Silver	Ranked, Flex, TFT	12h-15h/week
4	19	4 years	Not ranked	Arams, Classic, TFT	8h/week
5	25	2 years	Not ranked	Aram, classic not ranked	/
6	19	3 years	Not ranked	Arams, Classic, all for one	5-6h/week
7	21	6 years	Diamond	All, mostly ranked	28h/week
8	24	7 years	Platinum	All	8h to 15h/week
9	30	11 years	Gold	Arams, flex, ranked	28h/week
10	23	7 years	Gold	All	5-6h/week
11	24	8 years	Not ranked	Flex, arams	21h/week
12	22	2, 5 years	Gold	All	21h/week
13	26	2 years	Gold	All	21h/week
14	31	9 years	Silver	Flex, solo	2-3 times/month
15	29	10 years	Bronze	Normal, Flex, a little bit ranked	14h/week
16	23	5 years	Silver	Normal, a little bit ranked	4h/week
17	22	5 years	Not ranked	All except ranked	1-2h/day
18	23	3 years	Silver	Normal and ranked	5h/week
19	25	8 years	Platinum	Mostly ranked and a little bit of everything	15h/week
20	23	8 years	Silver	Everything	6h/week

Own table

¹ In League of Legends, ranked games can be played. Depending on your performance and the number of games won, a player gains points, called PL. Depending on the level of PL, a player can get a rank and evolves from rank to rank. Those are, in ascending order: Iron, Bronze, Silver, Gold, Platinum, Diamond, Master, GrandMaster, Challenger.

² The versions of the game considered the less competitive are: Aram, All for one and Flex (Normal). The most competitive mode is the Ranked one since it is during this type of game that players get to be ranked (see the map in Appendices I). In addition, Ranked games in Solo/Duo or Flex represent the first and most iconic version of LoL. This way of playing is also the most emphasized in e-sports competition. Consequently, those elements increase the feeling of competitiveness for gamers.

Those five player's features served as guidelines in an attempt to ensure heterogeneity in the sample. The variable "Experience" and "Frequency of playing" can possibly influence the participant exposure to harassment depending on the time spent playing. In addition, it was worthwhile to be able to interview "older" gamers as they can give their opinion on the subject at different moments in time. Then, "Ranking" in the game may also have an impact on the harassment endured and the reactions to it (see P4, page 13). Finally, League of Legends offers different versions of the game which can be considered more or less competitive, and which can also lead to different experiences of a same community.

Overall, we can observe that the criteria for this sample were met. Nevertheless, one could argue that in terms of ranking, there is a majority of Silver and Gold players. However, this distribution is in line with the actual rank distribution in League of Legends that can be found in the Appendices (Appendix II). The same observation can be made regarding the respondents' age, as only five female players are older than 25 years old. Nevertheless, according to statistics, 75% of the League of Legends community is under 25 years old, with the biggest age group being between 21 and 24 years old, which matches the age distribution of the sample (Pilipović, 2022).

The chosen sampling method consisted in a convenience sample. Respondents were found using my own personal network as well as a Facebook group dedicated to French-speaking LOL players (i.e., LOL Allies). In addition, some snowball sampling has also been used. Indeed, two respondents have offered to introduce me to a friend of theirs. When it comes to respondent selection, no specific criteria were required to qualify, except playing the game or having played the game recently. Out of the 19 interviews, one respondent considered she was not playing the game anymore. In order to recruit gamers willing to participate in the study, the specific and exact topic of the thesis was not disclosed to prevent any thoughts on the topic prior to the interviews.

When it comes to the interviews, all of them were conducted through calls. Indeed, this way of interviewing was convenient for both the respondents and me. Moreover, given the level of specificity of the respondents needed for this study, it would have been unrealistic to find respondents living from the same geographic area as me. Moreover, all the interviews were conducted in French, which was the mother language of all the participants as they were Walloon or French gamers. The length of the interviews varied between 20 and 60 minutes, depending on the experience of each woman.

3.2.2 Interview guide

In order to ensure the collection of relevant answers regarding the propositions expressed, a semi-structured interview guide was created (Appendix III). Open-ended questions were formulated alongside probing questions to deepen the conversation and obtain richer answers (Malhotra et al., 2017).

Four main sections are comprised in the interview guide: the respondent profile, femininity, League of Legends experience and reaction to aggressive behaviours. To put the participant at ease, the first part began with easy questions and general questions regarding the respondent's profile (e.g., "How old are you, How long have you been playing LOL ... (?) (Knight, 2013). The second part consisted in discussing and identifying participants' opinion on the notion of femininity. The main goals were to discover how they defined and positioned themselves regarding that definition but also if they experienced stigma as women in the past. On the one hand, those questions allowed to understand if the identification of a stigma is influenced by the identification of a woman to the femininity

spectrum³. On the other hand, those questions helped grasp how sensitive were the interviewed women to stigma, which could have an impact on how they evaluate and classify disruptive and sexist behaviours. In the third part, participants were invited to describe and give their opinion on the community as well as their sense of belonging in it. In addition, this section of the guide questioned the participants regarding their interaction with other players. Finally, the last part, focusing on women reactions to harassment, contained deeper questions about the type of harassment endured as well as the consequences it can provoke.

To improve the interview guide before data collection, it has been reviewed by a psychologist. Based on the theoretical framework of this study, which refers to psychological concepts, bringing the point of view of a professional seemed relevant and enriching.

3.2.3 Observations

I consider myself a LOL player since 2017, however, despite the years I have been playing, I have never seen myself as part of its community. As of today, I cannot qualify as a “tryharder” and play approximatively 6h per week. In this respect, my highest rating was Gold. Nevertheless, I have played all the different versions of LoL and I have acquainted myself with most of the champions. Consequently, my capacity as a League of Legend female gamer, allowed me to have a deeper understanding and knowledge, as well as a genuine experience of the game, as I undertook this study. The literature review, complemented by my own past observations as participant, guided me through the process of the creation of the interview guide. Moreover, this position allowed me to interact and probe respondents in a more effective way.

3.2.4 Analysis and interpretation

To analyse the data, all the interviews were audio-recorded and then transcribed verbatim resulting in approximately 100 pages of transcription⁴. The following step consisted in coding the data, to, in the end, be able to analyse it using a qualitative data analysis software: NVivo. An iterative approach to identifying themes was performed. Firstly, some themes and parent themes were formulated using the literature review. Secondly, after having read all the transcriptions, additional and complementary themes were added. The following step of the process consisted in effectively coding the data according to the various themes determined. Additionally, some attributes specific to each respondent were created to help with cross tables analysis.

3.2.5 Trustworthiness assessment

To test the reliability of coding, the intercoder reliability was calculated. A student who is used to qualitative analysis⁵ and independent to the study was asked to code two transcripts' interviews using the coding tree created for the analysis (see Appendix V). This coding tree consisted of themes and parent themes as well as definitions for the understanding of the independent coder. Those transcripts account for 10% of the sample, which represents the minimum to achieve representativeness (Lombard et al., 2002). To calculate the intercoder reliability, the data coded by the independent student was compared to my own coding of the same interviews using the percent

³ The femininity spectrum refers here to the position of the respondent's position regarding two extreme points: femininity as seen by men and society in general and femininity seen by opponents of the latter.

⁴ See one interview transcript in Appendix IV

⁵ This student is working in a company fully run by students which is active in market research consultancy. Additionally, she is in her first year of Master at HEC in International Strategic Marketing.

agreement method. This resulted in a score of 0.81 for the first transcript and a score of 0.59 for the second one, for an average of 0.70. Consequently, the final score equals the threshold to attain in exploratory research according to Rust and Cooil (1994). However, given the low level of agreement observed for one of the transcripts, the coding tree was reviewed and improved to ensure trustworthiness of coding. As a result, 4 themes or parent themes were added, while one theme was deleted from the previous coding plan.

4 Chapter 4: Results

4.1 *The gaming community, gender identities and clichés within the gaming community*

To determine if women develop conflicting identities while participating in the LoL gaming community, the respondents were asked to define it. The findings show that they nearly all used the qualifier “toxic”. Some also associated the gaming community to aggressivity, rage, childish players, and sore losers. In addition, references to men were also expressed to qualify it: “*a masculine community of pre-teens*”, “*of men in need of sex*” or “*a community of spoiled little boys*”. Nevertheless, the fact that some players are benevolent and nice, even if they represent a minority in the gaming community, was also brought up. In line with the definition given, the norms and standard behaviours identified by a few respondents are aggressivity, insults and immature behaviours in game (like flaming, spamming, or quitting the game⁶). Additionally, this research revealed that the female players interviewed picture gender-based harassment and discrimination as standardized in the community. Consequently, the way the gaming community is perceived by them is in line with hegemonic masculinity. As previously addressed, the norms related to this concept are a desire of dominance, manliness, aggressivity and sexism.

Then, the concept of femininity was also addressed by asking the interviewees to explain what expectations and qualifiers were used to describe women in our current society. The most recurring element was that being feminine is associated with beauty standards (such as having a slim body or being pretty), followed by being fragile, vulnerable, sensitive, or discreet (i.e., not being loud in public and not speaking one’s mind). Moreover, the notion of inequality compared to men and, a lack of independence is also linked to being a woman according to interviewees. In addition, being relegated to being responsible for others and caring for others was cited (e.g., taking care of the house, wanting, and caring for children, cooking for her husband...).

Out of 20 women, 2 were in line with the defined notion of femininity, 9 were opposed to it while 9 believed they were not really opposed but not really in line either. This shows that most interviewees do not fully position themselves as “feminine” (according to the definition of femininity offered by our society). Those findings suggest that, even in their everyday life, women might struggle with their gender identity and must make choices regarding their femininity. Among the interviewees, we can argue that some, consciously or not, choose between the two extremes of femininity, while others are mixing both of those extremes to define their own version of femininity. Two respondents explained that, to fit in, they decided to try to comply with beauty standards.

« As I couldn't change my behaviour, I changed my looks, but I think that since I've always had an extremely male circle of friends, there was always this idea of being attractive. Since I hang out with guys a lot, I didn't want to become the good buddy that you don't even consider a girl anymore. So, I always wanted to keep that feminine side, that charming side, because I didn't want to be treated like the guy who looks like a girl. That's why I conformed to the male ideal so that I could be better integrated in their team and still be the girl in the middle of the group, not the random buddy. »
(Respondent 8).

As in our society, preconstructed qualifiers and norms are assigned to female gamers in the gaming environment. Within the LoL community, women are subject to several clichés. The first one is that

⁶ See the definition in glossary

women can only play “Support”⁷ because they are not capable of playing aggressively and can only assist others (compared to carrying the game⁸). Additionally, male players associate women to individuals that only play cute or girly champions. Another cliché existing within the community is that LoL female players are “e-girls”⁹ which refers to women who are “attention whores”. According to one respondent, the latter cliché is conveyed by some female streamers¹⁰:

“They (female streamers) are very girly, and it creates a cliché maybe. Some of them give a very feminine cliché of the LoL players and it's not always the case. These clichés are also circulating on TikTok where girls who play are trying to look cute, to charm men when it's not necessarily the case.” (Respondent 6)

The term “e-girl” is also associated to the idea that women need men to level up in the game (“se faire PL”, to be elo boost in the game vocabulary). As a result, some men within the community decide to act like a “guide” or a “father” to help female gamers playing better, by giving (unwanted) advice. This stems from the preconceived idea created by men that women are not good at playing games:

“There are some guys who see chicks like profound morons by explaining the game to them when sometimes they're better than them at it. They don't necessarily do it with the will to hurt, they just have in mind clichés like “chicks suck at the game”. (Respondent 20).”

Consequently, based on those discoveries, we can argue that the main cliché associated to women, playing Support, relates to the concept of care. As previously explained, caring for other composes the accepted feminine identity. In women’s everyday life, this relates to taking care of the house, of children and of their husband. This perception can also be found in the way some jobs are labelled as feminine, such as the profession of nurse, midwife, primary school, childcare or even unpaid caregiving (housewife, househusband) (Schouten, 2019). This process of labelling jobs as feminine or masculine refers to a sociological concept: the gendered division of work. It can be defined by the fact that men and women do not perform the same activities leading to a separation and a principle of hierarchy in favour of men (as cited in Berthonet and Clos, 2019). In the gaming community, this aspect of femininity has been transposed to the role of Support whose main goal is to defend, help, give life, and even sacrifice oneself for the ADC¹¹ to defeat enemies. In addition, this role is considered as secondary, not important, easy to play and passive. In other words, being Support carries negative connotations just like some professions qualified as feminine (Schouten, 2019). Furthermore, the need for women to look attractive can also be transposed to the expectations towards female players. Indeed, some respondents explained that they were seen as girly in the way they look in real life but also regarding the champion they play:

“Female gamers are hyper-sexualized”. (Respondent 14)

“In the game, female gamers are not really allowed to play aggressive, Top¹² or fighters. For them, a female player is necessarily associated with the role of Support” (Respondent 11)

“There is also the cliché that girls like cute characters.” (Respondent 4).

⁷ See definition and explanation in the glossary

⁸ See definition in the glossary

⁹ See definition and explanation in the glossary

¹⁰ See definition in the glossary

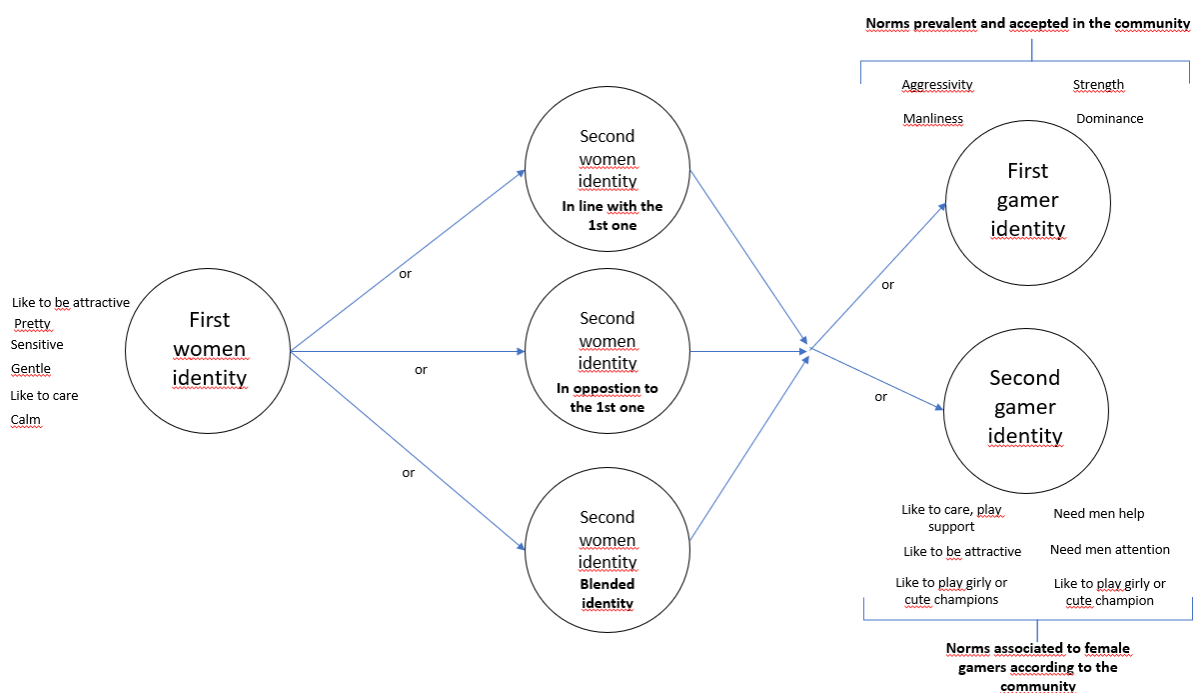
¹¹ See definition and explanation in the glossary

¹² Refers to the position played on the map, the Top role

Those results indicate that even if the prevalent norms and accepted behaviours within the community relate to hegemonic masculinity, the League of Legends players, and the way the game has been conceived, transposed some elements of the spectra of femininity outside the game to create new norms exclusively for women, who are considered as a minority. However, as found previously, most of the interviewees do not fully comply with this idea of feminine identity, which may lead some of those women to identify those norms and expectations as stigmas.

As a result, the proposition *P1: Female gamers have two conflicting identities: their women identity and their gamer identity* need to be nuanced. Indeed, it has been showed that, while a minority of women interviewed position themselves as in line with the accepted idea of femininity, the rest of them do not define femininity in the same way or are in complete contradiction with it. Therefore, we should consider not 2 different identities but 3: the women identity based on the society's definition, the actual women identity developed by a woman and the gamer identity. Those findings show that the first women identity (the women identity based on the society's definition) and the second (the actual women identity developed by a woman) can already be in conflict and lead to an identity dilemma, where the individual struggles to choose between the accepted notion of femininity and her own personality, desires, and natural behaviours. We can therefore imagine, based on the interviews, that a woman can: comply with the femininity defined by our society, be in complete opposition with it or develop a blended identity that allows her to avoid one of those two extremes (See Figure 1). Unlike the proposition that assumed that all women have the same conflicting relationship between their women and gamer identity, the results indicate that they can develop different types of conflict between their identities, based on their second women identity. However, we can assume that a female player can be simultaneously in opposition to the first women identity and the gamer identity. Indeed, even if the initial gamer identity refers to hegemonic masculinity which can be considered as the opposite of the first women identity (aggressivity, dominance, manliness...), the norms created by the gaming community specifically for female players "cancels" the identity work performed before by some women. Consequently, two different gamer identities can also be identified (See Figure 1).

Figure 1. Figure 1: Identities



4.1.1 The impact of the game's conception on the emergence of the second gamer identity

As argued previously, Riot plays a part in the stigmas developed in the LoL community regarding female players. Indeed, as developed by Maraschin (2020) several categories of champions exist in League of Legends. However, the researcher noticed that 3 of them were relevant when analysing female players: the “femmes fatales”, the warriors and the cute champions.

In her thesis, Maraschin argues that femmes fatales, who represent hyper-sexualized female champions, are designed to appeal to the male gaze. Indeed, those women have a generous chest (that is sometimes emphasized by an important cleavage), a small waist and a perfect face (See images of femme fatale champions in Appendix VI). Another category designed for men are warriors, whose physiques represent strength, power, intelligence, and virility (See images of warrior champions in Appendix VII). However, the third category which consists of cute or girly champions seems to have been created for women. Indeed, those champions, even if they represent women, do not display the same physical characteristics as the “femme fatale” champions. Most of them are more “creatures” than humans (See images of cute champions in Appendix VIII) and relate more to the world of children than adults, which refers more to the definition of femininity than masculinity. We can therefore conclude that Riot intentionally designs human champions (the femme fatal and the warriors) that will appeal to men and cute/girly champions that will appeal to women. This distinction of genre when designing champions participated in the stigmatization of female players “who only play cute champions”. This theory developed by Maraschin (2020) is supported by my own participant observation. This observation leads me to assert the latter theory by stating that all the other types of champions existing in League of Legends, even if they are creatures, are also designed for men as they convey ideas such as malice, danger, or fear (See images of those other champions in Appendix IX).

4.2 *Identification and integration into the gaming community*

Among the respondents who expressed themselves on their identification to the community, the majority considered that their own personality and behaviour in game was not in line with the ones of the community. Nevertheless, some interviewees explained that they felt close to the community while not totally agreeing with the statement. They explain it as follows:

“I would say I kind of get into it (the norms and behaviours of the community) in the sense that sometimes I write those negatives comments like “What are you doing? Play with us!” and all that but I think I'm much more into encouragement than denigration.” (Respondent 8)

“I didn't have a lot of male friends before and playing has helped me make some. So yeah, I think I fit in with the community more.” (Respondent 4)

It can be observed that they both justify their identification to the community using different arguments. On the one hand, the first woman explains that she can become aggressive (according to her). On the other hand, we can assume that the second interviewee justifies her identification to the community because she was able to make friends thanks to the game.

Another theme addressed during the interviews is the level of integration of the female players within the community. Among the women interviewed, 10 of them consider themselves as insider and 9 as outsider. Thanks to the sample's results, we can assume that women who do not suffer from harassment tend to consider themselves more easily as insider of the community. However, the opposite statement cannot be made.

Table 2. Cross tab between the level of integration and the exposition to gender-based harassment

	A : Insider ▼	B : Outsider ▼
1 : Répondantes:Gender harassment = No ▼	4	2
2 : Répondantes:Gender harassment = Yes ▼	6	7

Own results, extracted from NVivo

No other conclusions can be drawn by crossing the level of integration with other attributes.

4.3 No gender-based harassment

Out of 20 female players, 7 claimed that they were not victim of gender-based harassment, anonymity being the main explanation. Indeed, interviewees state that their gender cannot be discovered if they do not announce it in game: *Well, they don't know that. I don't point it out* (Respondent 1). When it comes to the other reasons, one respondent says that she is less annoyed because of her gender than before, while the other one describes it by the fact that the comments she gets based on her gender are not insults but romantic approaches, which she does not consider as harassment.

The players present those characteristics:

Table 3. Characteristics of respondents who do not suffer from gender-based harassment

	Age	Experience	Ranking	Role	Competitivity	Explanation	Integration	Identification to femininity
Respondent 1	Less or = 25	<= 3 years	Not ranked	Support+Other	Soft ¹³	Anonymity	Insider	In line
Respondent 2	Less or = 25	Between 3 and 6 years	Silver	Support	Soft	Other	Outsider	In line
Respondent 5	Less or = 25	<= 3 years	Not ranked	Support	Soft	Anonymity	Outsider	Opposition
Respondent 13	Between 26 and 29	<= 3 years	Gold	Support+Other	Hard	Anonymity	Insider	Opposition
Respondent 14	More than 29	Between 6 and 9 years	Silver	Other	Soft	Anonymity	Insider	Opposition
Respondent 15	Between 26 and 29	More than 10 years	Bronze	Support	Soft	Anonymity	Insider	In between
Respondent 19	Less or = 25	Between 6 and 9 years	Platinum	Support+Other	Hard	Other (romantic advances)	Insider	Opposition

Own table, extracted from NVivo

¹³ The definitions of “soft” and “hard” players can be found in the glossary

As already noticed previously, we can notice that some of those women consider themselves as insider of the League of Legends community. As a result, two conclusions can be drawn: the level of integration of a female player might impact her sensitivity and categorising of harassment or that by not being exposed to harassment, players tend to consider themselves more easily as insider of the community.

A second observation is that the respondent who does not consider romantic approaches as harassment has a rank considered as high, can be qualified as a hard player and is an insider. In addition, this respondent does not suffer from a high stigmatization. Consequently, those characteristics might influence the sensitivity to harassment of this player and thus, her way of categorising comments and insults as harassment.

Regarding their coping mechanisms to harassment¹⁴, respondents use gender masking, are inactive, mute the chat or seek help (from Riot by banning a player or by playing with friends to avoid harassment). Defensive othering (Respondent 14 and 19) and active defense (responding to comments and insults) represent other coping mechanisms which can be found among this category of respondents. Hence, based on the sample, we can argue that players who do not consider themselves as victims of gender-based harassment tend to have a more indirect way of reacting to regular harassment.

Another outstanding observation is that among all the interviewees, only two respondents said to be in line with the definition of femininity accepted by our society. Simultaneously, this table shows that both state they do not suffer from gender-based harassment.

4.4 Nature of disruptive and aggressive behaviours

The type of disruptive behaviours the most reported by interviewees is the ones based on the way of playing. Indeed, the first type of aggressive behaviours are insults because the player was not satisfied with the way of playing of the respondent, practise also called flaming. It can either be because she is not skilled enough or because she is too passive. According to some women, this nature of disruptive behaviour is not annoying because of the aggressivity of the words used but because of the repetitiveness throughout a game. However, some respondents have been the victim of more aggressive insults such as *"go kill yourself"* or *"son of a bitch"*. 2 interviewees also explained that some players try to add them as friends after a game to be able to send them aggressive chat messages afterwards, which shows the will of some players to hurt others.

Another type of aggressive behaviour endured by interviewees is spamming¹⁵(or spam ping), trolling or quitting the game. In League of Legends, some behaviours do not necessarily need to be spoken to be considered as aggressive and impact players. Out of the respondents who expressed themselves on frequency, players said they were being the victims of such behaviours roughly every other game or nearly at every game.

The second type of disruptive behaviours is gender-based harassment, experienced by 13 interviewees out of 20. One of the most recurrent forms is romantic or sexual approaches:

¹⁴ Those coping mechanism refer to harassment in general (not only gender-based harassment)

¹⁵ See definition in the glossary

*"I want to f*** you" (Respondent 7)*

"I saw that you were in a relationship but I'm Master so if you want, I can coach you personally...if you know what I mean..." (Respondent 7)

"I'll buy you a skin if you send nudes" (Respondent 8)

"Come on let's talk..." (Respondent 4)

Female players are also harassed because of the clichés conveyed in the community such as *"you're an e-girl"*, *"you're a girl that's why you can't play"* or *"go play Support because that's all you can do as you're a girl"*. In addition, some players also harass women based on stereotypes that exist on women outside the game: *"you're a girl you have to stay in the kitchen"*, *"go to the kitchen instead of bothering us to play"*, *"go back to the kitchen"*, *"go do girl games"*.

Additionally, during the interviews, respondents were asked if they have ever been the victim of disruptive behaviours for other reasons than the ones addressed before. It appears that insults can be based on the French nationality, on race or on sexual orientation.

4.5 Coping mechanisms

As already discovered in the literature, individuals who are victims of harassment¹⁶ can develop coping mechanisms to mitigate it. Several types could be identified in this research:

Table 4. Coping mechanisms

Gender masking	12
Seeking help	12
Inaction	9
Mute	9
Defensive othering	6
Acceptance	6
Active defense	4
Denial	1
Avoidance	1
Voice covering	1

Own table, extracted from NVivo

4.5.1 Gender masking

The most used coping mechanism among the sample is gender masking. Some of the respondents admitted that, thanks to anonymity, other gamers cannot be sure of their gender and that they take advantage of this uncertainty by not affirming that they are a woman in the game. In addition, respondents confessed they had changed their pseudo because they were too feminine and that by changing it, they received less hate:

¹⁶ By harassment, we mean both gender-based and "regular" harassment.

"My pseudo at that time, it recognized that it was a woman. And from the moment I changed it, it never happened again." (Respondent 11)

« So I changed it (the pseudo) because I was tired of getting comments" (Respondent 10)

Furthermore, to pretend to be a man in the game, one of the women interviewed explained that when she speaks in French the chat, she avoids feminising adjectives or nouns. Also, two players explained that they were playing masculine champions to not be recognized.

4.5.2 Seeking help

Another way of mitigating harassment is by seeking help: either by playing with friends or by reporting players to Riot¹⁷.

On the one hand, some respondents explain that by playing with people they know, they have less chance of playing with randoms¹⁸ who can be aggressive. On the other hand, some women look for emotional support in friends or boyfriends:

"That one time I answered, and I got insulted even more but I lived it well because I was with my best friend." (Respondent 6)

"My boyfriend manages my email. I can't handle it emotionally." (Respondent 7)

"I can also count on my best friend who tends to answer to insults for me". (Respondent 11)

4.5.3 Inaction

Another recurrent way of managing disruptive behaviours is by not reacting to it. Indeed, players believe it is useless to answer to oppressors or to try to reason them. Among those women, 4 of them explained that they used to react, but they had given up:

"I gave up because I figure it won't have any impact and worse if I actually have the misfortune of answering, calmly or not, the insults are gonna go increase crescendo." (Respondent 11)

"I used to do it a lot before but now I don't even bother because we waste too much time" (Respondent 10)

4.5.4 Mute

Muting the chat is also an important way for the interviewed women to avoid harassment while playing. By muting the chat, they may miss on relevant game strategies or fun conversations. However, female players explained that they preferred to miss those conversations than taking the risk to being exposed to harassment. This type of coping mechanism can be considered as a form of avoidance as they intentionally cut ties with their teammates and enemies.

4.5.5 Defensive othering

Defensive othering happens when individuals create internalized discrimination. This phenomenon can be observed within the sample interviewed. Indeed, it appeared that respondents could either

¹⁷ Riot is the company behind League of Legends.

¹⁸ See definition in the glossary.

be “oppressors” or victims. In the environment analysed, female players who position themselves at the opposite of the clichés tend to discriminate against gamers who don’t. They justify it by explaining that it discredits girls like them who try to fight the stereotypes present in the community: *“In fact, they confirm the clichés so it discredits the other girls who will play another place.”* Those interviewees direct their “hate” towards regular players but also towards female streamers.

“I was like, “why are you doing this, girl? Why are you getting naked to play?” I thought it was not cool for the female community.” (Respondent 14)

“Sometimes, they (female streamers) don't react and that annoys me because it trivializes this side where men allow themselves to say things that shouldn't be said because the women themselves don't defend themselves you know.” (Respondent 16)

Moreover, as shown in this last portion of the transcript, we can argue that judgements between gamers are not only based on personality and choices in the way of playing. Indeed, it can also be based on the coping mechanisms used. This conclusion can be supported by observations made on a League of Legends Facebook group (See screenshots in Appendix X). Those observations represent reactions of women regarding a female player’s post where she exposed gender-based harassment. In some comments, we can read accusing words such as:

“I think you are both ridiculous. You're totally playing into his hands and in the end, you sound like him. Hopeless!”

“But girl, what good did it do you to answer him? You should have deleted him and let him rage in his corner like a child.”

(Texts from the screenshots in Appendix X)

4.5.6 Acceptance

Based on the narrative of several respondents, we can observe that they do not contest harassment and have accepted it. By “accepting” to receive insults, those female players explain that it does not affect them much anymore:

“It should be unacceptable in real life but, it's kind of horrible to say that, it's really the average insults. We accept it because it's LoL, that's it.” (Respondent 14)

“The impact is rather minor because there is a kind of habit too” (Respondent 20)

4.5.7 Active defense

Another coping mechanism identified is active defense which refers to responding to insults and defending oneself. Two different approaches are used by respondents: they either insult back or try to respond in a gentle way. Depending on the situation, a player can go from gentle to violent in a single reaction: *“At first, I'm more in the gentle way. And if it continues, I'll just say “shut up, I don't want to know”*

4.5.8 Denial

One respondent explained that she intentionally tries to forget the disruptive comments and insults she endured.

4.5.9 Avoidance

Avoidance, in this case, refers to women who decide to intentionally avoid insults that might hurt them by not reading the chat: *"I don't really listen to what they say sometimes I read it but most of the time I don't read the chat. (...) It's more my friends who tell me 'Did you see what they said?'"*

4.5.10 Voice covering

The last mechanism identified is voice covering. The latter is only relevant when someone plays with League Voice or Discord¹⁹. The respondent's objective behind voice covering is to mask her identity. She then explained that she changed her voice to make other players believe she was a young boy instead of a woman.

4.6 *Game rank*

As previously explained, the ranking in League of Legends plays an important role in evaluating a player's skills, power, dominance, and success (Ballard & Welch, 2015). During the interviews, some respondents expressed their opinion on the impact of ranking on their integration and exposure to harassment.

According to Respondent 7, who is Diamond (high ranking), the more she moved up in ranking, the more she received hate and malicious comments: *"I am more integrated to the community if I am a girl and I am Gold than if I am Diamond"*

She explained that when male gamers know that she is both a woman and Diamond, they automatically think that she bought her account or that she got elo boost²⁰:

"You play alone on your account? No but it's not your account? You have to stop, it's not true, a woman can't be Diamond! Where did you buy your account?" (Respondent 7)

Another reaction to her ranking was that she was labelled as a "penis woman", implying that a "regular woman" does not have the ability to be Diamond. She added, that because her legitimacy is questioned, she feels the need to defend herself and prove that she has some serious knowledge of the game: *"So I'm going to justify my level and be an encyclopaedia of League of Legend just because I'm Diamond.* This argument has also been supported by another respondent.

However, some women part of the sample experienced the opposite. From their point of view, they became more respected by the people they were playing with. Nevertheless, those women have a ranking considered as low (silver). In addition, they only gained respect from their entourage and not random players.

As a result, based on the sample interviewed, it can be concluded that *P4: The game rank of a female gamer may have an effect on the way female gamers manage their identity and react to gender-based discrimination* is not fully supported. Indeed, we can argue that this proposition is only true to a certain extent and that it is considered as positive for players who display a low to medium ranking. Unlike what has been discovered by Bonnes (2019) in the military, women are not treated "better"

¹⁹ Discord is an instant messaging software that allows users to speak (vocally) with other users. League Voice is a messaging software, like Discord, integrated in League of Legends.

²⁰ See definition in the glossary.

by the whole community if they show a higher ranking (Diamond in this case). In this vein, it cannot impact their identity management.

4.7 Identity dilemmas

4.7.1 Respondents whose second women identity is in line with the first women identity

Among the 20 interviewees, 2 players said to be in line with the society's definition of femininity, resulting in equal first and second women identity (as explained in the section 4.1). This table presents attributes of the respondent 1 and 2:

Table 5. Characteristics of respondents whose second women identity is in line with the first women identity

	Age	Ranking	Role	Competitivity	Explanation	Integration	Identification to femininity	Explanation
Respondent 1	Less or = 25	Not ranked	Support+ Other	Soft	Anonymity	Insider	In line	Anonymity
Respondent 2	Less or = 25	Silver	Support	Soft	Other	Outsider	In line	Other

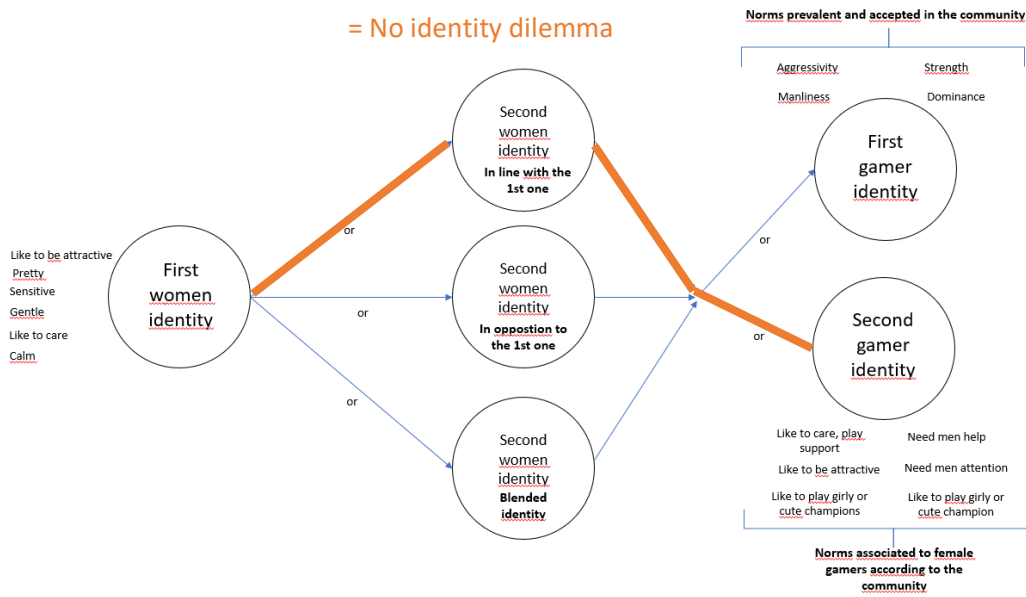
Own table, extracted from NVivo

Those women have various similarities like their age group, the role they play (which includes the role of Support) and their level of competitiveness. In addition, as already analysed in the section 4.3, another point of similarity between those individuals is that they do not consider themselves as victim of gender-based harassment.

Respondent 1

We can argue that Respondent 1 does not suffer from gender-based harassment thanks to her anonymity as well as the coping mechanisms she put in place. Indeed, she mainly seeks help from her friends to avoid harassment by playing with them. When she decides to play alone, she only plays the least competitive version of the game: *"I don't dare to play alone for the moment, I do a lot of Arams because my friends don't play too much and I don't like to do normal games alone. I've already done a few but each time I have to motivate myself and tell myself that everything is going to be fine... So, that's a little bit impacted because I wait for my friends to play"*. We can presume that this habit of protecting her identity and not exposing herself to the most aggressive versions of the game does not expose her to gender-based harassment, which do not impact her identity creation process and, in the end, does not create an identity dilemma. Additionally, this respondent shows congruity between her second women identity and the second gamer identity identified previously. As a result, Respondent 1's identity is not impacted because she does not suffer from gender-based harassment and do not consider the clichés as stigmas thanks to the congruity between her identities.

Figure 2. Respondent 1's identity management



Own figure

Respondent 2

Unlike Respondent 1, Respondent 2 explains the absence of gender-based harassment by the fact that she used to be the victim of more insults and comments in the past. However, this woman also explained that she tries not to remember the insults and aggressive comments she receives:

"I think so, but honestly, I'm trying not to remember. I haven't had it recently, so I won't be able to tell you exactly what I was told"

Consequently, those two explanations may lead us to think that, even if she really is the victim of gender-based harassment, she does not acknowledge it, and she is not affected by it.

Another divergence with the previous player is that she considers herself as an outsider *"because I am a girl and only want to play female characters"*. In this case, we can assume that, even if she knows that clichés exist within the community on female players, by not receiving hate on this topic, she does not develop an identity dilemma but sees her feeling of integration impacted. Consequently, those results indicate that the lack of integration of an individual is not enough to be the starting point of an identity dilemma. Finally, as Respondent 1, the second women identity of the individual and the chosen gender identity (second one) are not in conflict.

4.7.2 Respondents whose second women identity is in opposition to the first women identity

Table 6. Characteristics of respondents whose second women identity is in opposition to the first women identity

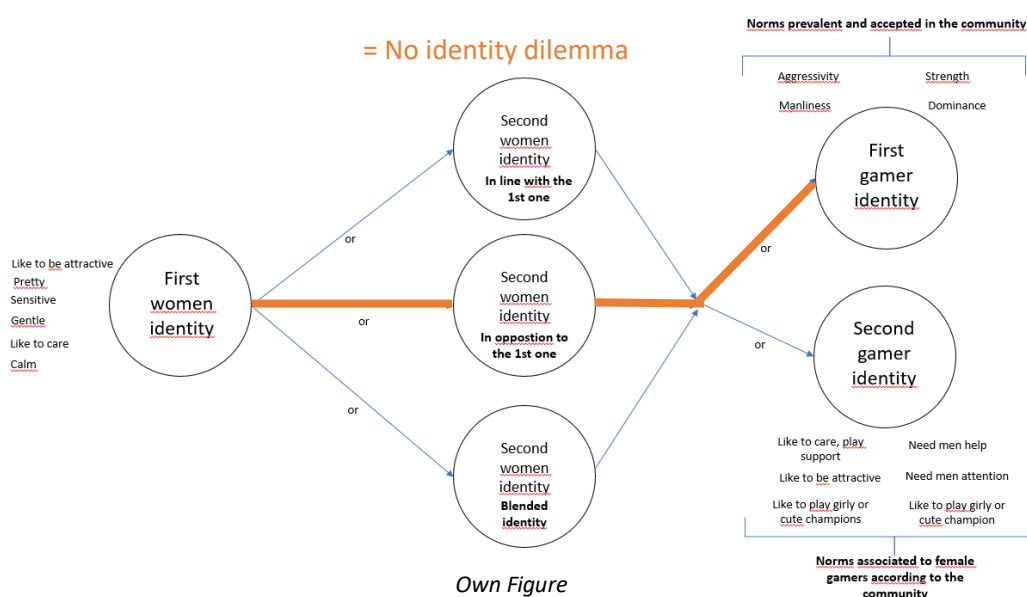
	Age group	Ranking	Role	Competitiveness	Outsider	Gender based harassment
Respondent 5	Less or = 25	Not ranked	Support	Soft	Outsider	No
Respondent 13	Between 26 and 29	Gold	Support+Other	Hard	Insider	No
Respondent 14	More than 29	Silver	Other	Soft	Insider	No
Respondent 10	Less or = 25	Gold	Support+Other	Hard	Insider	Yes
Respondent 12	Less or = 25	Gold	Support	Soft	Outsider	Yes
Respondent 17	Less or = 25	Not ranked	Support	Soft	Insider	Yes
Respondent 4	Less than 20	Not ranked	Other	Soft	Insider	Yes
Respondent 6	Less than 20	Not ranked	Other	Soft	Insider	Yes
Respondent 19	Less or = 25	Platinum	Support+Other	Hard	Insider	No

Own table, extracted from NVivo

Category 1

The first observation that can be made of the table above is that respondents who play in another role than Support all consider themselves as insiders of the community (Respondent 14,4,6). All those players decided to move away from the stigmatisations on LoL female players by choosing a role not associated to it. Hence, they feel as insider to the community by referring to the first gamer identity. Consequently, those might have developed an identity dilemma at the beginning of their experience in the community but resolved it as their second women identity (which is opposed to the first women identity) matches the first gamer identity.

Figure 3. Identity management of Category 1's respondents



Category 2

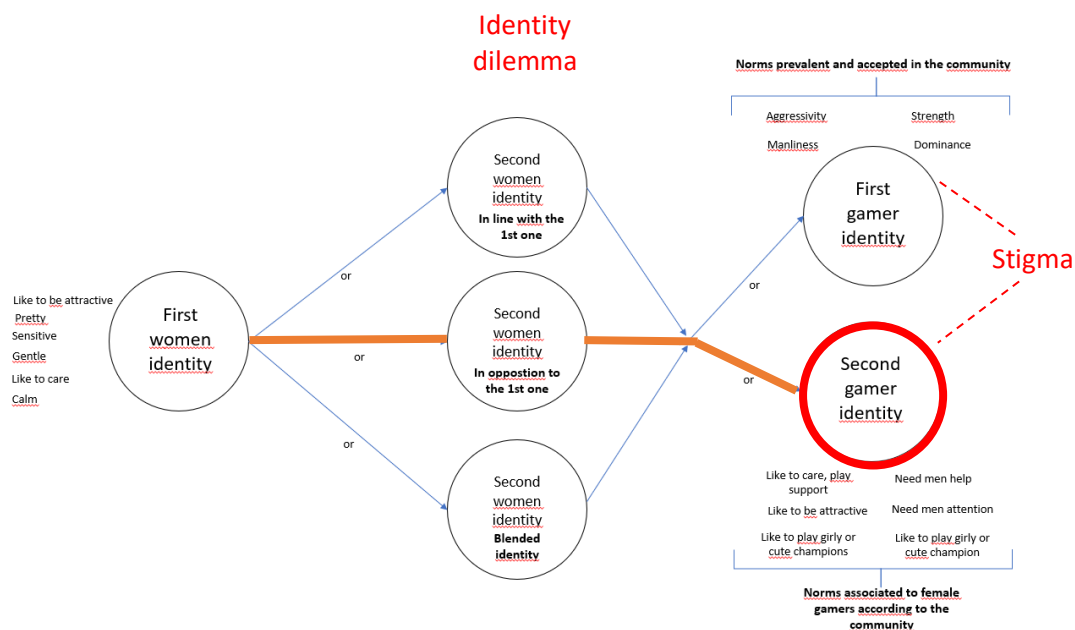
Then, this table also shows that all the other respondents mainly play Support. We can understand that, even if their first and second women identity are in conflict, they hold similarities with the second gamer identity. This situation on its own could be the root of an identity dilemma as those identities stand for opposite norms and behaviours.

However, thanks to the explanations given by all those players on the clichés present in the community, it can be argued that the initial source of identity dilemma is not the conflict between the women and gender identities, but the stigmas associated to female players. This hypothesis can be asserted by the fact that some of those respondents are not exposed to gender-based harassment. This means that even if a player is not harassed, she can still be aware of stigmas and be impacted by it.

As a result, we can claim that the only factor that can trigger an identity dilemma in this specific setting is the presence of stigmas. In other words, the role and champions played by this category of women (which corresponds to the second gamer identity) are stigmatised in the community as it is the opposite of the first gamer identity. Hence, they are stuck between not being stigmatised or playing how they really want to:

"At first, I started to play ADC and then it didn't particularly suit me and I preferred to play Support. But I told myself that I had no right to play Support, it was a work of forcing myself, to realize that, unconsciously, I was forcing myself not to do things in order not to fit into this stereotype because we see them in a negative way."

Figure 4. Identity management of Category 2's respondents



Own Figure

The reaction of those female players to their identity dilemma is to create a sort of blended identity that can be reflected in their way of playing. Indeed, they decide to keep playing Support for the most part but counterbalance the cliché by avoiding girly or easy to play champions and by forcing themselves to learn to play other roles:

"Sometimes I put "autofill" to try to play as much roles as possible". (Respondent 10)

"There are champions who attracted me less because mechanically they are not the most difficult to play with. And I thought, "let's avoid the stereotype". So, I think that pushed me not to play them." (Respondent 13)

"I admit that there are several times when I know that there are people who are likely to misjudge me, I take another role or another champion just to try to give another image of me." (Respondent 17)

Those findings also lead to another observation and questioning. All those respondents claim to be against the first women identity, which is indirectly transposed into the gaming community (the second gamer identity). Nevertheless, they are naturally attracted by the role of Support and attractive champions which should not, theoretically, be in line with their personality.

4.7.3 Respondents whose second women identity is nor in line nor in opposition to the first women identity

Table 7. Characteristics of respondents whose second women identity is nor in line nor in opposition to the first women identity

	Age group	Ranking	Role	Competitivity	Integration	Gender based harassment	Coping mechanisms
Respondent 3	Between 26 and 29	Silver	Support+Other	Soft	Insider	Yes	Mute
Respondent 7	Less or = 25	Diamond	Other	Hard	Outsider	Yes	gender masking, defensive othering
Respondent 8	Less or = 25	Platinum	Support	Hard	Outsider	Yes	gender masking, mute
Respondent 9	Less or = 25	Gold	Support+Other	Soft	Outsider	Yes	Acceptance, gender masking, defensive othering, mute
Respondent 11	Less or = 25	Not ranked	Support+Other	Soft	Outsider	Yes	Gender masking
Respondent 15	Between 26 and 29	Bronze	Support	Soft	Insider	Yes	Acceptance, gender masking
Respondent 16	Less or = 25	Silver	Other	Soft	Insider	Yes	Avoidance, denial, defensive othering,
Respondent 18	Less or = 25	Silver	Other	Soft	Outsider	Yes	gender masking
Respondent 20	Less or = 25	Silver	Other	Soft	Outsider	Yes	Acceptance, active defense, gender masking

Own table, extracted from NVivo

Among the respondents whose second women identity can be considered as a "blended identity", we can notice that 5 of them do not usually play Support as a role and that 2 play this role as well as other roles. In addition, all those women have already been exposed to gender-based harassment.

When analysing in more detail the narrative of those women, we can identify different "paths".

Category 1

The first path concerns the respondents 11, 16 and 20. Indeed, those women, to avoid an identity dilemma, decide to counter the cliché. Even if they do not position their femininity close to an extreme, those players prefer to develop a gamer identity closer to the prevalent norms present in

the League of Legends community (i.e., the first gamer identity). It allows them to protect themselves from being harassed based on the clichés.

"I don't play Support because of the cliché!" (Respondent 16)

"I think that subconsciously I also prefer to stay away from it (the cliché)". (Respondent 20)

As it has already been observed, stigmas and harassment based on those stigmas are the triggers for respondents to develop an identity dilemma. This way of approaching the community is similar to the method adopted by the first category of players whose second women identity is in opposition to the first one. However, unlike those other female players, respondents 11 and 20 do not consider themselves as insiders of the community. Therefore, two affordances can be argued: it either shows that the feeling of integration is not a prerogative to develop this identity management style, or it means that the respondents did not define their integration in the same way, which leads to those differences.

The same conclusion can be drawn for the respondents 3 and 18, even if less information was gathered on that topic from those interviewees, which does not allow certainty.

Category 2

Another path observed is the one of Respondent 15. We can argue that this woman does not develop an identity dilemma because her notion of femininity is closer to the second gamer identity than the first one. Indeed, even if she says not to agree with all the norms behind the first women identity, her personal experience in beauty pageants may influence her identification to the stigmas.

In addition, one of the coping mechanisms used by this woman is acceptance, which means she "gave up" on defending gender-based harassment and discrimination within the community. Hence, she is indirectly not impacted by it anymore.

Another element that seems to help her identity creation within the community, is to insist on the fact that girls always play Support. By acknowledging this, it can be argued that her perception of the clichés switches from "stigma" to "truth":

"I know that it's a big cliché anyway. But I know that there is a majority of girls who play Support, it's like that". (Respondent 15)

Category 3

Respondent 9 also developed her own way of avoiding an identity dilemma. Indeed, this player explained during her interview that she does not like the cliché associated with women in the game because it is not representative of the difficulty this role represents: *"It's a shame since it's a super complicated position"*. This argument may indicate that she tries to make me picture the role of Support as difficult and therefore "worthy" (from the LoL perspective). We can argue that, as she plays Support, she feels forced to defend this role. From this point of view, we can imagine that the stigma regarding this role may cause an identity dilemma for this player: if she plays the role she likes, she will keep the cliché alive and be stigmatised. However, like other players previously analysed, she resolves her identity dilemma by explaining that she also plays ADC. In addition, to separate herself even more from the cliché, she practises defensive othering.

"It's just that I've come across female people in the e-girl stereotype before and I have a hard time with it".

"The girls that I've seen in the game they're trying to get some attention and I can understand that but sometimes it's a little bit extreme so that's what I have a little bit of a hard time playing with the female players".

"I feel more comfortable with male players"

(Respondent 9)

In the discourse of this respondent, we can interpret that she prefers to play with male players, as she did not like the female players she came across. As previously addressed in the literature, using defensive othering can be a way of resolving an identity dilemma (Ezzell, 2009). We can conclude that this interviewee uses two resolutions simultaneously: a blended identity (by making changes in the role she is playing) but also defensive othering.

Category 4

This analysis also brings out another way of handling identities within the League of Legends community represented by Respondent 7. The latter, who can be considered as a hard gamer, presents the "opposite" of the identity processes identified before. Indeed, this player explains that when she started playing, she was naturally attracted to roles and champions at the opposite of the cliché: *"Well, I started the game and I tried a lot of champions, I chose what I liked and it was not at all in accordance with the cliché"*. Then, she was forced by her ex-boyfriend (who was also a hard gamer) to fit into the stereotype of the female gamer who plays Support and girly champions: *"He said 'no, you're going to fit into that cliché because that's the way it is' and that's all, so for a while I was in that cliché and I wasn't having fun on the game"*. After she got out of her relationship, she decided that she would stand up for herself and play how she really wanted: *"I thought 'I'm going to play Top to piss them off' and now I can play all the roles just because I was told 'a girl doesn't play Jungle'"*. In addition, being at the opposite of the cliché is also a way for her to mask her identity, to *"disguise herself"*, to, in the end, avoid gender-based harassment.

Even if she seems to have coped effectively with the stigmas and created her own gamer identity, it is not totally true. Indeed, she confessed that when she plays with friends, she feels a pressure to play "champions for girls": *"When I play with friends, I say to myself 'well no, I'm going to play the champions for the girls' because if I play Darius²¹, they'll say something"*. Respondent 7's narrative indicates that, unlike all the other respondents analysed previously, she feels the need to conform to the cliché. She explains it by the fact that the gaming community got less tolerant towards women who decide to play in another role than Support: *"A few years ago, you played mid, people, they were a bit wide-eyed but they didn't care - now, it's 'ah you play something else than Support? well, I'm going to dodge the game or people get mean'"*. Additionally, according to this interviewee, the more the ranking is high, the more the community is intolerant and toxic towards players like her: *"I was less annoyed when I was gold (than Diamond) honestly"*.

It can be argued that this need of conforming comes from her personality. Indeed, a parallelism can be observed regarding the way she handles her women identity. While discussing femininity, Respondent 7 admitted that she does things she does not like just to please others: shaving, straightening her hair or wearing a bra. This difference in addressing identity dilemma might also come from her high ranking and implication in the game (hard gamer).

²¹ See an image of Darius in Appendix XI

Another interesting element about her is that she practises defensive othering:

"I've tried to get on women's teams before. Oh boy, the worst experience. It's impossible."

"I mean, there's really the idiots ('cruches' in French), I want to call them, and the girls who play LoL and to me there's really a difference."

"In my opinion they reinforce the cliché, and I don't understand that. After, all girls are not like that, but I would say that 75%, 70% of the girls I met were like that."

No matter the pressure she feels regarding the clichés, she still despises what it represents and differentiates herself from girls who "reinforce the cliché".

As a result, we can conclude that Respondent 7 solves her identity dilemma by identifying herself to the first gamer identity, as well as practising defensive othering. However, it is important to notice that her chosen gamer identity can sometimes be challenged and that she can still retrieve her identity dilemma depending on the environment she plays in (i.e., when she plays with friends) or even other factors that cannot be confirmed like her relationship to femininity for instance. In addition, this respondent allows us to understand that an individual can go through different phases to solve an identity dilemma and that this process can take several years.

Category 5

Respondent 8 represents the last category of player detected during this analysis. This player, whose ranking can be considered as high and her category of gamer as hard, has contradictory characteristics. On the one hand, this interviewee only plays Support and girly champions. Therefore, she incarnates the cliché and has already been the victim of defensive othering. On the other hand, she admitted identifying a bit with the community, as she can sometimes be toxic by commenting on how other teammates play. From her femininity point of view, she explained that she always preferred to be friends with boys but never wanted to be considered as one, which is why she kept trying to conform to the "male ideal".

"Since I hang out with guys a lot, I didn't want to become the good buddy that you don't even consider a girl anymore. So, I always wanted to keep that feminine side, that charming side, because I didn't want to be treated like the guy who looks like a girl."

We can therefore imagine that she transposed the process of managing her women identity to the process of creating her gamer identity. Indeed, by conforming to the cliché, which has been created by the masculine gaming community, she can play League of Legends (which is a "male" activity) but keep her feminine side by playing a feminine role and champions. From the point of view of this woman (who created a blended women identity), developing a blended gamer identity does not come from an identity dilemma that stemmed from the gaming community but represents a translation of her women identity process. As a result, we can argue that Respondent 8 effectively experienced an identity dilemma but only in the real-life environment, where, as previously explained, she conformed to feminine beauty standards to fit in with her group of friends. This conclusion is relevant with one of the first conclusions expressed in the Section 4.1 saying that the League of Legends players transposed some elements of the femininity spectra inside the gaming community. Thanks to the similarities with the definition of femininity in our society and the second gamer identity, Respondent 8 could, consciously or not, position herself in the gaming community the same way she positions herself in our society. This conclusion can be sustained by the fact that she also explained that from the feminine point of view, her personality never really fit in the mould created for women. Within the gaming environment, she also admitted being the source of toxicity, which is a behaviour claimed as masculine in the community. We can therefore notice that, just like in real life, she keeps a feminine look (regarding the champions/roles played) but adopts some "masculine behaviours" to feel as part of the community.

4.7.4 Implications regarding the propositions

Thanks to all those reflections on identity dilemmas, conclusions can be drawn regarding the propositions 2,3 and 5.

Firstly, the findings indicate that *P2: Gender-based discrimination may be the source of identity dilemmas for female gamers* is not supported as, in the studied environment, it is stigmas that are the starting point to develop identity dilemmas. Then, being the victim of harassment based on those stigmas contributes to this phenomenon. As a result, for gender-based harassment to be a determinant of identity dilemmas, it needs to be paired with stigmas.

Secondly, the *P3: Female gamers may create a blended identity to cope with gender-based discrimination and identity dilemmas* can be considered as supported by the results. Indeed, several female League of Legends players have created a blended identity to manage their identities conflict.

Finally, as previously discovered, some respondents also manage their identity by relying on defensive othering, which supports the fifth propositions: *Some female gamers may use defensive othering to cope with gender-based discrimination and identity dilemmas*.

4.8 Coping mechanisms and identity management styles

Table 8. Cross table: Coping mechanisms and identity management styles

	No identity dilemma (2)	Blended identity (7)	Resolved: Cliché opposite (7)	Blended women identity (1)	Blended identity + DO (1)	Resolved: Cliché opposite + DO (1)	Cliché Acceptance (1)	Total (20)
Acceptance	1	2	1	0	1	0	1	6
Active defense	0	1	3	0	0	0	0	4
Avoidance	0	0	1	0	0	0	0	1
Defensive othering	0	2	2	0	1	1	0	6
Denial	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	1
Gender masking	0	4	4	1	1	1	1	12
Inaction	1	5	2	0	1	0	0	9
Mute	1	4	2	1	1	0	0	9
Seeking help	1	3	6	0	1	1	0	12
Voice covering	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	1
Total	2	7	7	1	1	1	1	20

Own table, extracted from NVivo

The first conclusion that can be drawn from this table is that women who solved their identity dilemma by developing a gamer identity at the opposite of the clichés, are the ones who use the most active defense to react to harassment. In addition, those women are the ones who rely the less on acceptance. Those coping mechanisms are in accordance with the identity management style adopted by this category of interviewees. Indeed, they tend to fight actively harassment and hate the stigmas present in the community. This need to stand up for themselves also lead some of those women to practise defensive othering directed at women who “keep the clichés alive” and discredit their fight.

Contrarily, half of the respondents who use acceptance developed a blended identity. In line with that, those women also represent the category that is the most inactive to mitigate harassment.

Another observation that can be formulated is that defensive othering is as frequent among women who develop an identity dilemma as women who position themselves as the opposite of the clichés.

Finally, the only type of identity management style that can be linked to a coping mechanism is the cliché acceptance. Indeed, the respondent relying on this strategy seems to have resolved her identity dilemma by accepting clichés and gender-based harassment.

As a result, we can argue that *P6: The type of coping mechanisms used by women may impact how they manage identity dilemmas* is not fully supported. Indeed, unlike the analysis of Bonnes (2019), the information gathered from this sample does not allow us to conclude that all the identity management styles of all female players interviewed are dependent on the coping mechanisms used. However, the results do indicate that, in some cases, the coping mechanisms put in place by those women are coherent with the management style they developed, and that one style is in line with the proposition. Even if this proposition could be true for this population, this sample does not allow its confirmation.

4.9 Sensitivity to gender-based harassment, exposition to stigmatisations and identity management styles

Two distinct factors, that could potentially influence women's identity management, were identified: sensitivity to gender-based harassment and discrimination and the exposure to stigmas outside the studied environment.

4.9.1 Sensitivity to gender-based harassment and discrimination

Table 9. Sensitivity and identity management styles

	Blended identity (7)	Resolved: Opposite (7)	Resolved: Opposite + DO (1)	Cliché acceptance (1)	Total
High sensitivity	5	5	1	1	12
Low sensitivity	1	2	0	0	3
Total	6	7	1	1	15

Own table, extracted from NVivo

As it can be observed in the table above, the sample analysed does not show “significant” difference between the two main identity management styles. Out of the 15 respondents for whom the degree of sensitivity could be identified, 12 of them are sensitive to the topic. We can therefore conclude that this factor does not influence in any way the identity management process of the women interviewed.

4.9.2 Exposure to stigmatisations outside the community

Table 10. Exposure to stigmatisations

	No ID (2)	Blended identity (7)	Resolved: Opposite (7)	Blended identity women (1)	Resolved: Opposite + DO (1)	Cliché acceptance (1)	Total
High	0	3	0	0	1	1	5
Low	1	3	6	1	0	0	11
Total	1	6	6	1	1	1	16

Own table, extracted from NVivo

Out of the 16 respondents for whom the degree of exposure to stigmatisations could be determined, 11 showed a low level of exposure. On the one hand, the results indicate that women who position themselves as the opposite of the stigmas consider they are not highly stigmatised in their everyday life. On the other hand, we can notice that the same statement cannot be made regarding women who developed a blended identity. Even if the findings do not allow a clear conclusion on the matter, it may be interesting, in future research, to focus more on this aspect. Indeed, we can assume that women who are used to stigmatisations may more easily develop a blended identity than any other identity management style.

4.10 Summary of propositions verification

Table 11. Verification of the propositions

Propositions	Verification
P1: Female gamers have two conflicting identities: their women identity and their gamer identity	Nuanced
P2: Gender-based discrimination may be the source of identity dilemmas for female gamers	Nuanced
P3: Female gamers may create a blended identity to cope with gender-based discrimination and identity dilemmas	Supported
P4: The game rank of a female gamer may have an effect on the way female gamers manage their identity and react to gender-based discrimination	Not supported
P5: Some female gamers may use defensive othering to cope with gender-based discrimination and identity dilemmas	Supported
P6: The type of coping mechanisms used by women may impact how they manage identity dilemmas	Not supported

Own table

5 Chapter 5: Discussions

5.1 *Identities*

The first element analysed in this thesis is the notion of female players' identities, their women identity and their gamer identity. As argued by Schelfhout et al. (2019) women, compared to men, struggle to maintain both their women and gamer identity as they can be considered as contradictory. On the one hand, the League of Legends community developed norms which can be related to hegemonic masculinity. On the other hand, the feminine identity accepted by our society describe women as gentle, quiet, caring etc.

The results of this research support those two definitions but bring nuance to the first proposition saying that female gamers have two conflicting identities: their women identity and their gamer identity. Indeed, it was discovered that most women do not fully position their own femininity in accordance with the accepted notion of femininity, leading to a division of the women identity. In line with this conclusion, the concept of gamer identity within the gaming community also needs to be nuanced. The results indicate that the League of Legends players transposed some elements of the spectra of femininity outside the game to create new norms exclusively for women. As a result, female players' relation between their women and gamer identity will depend, not only on their own relationship with femininity but also on the gamer identity they will choose (willingly or not) to adhere to.

In this light, this research complements Schelfhout et al. (2019) findings regarding female players' identities by going deeper into the definitions of women and gamer identities, which can be multiple.

5.1.1 The clichés existing about female players within the community: the second gamer identity

As previously discussed, some norms and expectations towards women existing outside the community have been transposed into it. The main element transposed is the notion of care. Just like in women's everyday lives, they are expected to protect and take care of their teammates while men make strategies and carry the game. This distinction of the roles in the game comes from the (still present) gendered division of work practised in our society. The gendered division of work can be defined by the fact that men and women do not perform the same activities, leading to a separation and a principle of hierarchy in favor of men (as cited in Berthonet and Clos, 2019). As a result, women have for years, been assigned to care positions which is even true in other social settings, such as gaming communities.

This conclusion is in line with the work of Hatmaker (2012) who analysed women engineers. Indeed, those women were also marginalized by being "pigeon-holed" by their organization to perform roles requiring stereotypically feminine traits such as caring and offering emotional support. In parallel, female players are expected and pressured to take on the role of Support because they are women.

5.2 *Sources of identity dilemmas*

Another main theme analysed in this research is the source(s) of identity dilemmas. The findings suggest that the main factor that can trigger an identity dilemma in this specific setting is the presence of stigmas. This conclusion comes from various observations. The first one is that even women who are not victims of gender-based harassment can question their identity (even if those women do not seem to develop an important identity dilemma). The second observation leading to this conclusion is that the lack of integration of an individual is not enough to be the starting point of

an identity dilemma. Therefore, the only point of similarity between all the women questioning their identity is that they are inevitably exposed to stereotypes and stigmas present in the gaming community. However, it is important to nuance this statement by highlighting the fact that gender-based harassment as well as the level of incongruity between the women and gamer identities, do impact the development of an identity dilemma. In this environment, gender-based harassment can be based on those stigmas which enhance the negative impact on female players. Another important observation is that the exposure to gender-based harassment does not create an identity dilemma but does have an impact on the sense of integration of some of the women interviewed. Indeed, by not being exposed to harassment players tend to consider themselves more easily as insiders of the community.

Consequently, those results differ from the second proposition and the findings of Bonnes (2019) who studied the identity work of service-women. The latter argues that it is the exposure to sexual harassment that creates an identity dilemma as it “serves as a salient reminder that women are outsiders in the military space” (Bonnes, 2019, p1675). Even if the service community and the League of Legend community share some similarities, we can assume that this variance may come from the difference in environments. Indeed, unlike the military, the LOL community “created a special place for female players to evolve in” (i.e., the second gamer identity). However, as this specific identity created for women carries negative connotations, this identity became a stigma from the perspective of the female players, leading to the emergence of identity dilemmas.

As previously stated, the level of congruity between a player’s (second) women identity and the gamer identity she chose to adhere to is also a determinant in developing an identity dilemma. However, the findings show that among the respondents who claim to be against the first women identity, some of them are naturally attracted by the role of Support and attractive champions. Yet, this identification to the second gamer identity, which is indirectly transposed from the first women identity, should not theoretically be in line with their personality. The first plausible explanation to this inconsistency is that the respondents were biased during the interview. Indeed, they might have tried to impersonate a “modern woman”, a feminist that fights the clichés associated to women. This social desirability bias seems relevant as feminist movements have been rising for several years now and that fighting for equality between the genres is more common and accepted than it used to be (Levy, 2022). Another explanation might be that those women did not develop the same type of relationship with their femininity within the gaming community. Indeed, it can be argued that our current society is not as intolerant and stigmatising towards women as the League of Legends community. Consequently, women may feel more at ease protesting stigmas outside the gaming community. This phenomenon may also be explained by the fact that those players, for some unknown reasons, do not have enough hindsight to make connections between the different identities and identify a conflict.

5.3 Identity management styles and factors influencing it

As discovered throughout this thesis, female gamers do question their identity when participating in the LoL gaming community. As a result, those women developed different strategies or “identity management styles” to feel at ease within this environment. Thanks to the narratives of the interviewees, 4 main styles were identified: creating a blended identity, positioning oneself as the opposite of clichés, practising defensive othering, and accepting the clichés.

As theorized previously in the theoretical framework, a blended identity is a common resolution type that consists in the creation of new identity. The latter brings together two conflicting identities in a creative way, to conform to expected norms (Dunn, 1998; Dunn & Creek, Schwalbe & Mason-Schrock, 1996; Bonnes, 2019; Ezzell, 2009). The results of this research support the third proposition which assumed that female players in the League of Legends community used a blended identity to

manage their identity dilemmas. To avoid stigmatisations, some women decide to change the champions or the roles they play to distance themselves from the clichés. This configuration allows them to still enjoy themselves by playing Support (which is generally the role they prefer) but alternate with other roles or chose to play champions that are not considered “for girls”. The results, by supporting this proposition, are also in line with Xue et al. (2019) and Bonnes’s (2019) findings who both have identified the concept of blended identity in the narrative of the populations studied (i.e., esports female gamer and service-women).

The second identity management style is represented by the adoption of a gamer identity that is the opposite of the clichés associated with women in the game. Indeed, the findings show that some female players are really upset by the stigmatisations existing, leading them to try to fight them by not corresponding to them. Consequently, they will play every type of roles except Support and will avoid playing with cute or girly champions. This tactic turned out to be used for two distinct goals: resolving an identity dilemma and practising gender masking. Indeed, thanks to the anonymity offered by League of Legends (as it does not require to speaking orally during the game) women can “disguise themselves” as men thanks to the roles and champions they will play. Hatmaker (2012) found similar results while studying women engineers. Indeed, it has been found that some women engineers changed the way they presented themselves physically (by not being feminine) to downplay the fact they were women. Rydzik et Ellis-Vowles (2018) also identified the same mechanism among women brewers who downplayed being women to avoid differential treatment.

In addition, the latter results also refer to the psychological concept of reactance. Reactance happens when individuals believe their freedom of thinking and acting is being threatened. This phenomenon, when happening in a social environment, will lead the individual to resist social pressure and even ignite the want to counter it (Jonas et al., 2009). In other words, when someone is told to do something, one will do the opposite, which can be related to the second identity management style identified in this thesis.

Then, as it has been assumed (P5), the concept of defensive othering is a solution used by female players to resolve their identity dilemma. Consequently, the results support the findings of various scholars (Armstrong et al. 2015; Ezzell, 2009; Bonnes, 2019) who identified defensive othering as a way of coping with harassment. Defensive othering refers to the process of stigmatising others, namely, to protect oneself from the same stigmas. League of Legends female players, like service-women (Bonnes, 2019) or rugby female players (Ezzell, 2009) position themselves as the exception to the stereotype by adopting their oppressor’s norms, values, and behaviours (Ezzell, 2009). Indeed, the players interviewed who practised defensive othering considered that the way they were playing and presenting themselves in the community was the opposite of the cliché associated with women. In addition, they got aggressive and had a harsh judgment of women who were “keeping the clichés alive”. However, the present results differ slightly from other papers on the subject as not all women who decide to counter clichés practise defensive othering. Additionally, some players resort to defensive othering without positioning themselves as the opposite of the clichés but by creating a blended identity. Consequently, we can argue that some female LoL players do practise defensive othering but that they do not belong to a “homogenous group” in terms of relation to the stigmas. The findings also indicate that defensive othering is generally practised alongside another identity management style.

The last main style to resolve an identity dilemma is by accepting the clichés existing in the gaming community. Indeed, by accepting that the community is toxic and by not considering the clichés as stigmas, the results indicate that a female player can resolve her identity dilemma. However, it is important to notice that this woman also showed an important congruity between her second women identity and her second gamer identity. This identity management style can be related to the concept of rationalization theorized by Hatmaker (2012) which consists in convincing oneself that the situation experienced is ‘ok’ or part of the culture.

Finally, the results of this research also highlight the fact that individuals can go through different phases to solve an identity dilemma and that this process can take several years.

5.3.1 Factors influencing identity management styles

Firstly, based on Bonnes' (2019) findings, the game rank of players was assumed to help players gain respect from teammates and, in the end, allow them to resolve their identity dilemma (P4). However, the results were mixed on this topic which does not allow a clear answer. In addition, as discovered, displaying a high game rank while being a woman can be detrimental. Indeed, the legitimacy of players can be questioned, and hate can arise. This negativity toward skilled female players comes from the perception of members of the community who consider women as incompetent in the game. Similarly, Hatmaker (2012) found that women engineers suffer from several types of marginalising interactions, namely, seeing their competencies and abilities as engineers doubted because of their gender.

Secondly, the results indicate that women several women who developed an identity dilemma were also exposed to stigmatisations outside of the gaming community. As a result, it can be argued that women who are used to stigmatisations may more easily develop a blended identity than any other identity management style. However, this finding cannot be asserted by previous research.

5.4 *Coping mechanisms*

Unlike what has been proposed previously (P6), the type of coping mechanisms used by the women studied does not impact how they manage identity dilemmas. Indeed, even if one type of identity management style is based on one of the coping mechanisms identified, the same statement cannot be made for the other types of styles.

Consequently, the research's findings cannot be considered as in line with Bonnes' (2019) findings who served as inspiration to formulate the sixth proposition. Bonnes found that, through the feeling of belonging to the community, service-women developed certain ways of managing their identities depending on the coping mechanisms they put in place. This difference may be explained by the results gathered on the sense of belonging to the community. Indeed, the military and the League of Legends of community cannot be considered as equal environments. As previously explained, the studied community created a gamer identity specific to women which can help women, despise negative connotations, to feel as more integrated in the community as they have an identity to refer to. Another explanation may be that all respondents did not have the same definition of "being integrated" in the community which led to differences in their answers.

However, the results do allow us to state that a link between the style chosen, and the coping mechanisms used by female players exists. This conclusion can be demonstrated by the consistency of respondent's choices regarding those two variables.

In addition, the coping mechanisms identified in this research are, for most part, in line with Fox and Tang's (2019) findings. Indeed, out of 5 coping mechanisms proven significant, 4 were in accordance with the findings: gender masking, avoidance, denial and seeking help.

6 Chapter 6: Conclusions

6.1 *Summary*

This thesis explores how female gamers manage their identity-ies in a hostile and gendered gaming community, through the prism of identity dilemmas. The research focuses on all the determinants and outcomes of identity dilemmas, ranging from the identification of respondents to femininity, the sources of identity dilemmas, the resolutions developed to the factors who can influence them.

To effectively investigate this phenomenon, a qualitative study was undertaken, and 20 female gamers were interviewed using a semi-structured interview guide. To ensure the quality of the data collected, a sample as heterogeneous as possible was gathered based on several characteristics such as the age, the LoL experience, the ranking, the type of versions played and the frequency of playing. When heterogeneity was not achieved, it was ensured that the sample followed the actual game's distribution.

Then, the data was carefully coded using a qualitative analysis software, NVivo. Before the actual coding step, an intercoder reliability test was completed, which helped improve the coding tree created. Afterwards, an analysis based on the themes identified was performed which led to various findings.

Firstly, it was discovered that female gamers may experience identity dilemmas between their women identity and gamer identity. However, this research allowed us to discover that, in order to analyse the identity process of players, two women identities need to be considered, being: the women identity based on the society's definition of femininity and the women identity based on the degree of accordance of the respondents to the society's definition of femininity. Additionally, the gamer identity can be twofold depending on the type of norms and behaviours that a female player decides to adhere to: the first gamer identity, which refers to the prevalent norms of the community (hegemonic masculinity) or the second gamer identity, created exclusively for women, which is inspired by the society's definition of femininity.

Then, this research indicates that, in this setting, the source of identity dilemmas is, first and foremost, the presence of stigmas which arises from the negative connotations carried by the second gamer identity. In the second place, it is the exposure to gender-based harassment based on those stigmas, and the level of incongruity between the various identities that worsen the identity dilemmas.

Thirdly, several resolutions to identity dilemmas, called identity management styles, were identified: creating a blended identity, positioning oneself at the opposite of the stigmas, practising defensive othering and accepting the stigmas. Additionally, the results showed that a single individual can use two different identity management styles at the same time. Moreover, it was discovered that the process of resolving an identity dilemma can consist of several phases and can take several years.

Another conclusion drawn from this research is that displaying a high game rank does not impact positively a female player's exposure to stigmas and gender-based harassment, which does not help with identity dilemmas.

When it comes to coping mechanisms, the data does not demonstrate a clear influence of coping mechanisms on the identity management styles developed. Nevertheless, respondents' choices show consistency between those two variables.

Finally, it was found that the exposure to stigmatisations outside the gaming community may influence the identity management style developed by respondents.

6.2 *Managerial implications*

This research, by focusing on the impact of harassment and, as it was discovered stigmatisations, tackles the topic of inclusion in the gaming world. Women, still today, are considered and treated as a minority in gaming communities, leading to an oppression by male gamers. As of today, this preoccupation is one of the most predominant and challenging in the sector, hence the relevance of this thesis from a managerial point of view.

The results show that, nowadays, women can define their femininity in a multitude of ways and that the definition of being a woman is not as simple as our society pictures it. Women, outside gaming communities; are endlessly making choices between being themselves or complying with the standards and expectations associated to their gender.

Unfortunately, the same struggles are present in gaming communities and can be considered as aggravated since communities like League of Legends are still ruled by hegemonic masculinity. This thesis shows that female players, for most part, present identity dilemmas due to the exposure to stigmas and gender-based harassment but also due to the incongruity with their own women identity and the gamer identities existing in the community.

As found in this research, the developers of video games play a part in this phenomenon by creating, in this case, champions “for girls” based on stereotypes existing in our society. Indeed, the League of Legend’s developers created, consciously or not, a division between female and male gamers which in the end, created stigmas for the subordinated group. Based on the same reasoning, the role of Support has been associated to women due to a transposition of the community of the notion of care. As a result, video games creators should consider that, depending on the way they conceive games, it may induce stigmatisations towards minorities such as women. Indeed, even if some women may feel at ease with this separation in terms of gender, this way of creating games negatively impacts a great number of female players. Based on those findings, companies like Riot should abandon gender stereotypes when designing champions and base themselves on more neutral characteristics. In addition to the physical appearance of champions, they should diversify the type of appearances depending on the five roles that can be played. By doing so, a link between a role for women and girly champions cannot be deducted.

Another recommendation formulated, based on the results of this research, is to increase the visibility of female players. Indeed, as of today, the gaming competitive scene is dominated by men and a segregation is made between feminine and masculine teams, which does not encourage women inclusivity. By increasing female players’ representation in the gaming universe, gaming companies might help in taking down stereotypes associated to women, which would, in the end, help them to position themselves more easily in such communities.

6.3 *Theoretical implications*

The research findings contribute to the literature existing in the field of Consumer Culture Theory which “refers to a family of theoretical perspectives that address the dynamic relationships between consumer actions, the marketplace, and cultural meanings” (Arnould & Thompson, 2005, page 868).

Indeed, the concept of online brand communities has already been widely addressed by scholars in the past and this, from various perspectives. The same statement can be formulated regarding identity creation within communities (Dessart & Cova, 2017; Seraj, 2012; Wang et al., 2017). Similarly, video games communities have been at the centre of several studies as well as the topic of women in the gaming environment. However, a gap in the literature was identified regarding the

identity creation of women within gaming communities. As a result, this thesis contributes to those various concepts.

Firstly, the results complement Schelfhout et al.'s (2019) findings regarding the various identities female gamers can develop. Indeed, this research indicates that, in order to analyse the concept of identity creation and management of those women, more than two unique types of identities need to be considered, aspect not highlighted by previous research. Also, those findings suggest that when considering the identity creation and management of women within a specific community, it is important to consider their own relationship to the women identity prevalent in our society.

Secondly, this research contributes and is, for most part, in line with the existing literature focusing on identity dilemmas and their possible resolutions. Indeed, as found by various scholars (Charmaz, 1994; Dunn & Creek, 2015; Schwalbe & Mason-Schrock, 1996; Goffman's, 1963; Bonnes, 2019) this sociological phenomenon can also be observed with regard to women participating in gaming communities. Additionally, this research supports both Bonnes (2019) and Ezzell (2009) findings regarding the concepts of blended identity and defensive othering as those two identity management styles have been identified thanks to the narratives of the respondents. Furthermore, this thesis complements research on identity dilemmas by arguing that another resolution refers to the psychological concept of reactance (Jonas et al., 2009). In line with that, it was showed that female players also downplay their gender in gaming communities which supports Hatmaker's theory on women engineers' reactions to marginalizing interactions. Similarly, this research indicates that another resolution type is represented by the acceptance of the stigmas and gender-based harassment which, again, is in line with Hatmaker's (2012) findings.

Thirdly, the notion of coping mechanisms observed in this research aligns with the previous findings of Fox and Tang (2019). However, a clear influence of coping mechanisms on the identity management styles adopted by female gamers could not be proved, which differs from the existing literature on this aspect (Bonnes, 2019).

Another theoretical implication lies in the observation that gaming creators play a part in the emergence and subsistence of stigmas regarding female players in gaming communities. This conclusion is consistent with those of scholars focusing on the negative impacts of sexualised avatarisation in video games on women (as cited in Lopez-Fernandez, 2019; Eklund, 2011), which also question the role of game developers in the discomfort of female players in gaming communities.

6.4 Limitations and suggestions

As demonstrated above, this research brings relevant findings to the literature and helps in filling a gap identified in the literature regarding identity creation within gaming communities. However, those findings need to be considered with caution as certain limitations must be considered.

Firstly, the definition of gaming communities needs to be nuanced to allow any parallelism of the results to other gaming communities. Indeed, the community is infamous for its toxicity and aggressivity. Therefore, it is important to relate this research to other gaming communities which can be considered as hostile and gendered as League of Legends. For instance, some MMORPG gaming communities can be considered as more tolerant and inclusive than the one at hand, which may not enable a parallelism of findings (Slant, 2022). Accordingly, it could be relevant to validate findings with other gaming communities and, maybe, identify differences.

Secondly, the nature of this research, being exploratory, does not allow the generalisation of the results to the studied population. Indeed, the main goal of such study is to bring food for thought on the topic and identify possible trends which can only be considered true among the sample interviewed. Consequently, future research could focus on validating the findings by using a quantitative approach.

Thirdly, as addressed in the body of the research, many factors happening outside the community can influence identity management styles. In this vein, it may be relevant to investigate more on those possible factors such as the impact of the exposure to stigmatisations outside the analysed community, the experience of women in relation to their femininity (like traumas or negative experiences), etc.

In line with this limitation, the reflection on the results allow to identify another weakness which lies in the “integration and sense of belonging” variable. Indeed, a lack of understanding of the notion of integration may have been the cause of divergence with previous research. As a result, future research could question the same population again by ensuring that a shared definition of this variable.

Regarding the sample, a recommendation for future research can also be formulated. Indeed, when gathering the sample, the aspect of “hard” and “soft” gamer was not considered leading to an over-representation of soft female players. However, it may be relevant to focus on hard gamers, which may address identity dilemmas and identity management styles differently, an observation that could not be asserted given the constitution of the sample. This limitation is supported by the fact that this player’s characteristic may be determinant because of the level of involvement of individuals in the community, which may lead to a different impact on identity creation and management. Such findings could be in line with Mennesson’s (2000) theory based on women evolving in the world of boxing.

One last limitation can be identified regarding the veracity of the data collected. This thesis tackles various aspects that can be considered as sensitive such as the notion of femininity or the impact of harassment on personality and feelings. Additionally, being able to express oneself on the latter topics requires respondents to have hindsight on the situation which is not also the case. Finally, as previously addressed, some parts of the data collected might have been influenced by a social desirability bias. Hence, all those observations need to be taken into account when considering the findings of this thesis.

7 Appendices

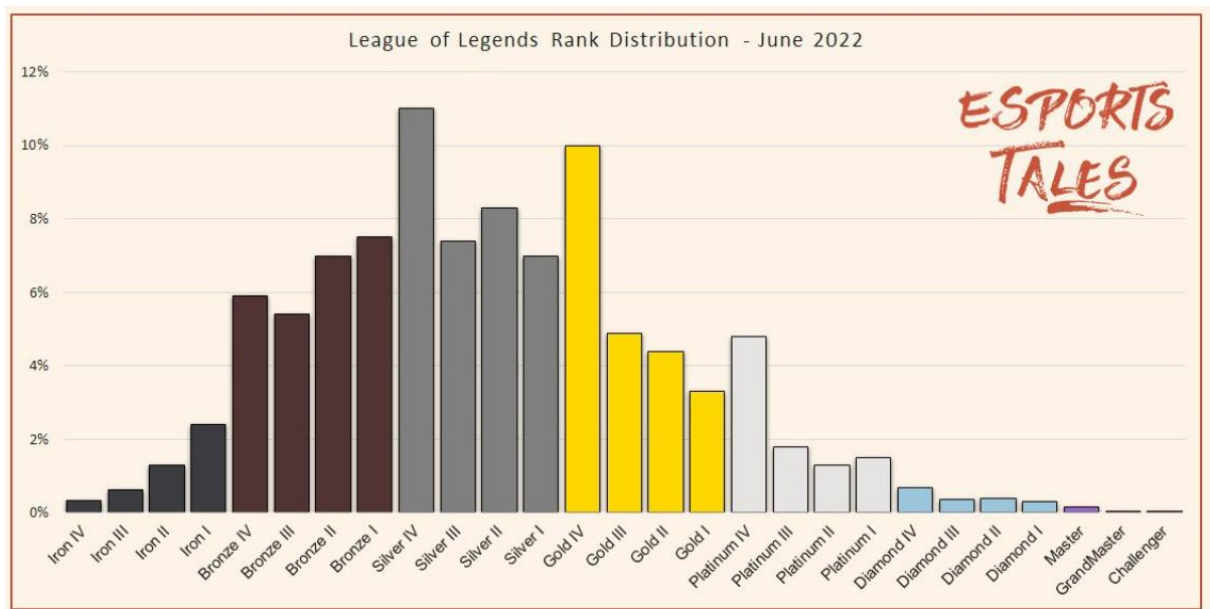
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Appendix I: League of Legends's map



Source: <https://www.touchtapplay.com/league-of-legends-wild-rift-map-guide/>

Appendix II: League of Legends rank distribution



Source: <https://www.esportstales.com/league-of-legends/rank-distribution-percentage-of-players-by-tier>

1 Profil de la répondante

- 1.1 *Quel âge avez-vous ?*
- 1.2 *Depuis combien de temps jouez-vous à League of Legends ?*
- 1.3 *Quel est votre niveau, votre rank dans le jeu ?*
- 1.4 *A quels type.s de versions du jeu jouez-vous (Draft, Classée, Aram, Map éphémère...) ?*
- 1.5 *A quelle fréquence jouez-vous à League of Legends ? Combien d'heures par semaine/mois jouez-vous ?*

2 Identité féminine dans sa globalité

- 2.1 *Comment concevez-vous et décrivez-vous l'identité féminine acceptée par la société actuelle ?*
- 2.2 *Comment vous positionnez-vous personnellement en tant que femme vis-à-vis de cette identité féminine ?*
- 2.3 *Dans quelle mesure vous sentez-vous stigmatisée en tant que femme dans votre vie de tous les jours. Expliquez*

3 Expérience en tant que gameuse LOL

- 3.1 *Comment qualifieriez-vous la communauté de joueurs LOL en général ?*
 - Selon vous, quelles sont les valeurs et les normes de la communauté LOL ?
- 3.2 *Donnez votre avis sur ces normes et valeurs.*
 - Dans quelle mesure vous retrouvez-vous dans ces normes et valeurs ?
 - Votre avis-a-t-il évolué au cours de votre parcours de gameuse LOL ?
- 3.3 *Comment vous sentez-vous vis-à-vis de la communauté LOL en tant que femme gameuse ?*
 - En termes d'intégration, d'appartenance ?
 - Y-a-t-il eu une évolution entre le début de votre parcours et maintenant ? Expliquez.
- 3.4 *Expliquez-moi comment se passe l'interaction avec les autres joueurs (tant féminins que masculins) LOL.*
- 3.5 *Quelles sont vos relations avec les autres gameuses LOL si vous en avez. Expliquez.*
 - Quel est votre avis sur ces gameuses ?

4 Réaction aux comportements agressifs

4.1 *Cela vous est-il déjà arrivé de ne plus apprécier jouer à LOL, de vous sentir mal à l'aise en jouant ? Si oui, pourquoi ? Expliquez les raisons de ce sentiment.*

4.2 *Dans quelle mesure avez-vous déjà été victime de comportements agressifs de la part d'autres joueurs ? Expliquez.*

- Quelle était la nature de ces comportements ? Définissez-les.
- (Si le sexisme, le harcèlement sexuel, n'est pas encore abordé : avez-vous déjà été victime de comportements agressifs car vous étiez une femme dans le jeu ? Expliquez.
- Selon vous, pour quelles raisons pensez-vous avoir été victime de tels comportements ? Qu'est-ce qui ont motivés/motivent ces comportements de la part des autres ?

5

5.1 *Pouvez-vous élaborer sur l'impact que ces comportements agressifs ont eu sur vous ?*

- Quel a été/est l'impact sur vous, en tant que joueuse LOL ?
- Quel a été/est l'impact sur vous, en tant que femme ?
- Comment avez-vous réagi (directement au moment des comportements agressifs, et plus longtemps après)
- Pensez-vous avoir changé en tant que personne suite à ces comportements ?

5.2

5.3 *Expliquez-moi comment vous avez fait/faites face à ces comportements.*

- Mettez-vous des choses en place pour éviter de subir ces comportements ?
- Dans quel(s) but(s) mettez-vous en place ces « techniques » ? En quoi sont-elles efficaces selon vous ?

5.4 *Pouvez-vous m'expliquer comment votre manière de gérer la situation a évolué ?*

Définition des comportements sexistes ou discrimination sur base du genre

Des comportements sexistes ou discrimination sur base du genre réfèrent à des commentaires sexistes qui peuvent indiquer une infériorité ou une inégalité fondée sur le sexe, des tentatives d'approches sexuelles ou romantiques ou des menaces ou blagues sur le viol.

5.5 Sur base de la définition que je viens de vous donner, quel est votre opinion sur les comportements sexistes ou agressifs envers les femmes dans la communauté LOL ?

- Est-ce que c'est normal ? Cela fait-il part de la communauté, de l'expérience de jeu ?
- Pensez-vous que toutes les gameuses sont victimes de commentaires sexistes ou discriminée à cause de leur sexe ? Expliquez.
- Pensez-vous qu'il existe des choses à faire et à ne pas faire en tant que gameuse LOL pour ne pas être victime de ce type de comportements ? Si oui, expliquez pourquoi ?

5.6 Y-a-t-il quelque chose que vous voudriez ajouter à propos de la communauté LOL, des femmes qui y jouent ou des comportements sexistes au sein de cette communauté ?

Appendix IV: Interview transcript of Respondent 7

Native Davignon: quel est ton âge ?

R7: Alors, j'ai 21 ans.

Native Davignon: ok depuis combien de temps est-ce que tu joues à LoL ?

R7: Je joue à LoL depuis 2016 donc 6 ans.

Native Davignon: quel est ton niveau ?

R7: Alors, je suis diamant 2.

Native Davignon: à quel type de version du jeu joues-tu ?

R7: Ben, je joue en classée, je fais de la TFT aussi, je fais tous les modes.

Native Davignon: à quelle fréquence tu joues à lol. Donc si tu sais donner par exemple une indication en nombre d'heures par semaine par exemple ?

R7: Je joue environ 4 heures par jour même si ça dépend de mon rythme de vie.

Native Davignon: comment est-ce que toi tu conçois et tu décris l'identité féminine qui est acceptée aujourd'hui par la société ?

R7: bah, je trouve que il y a une espèce d'inégalité, on ne peut pas faire comme les autres. Si je mets un short court, je suis une p*** tu vois, je peux me teindre les cheveux ou ne pas me raser les jambes mais je vais pas avoir de copains et ça c'est pas bien parce que je suis une femme. Je vais avoir 21 ans et je me prends déjà des remarques du genre " Bon les enfants, faudrait commencer à penser à faire des gosses" etc. Donc pour moi, je trouve qu'il y a moins de liberté pour les femmes, pas au point de vue juridique mais au point de vue moral, dans les mœurs.

Native Davignon: comment est-ce que toi tu te positionnes personnellement en tant que femme vis-à-vis de l'identité féminine qui a accepté justement par la société ?

R7: c'est compliqué parce que il y a beaucoup de choses où je me sens obligé de les faire. Par exemple, je déteste porter un soutien-gorge mais si je ne porte pas de soutien-gorge et qu'on voit juste un peu à travers mon t-shirt, je sais qu'on va me regarder. Ou par exemple le fait de devoir s'épiler alors que j'ai la flemme ou "les cheveux bouclés c'est moche" car les gens préfèrent les filles aux cheveux raides donc quand je vais au restaurant, je dois me lisser les cheveux sinon on va me regarder.

Native Davignon: OK et selon toi quels sont les adjectifs qu'on a des femmes aujourd'hui?

R7: C'est horrible si je dis un objet. Non, mais j'ai l'impression que on doit correspondre à un catalogue, un catalogue dans le sens parfait. On doit être vraiment fine, faire un 1m75, être blonde si possible les cheveux raides.

Native Davignon: et au niveau de la personnalité, tu as l'impression qu'on attend quoi des femmes ?

R7: moi, je suis dans la vie de tous les jours, je suis vraiment très directe et on me dit tout le temps que je suis un mec. Enfin, on me range tout le temps dans la catégorie des mecs. Tu vois genre il faut être coquette, il faut être douce, il faut être attentionnée, il faut pas parler fort, il faut pas dire de gros mots.

Native Davignon: Et donc du coup toi, tu te positionnes pas du tout dans ces attentes ?

R7: C'est pas ça, c'est que je peux être douce attentionnée etc mais si j'ai envie de dire à quelqu'un ferme ta gueule, je vais lui dire aussi quoi et donc en société, j'essaye quand même d'être un peu plus réservée.

Native Davignon: est-ce que tu te sens stigmatiser du coup en tant que femme dans ta vie de tous les jours.

R7: alors dans mes études déjà parce que je fais des études vétérinaires donc je suis confrontée à des hommes en permanence qui ont le besoin de réexpliquer des choses que je sais déjà donc ça me rend dingue. Tout simplement même juste avec mes parents aussi qui me disent non mais t'es pas assez féminine ou tu fais pas ceci. Dans la société en général, il y a juste mon copain qui est super ouvert avec tout ça, il est trop cool. mais autrement oui un peu.

Native Davignon: par exemple est-ce que tu as l'impression que comparé à une femme lambda qui n'est dans aucun des extrêmes, est-ce que toi tu as l'impression d'être plus sensible ou moins sensible à ces stigmatisations ?

R7: je sais que je suis très sensible à ça parce que en fait dans ma famille si tu veux toutes les femmes, elles sont elles sont en fait l'idéal féminin. Tu vois très fine, très grande les cheveux raides et tout blondes et moi j'arrive je suis brune rouge, je suis ronde et je fais un mètre 50 tu vois. Donc je suis grave sensible à toutes ces stigmatisations parce que je me les prends en permanence dans la gueule quoi.

Native Davignon; comment est-ce que tu qualifierais la communauté de joueurs lol ?

R7: Alors comme ça juste en tant qu'individu, j'aurais dit toxique. et en tant que femme je dirais injuste. Alors toxique parce que déjà tu fais une super bonne game ça va venir t'envoyer des messages en disant. " tu veux duo queue" machin et si tu fais une mauvaise game ça t'envoie un message pour te traiter de tous les noms. Donc déjà ça ça va pas. Et injuste parce que la première question qu'on me pose c'est mais "tu joues toute seule sur ton compte ? Non mais c'est pas ton compte ? Faut arrêter c'est pas vrai une femme ça peut pas être diamant" et après j'ai même eu droit à "tu es une femme zizi". Donc je vais vraiment justifier mon niveau et être une encyclopédie de League of Legend sous prétexte que je suis diamant.

Native Davignon: donc tu dois prouver que tu es légitime car tu es une femme ?

R7: oui oui et puis j'ai aussi des commentaires "tu dois jouer support". Ben non en fait moi je main mid.

Native Davignon: et selon toi c'est quoi les valeurs et les normes qui sont acceptées dans la communauté lol ?

R7: les valeurs de LOL en ce moment, il y en a plus trop. Les valeurs de LoL normalement c'est si tu es bon tu montes mais en ce moment. C'est plutôt celui qui sera le moins roulé dessus par l'algorithme. Après tu as toujours les clichés "les supports enchanteurs ça sera certainement la fille qui joue avec son mec qui doit jouer jungle top ou mid", l'ADC c'est un attardé qui fait que mettre des clic droits et puis le TopLiner, il joue sur une île perdue.

Native Davignon: et est-ce que pour être par exemple accepté dans la communauté il faut avoir une personnalité en particulier ?

R7: Alors en tant que personne lambda je t'aurais dit faut être fort. Faut bien communiquer, faut être sûr de ses choix, il faut être un vrai leader. En tant que femme vaut mieux fermer sa gueule vraiment. J'ai essayé d'intégrer des équipes compétitives. J'étais la seule fille et bah après voilà, je suis diamant deux donc je sais de quoi je parle sur le jeu quand même.

Native Davignon: Ouais, c'est sûr.

R7: Et j'ouvre ma gueule alors que les mecs ils sont platines un ou des quatre donc j'estime avoir un meilleur niveau sans vouloir me vanter parce que je suis pas en mode, tu es une grosse merde mais voilà et c'est tout de suite "Oui mais non mais tu fermes ta bouche", "oui mais non mais on t'écoute pas" et je sens que c'est parce que je suis une fille honnêtement.

Native Davignon: donc du coup toi personnellement dans quelle mesure est-ce que tu te retrouves dans les valeurs et les normes de LoL enfin, est-ce que ça colle à ta personnalité ou pas ?

R7: Non pas trop.

Native Davignon: est-ce que pour toi il y a une évolution dans les normes et les valeurs ou pas ?

R7: ouais, bah ouais, en fait ce qu'il y a c'est que dès qu'on sort un tout petit peu de la case prédéfinie pour les femmes, c'est à dire de jouer support et tout, si tu joues autre chose surtout maintenant - il y a quelques années, je trouve que c'était moins flagrant car il y a quelques années, tu jouais en mid les gens, ils avaient un peu les gros yeux si tu leur disais bon bah je joue top mais ils s'en foutaient - maintenant, c'est "ah tu joues autre chose que support ? Ah bah, je vais dodge la game ou les gens deviennent méchants.

Native Davignon: Donc du coup et tu penses que c'est au fur et à mesure des années ou alors c'est parce que tu as augmenté de niveau ?

R7: Non, je pense que c'est au fur et à mesure des années vu que la saison dernière j'étais classée platine donc pas un gros niveau et j'ai monté ben là cette saison, je me suis motivée. Voilà, je pense que c'est vraiment au fur et à mesure des saisons au début de cette saison, j'étais Gold et c'était pareil.

Native Davignon: OK donc du coup question par rapport à la communauté, comment est-ce que toi tu te sens vis-à-vis de cette communauté en tant que femme ? Est-ce que tu te sens intégrée, est-ce que tu as l'impression d'appartenir à la communauté ou pas ?

R7: Alors appartenir à la communauté absolument pas. J'ai plutôt l'impression d'être un morceau de viande, c'est cliché mais en fait j'ai pas l'impression d'être une joueuse lambda du fait que j'ai un gros niveau donc déjà on remarque dans la communauté qui a très peu de joueurs de haut niveau donc déjà juste quand tes diamants et que tu mets un poste ou quoi bah les gens sont "oh mon dieu tes diamants. Oh c'est trop bien. C'est trop bien."

Mais alors quand tu es en plus une fille. il y a le double côté un peu vicieux de "ah trop bien t'es diamant, c'est trop génial une fille qui est diamant c'est génial" mais bon il y a aussi les "tu l'as acheté où ton compte", "non c'est c'est impossible". Donc il y a très très peu de bienveillance. Le nombre de fois où j'ai mis des postes LOL FR et le premier message que je reçois c'est une photo de sa ****... Ça ou alors "ah oui mais tu sais j'ai vu en fait que tu étais en couple mais moi je suis master alors si tu veux, je peux te coacher personnellement...si tu vois ce que je veux dire..." Et tout le temps tout le temps.

Native Davignon: OK et à nouveau, est-ce que tu as vu une évolution entre ton intégration ou ton sentiment d'appartenance du début à la fin, est-ce que ça empire ?

R7: On me faisait moins chier quand j'étais gold honnêtement mais, au tout début, genre il y a 5 ou 6 ans, je mettais des postes sur LOL FR et je trouvais des gens super sympas avec qui jouer, des gens qui sont vraiment mes amis à l'heure actuelle, que j'ai rencontré grâce à LoL. Et aujourd'hui, c'est impossible, ça va faire trois ans que je n'ai pas rencontré quelqu'un de bien sur League of Legends.

Native Davignon: comment est-ce que ça se passe l'interaction avec les autres joueurs ?

R7: Franchement j'évite de jouer avec des joueurs que je connais pas dans la vie réelle en fait parce que ça se passe toujours mal.

Native Davignon: et donc du coup quand tu dis ça se passe mal, tu sais donner des exemples ?

R7: bah première question c'est un "tu fais quoi dans la vie ?" ok tu as quel âge ok ah tu es trop mignonne ou genre les garçons qui sont là à ma belle au bout de 2 minutes de jeu genre, je suis en mode mais enfin pardon mais c'est gênant. Ou par exemple truc tout con, tu vois quand tu joues à LoL, il y a un allié qui fait quelque chose de bien et tu dis "ah c'est bien tu as bien joué" et tu as un random qui dit "attends tu en as encore un peu au coin des lèvres".

Et avec les filles honnêtement, j'aime pas jouer avec.

Native Davignon: ok pourquoi ?

R7: Parce qu' en fait, j'ai l'impression que la plupart des filles se mettent dans le cliché de la joueuse pour des fois avoir de l'attention ou des fois ou peut-être juste chercher de la facilité dans le sens où on va pas les emmerder si elles sortent de cette case là ou si elle reste dedans. En fait c'est super énervant parce que toutes les filles que je rencontre déjà c'est "ah oui mais non mais moi je me mets support et quand je leur demande "ok mais tu joues pas autre chose ?" elles disent "Ah bah non" et ça me gonfle parce que du coup, à côté, moi je suis en mode "Non, je joue pas support". C'est chiant d'être confronté à des clichés humains. Il y a aussi les clichés " moi je suis une Eagle, j'ai plein de skins ". Donc honnêtement je ne joue pas avec pas beaucoup de filles parce que toutes les filles que j'ai rencontrées sur le jeu elles sont un peu des clichés humains quoi.

Native Davignon: OK et donc du coup pour toi le cliché lol de la fille, c'est main support ?

R7: Ouais, c'est mais une support sans compte, qui est boostée, qui a plein de skin qui mane Yumi, Nami, Soraka et puis elle te dit je sais jouer Léona mais en fait elle a jamais joué le perso. Et puis comment dire ça qui fait plein de réflexions à tendance sexuelle au meilleur allié de la team pour pouvoir duo avec.

Native Davignon: Ok, je vois ouais donc du coup tes relations avec les autres gamers lol tu les évites ?

R7: Ouais ouais, en plus j'ai déjà essayé d'intégrer des équipes féminines. Oh là là la pire expérience. C'est impossible.

Native Davignon: Parce que elles étaient toutes comme ça du coup ?

R7: Déjà et elles parlent les unes sur les autres. Pour le peu qu'il y en ait une qui soit un peu meilleure bah tout de suite, c'est une menteuse, son compte, il est boosté etc. Comment dire... il y a vraiment les cruches, j'ai envie de les appeler et les filles qui jouent à LoL et pour moi, il y a vraiment une différence.

Native Davignon: Ok ouais, donc du coup il y a toi et elles ?

R7: Oui. Pour moi elles renforcent le cliché. et je ne comprends pas. Après, pas toutes hein, mais je dirais que 75%, 70% des filles que j'ai rencontrées c'était ça.

Native Davignon: est-ce que ça t'est déjà arrivé de ne plus apprécier de jouer à LoL, de te sentir mal à l'aise ?

R7: ouais ouais, ça m'est déjà arrivé parce que quand tu fais des grosses sessions de jeu de 10-12 heures par jour et que t'es pas dans un bon mood et du coup bah tu es pas très performant et que tu prends des messages dans la gueule "va te suicider" "désinstalle le jeu" ben une fois ça fout un coup mais pour le peu que dans la vie réelle, il se passe un truc pas bien à côté (c'est dur). Ça m'est déjà arrivé de pas toucher au jeu pendant presque 6 mois donc.

Native Davignon: Dans quelle mesure as-tu été victime de comportements agressifs de la part d'autres joueurs ?

R7: Ben des messages en privé, des insultes, quand on met des postes aussi. Quand on joue avec eux que ça se passe mal, ils viennent en privé, ils nous envoient des choses pas sympa. Je sais pas si les publications sur facebook compte aussi mais du coup bah tout ce qui est nude, harcèlement tout ça...

Native Davignon: Ok ouais, donc c'est quand même aller loin toi tout ce que tu as déjà reçu ?

R7: Ouais, à un moment je streamais du League of Legend et en fait mon ex était jaloux du fait que je stream et il avait divulgué mon adresse et l'école dans laquelle j'étais et je me suis retrouvée avec un mec de plus de 40 ans à la sortie du lycée qui m'attendait pour prendre une photo avec moi quoi. Et ça ça m'a fait péter les plombs parce qu'il était jaloux du fait que je stream et j'ai reçu des colis et des lettres chelou à la maison.

Native Davignon: Et donc on vient te trouver en fin de partie en privé parce que tu as mal joué ou pour une autre raison ?

R7: Sur mon compte principal, mon pseudo est mixte mais sur mon Smart par exemple, c'est un pseudo très féminin. Donc ça peut être "salut tu veux duo ?" tu vois et la plupart du temps, je dis "non" et après on me dit "t'es pas une gentille fille" et après ça dégénère et je me prends des trucs genre "sale p****" "j'ai envie de te baiser" j'ai bien envie d'***** une joueuse de LoL" enfin des trucs très trash quoi... Donc là directement, c'est bloqué, prendre des screen et envoyer au support de Riot.

Native Davignon: OK et donc du coup si tu devais donner j'aurais un pourcentage du nombre de commentaires agressifs que tu reçois par exemple sur 10 games ?

R7: sur 10 game

R7: Tu parles en privé ou tu parles juste dans le chat ?

Native Davignon: Bah là franchement, je pense qu'on peut considérer lol dans son ensemble ?

R7: Ok franchement, j'ai presque envie de dire à toutes les games.

Native Davignon: Et de commentaires sexistes ou discriminants ?

R7: À chaque fois que je joue sur mon Smart je dirais que au moins 6 à 7 games sur 10.

Native Davignon: et donc sur ton autre compte qui est plutôt mixte du coup les gens se rendent pas compte que tu es une femme du coup. Esy-ce que ça te permet de pas recevoir de commentaires négatifs ?

R7: Oui ett quand on me demande de duo queue sur mon principal, je vais sur League Voice et je parle avec une voix grave comme ça on me prend pour un petit garçon.

Native Davignon: Donc pour toi les raisons qui motivent les gens à être agressif, c'est la manière de jouer et le fait que tu es une femme, tu penses qu'il y a pas d'autres éléments ?

R7: Enfait si tu fais une mauvaise game, comme ça arrive à tout le monde, ils sont pas contents mais alors si en plus tu es une femme, tu as rien à faire sur le jeu (d'après eux)

Native Davignon: Comparé à d'autres personnes tu as vraiment vécu un déferlement de haine!

R7: Ouais à tel point que, mon ex qui était accro à League of Legend m'intimidait et il m'insultait si je jouais autre chose que support tu vois ça allait loin...

Native Davignon: Ah oui, ok donc c'était même dans ta relation personnelle.

Native Davignon: OK, et donc du coup tous ces comportements là, est-ce que à terme ça a eu un impact sur toi en tant que joueuse ?

R7: Bah ouais parce que tu te penses libre de jouer n'importe quel champion sauf qu'en fait sur ce jeu à force, tu as des champions qui sont plus féminins et des champions qui sont plus masculins. Et quand tu joues seule, on va dire que tu t'en fous mais quand tu joues avec des amis ou quoi ben tu te dis ben non, je vais jouer les champions pour les filles, on va dire parce que si je sors un gros Darius, on va me faire la remarque.

Native Davignon: Et donc du coup là l'heure actuelle genre même quand tu joues par exemple avec tes amis Lol tu as toujours ce besoin de te conformer au cliché ou tu arrives à passer au dessus ?

R7: Non, ça ça va. parce que parmi mes amis je suis celle qui a le meilleur niveau de ma liste d'amis Lol. En plus j'ai vraiment fait le tri, j'ai enlevé toutes les personnes toxiques de ma liste d'amis, c'est-à-dire que vraiment j'ai gardé que les personnes avec qui c'est safe de jouer. Du coup, je suis passé de 200 amis sur LoL à 20.

Native Davignon: Et du coup, est-ce que tu as l'impression que ton niveau te donne une certaine légitimité au sein de la communauté et vis-à-vis en fait de tout ces personnes super négatives ?

R7: Ben non, en fait, j'ai l'impression que c'est un handicap plus qu'autre chose parce que j'ai l'impression d'être une imposture. En fait, parce que je suis une femme que ça justifie rien.

Native Davignon: Ok donc oui même le fait d'être forte et d'être de bien jouer genre ça te permet pas d'être intégrée ?

R7: Non non, en fait je dirais même que c'est encore pire si je suis une fille et que je suis Gold, je suis plus intégrée que si je suis une fille et que je suis Diamant. Je l'ai vécu

Native Davignon: Et plus tu es classée plus tu respectée, comme les hommes, ou pas ?

R7: En fait, il y a eu un moment sur LoL ou quand tu regardes toutes les streameuses, c'est pas méchant, mais il y a pas de streameuse de haut niveau. Le problème c'est qu'on les regarde pas pour leur style de jeu, tu les regardes parce qu'elles sont bonnes. Et puis les streameuses les plus connues, elles ont pas un super niveau sur LoL. En plus, dans le compétitif de haut niveau, il y a aucune femme donc en fait quand toi tu passes le diamant, pour la plupart des hommes, tu deviens une femme zizi, je l'entends tout le temps... Je te jure c'est insupportable,, je pense qu'on n'est pas assez représentées et dès que les filles qui ont un bon niveau se montrent, on se fait taper dessus vraiment.

Native Davignon: Et du coup une fois que tu es un peu forte c'est comme tu as expliqué genre tu reçois des messages en mode "C'est pas vraiment ton compte..." ?

R7: Ouais jusqu'à demander "C'est quoi tes tarifs pour que je te monte en Master?".

Native Davignon: Et par exemple sur le groupe lol.fr, si tu devais donner un ordre d'importance, sur 5 posts tu reçois combien de fois des commentaires négatifs ou agressifs ?

R7: alors franchement, je dirais à tous les postes mais c'est pas dans les commentaires. Les gens passent directement en messages privés. Ils ne vont pas forcément liker ou commenter mais ils vont venir en message privé. Ça va commencer par "salut, ça va" et dans les 10 minutes à 95% du temps, tu reçois une photo, des messages obscènes, des insultes...

Native Davignon: ok donc on a parlé un peu de l'impact en tant que joueuse, est-ce que du coup ces comportements agressif, négatifs, discriminants, ont eu un impact sur toi en tant que femme ?

R7: Ouais parce qu'en fait j'étais arrivé à un moment de ma vie où je pouvais commencer à vivre doucement du streaming et je streamais exclusivement du LOL quasiment et j'ai arrêté parce que j'ai reçu des colis à la maison, des gens qui m'attendaient à la sortie de l'école... Donc là ça va faire

quelques années que j'ai arrêté mais c'était traumatisant et puis pareil, ils ont trouvé mon numéro de téléphone. On me contactait en plein milieu de la nuit. J'ai reçu des sextoys et des sous-vêtements usagés dans ma boîte aux lettres et j'avais 16 ans quoi. À l'heure actuelle, j'aimerais reprendre le streaming tu vois mais c'est impossible. Je ne peux pas, j'ai presque du stress post-traumatique et j'ai vu une scie pour ça tu vois.

Native Davignon: et maintenant est-ce que ça a un impact sur toi ou pas ? enfin est-ce que des fois ça arrive que tu te remettes en question toi personnellement ?

R7: Ben là, LOL a pris une nouvelle dimension pour moi cette année vu que en fait je suis devenue coach pour des joueuses et donc je suis rémunérée un petit peu en fait pour coacher des gens. Avant, ça me tenait moins à cœur parce que je me disais bon, c'est un jeu machin et tout mais là quand on me dit "ouais, tu es trop nulle" ça a plus d'impact parce que je me pense pas légitime.

Native Davignon: OK et comment est-ce que toi tu fais face aux comportements ? tu as mis des choses en place pour éviter les commentaires négatifs et discriminants ? Donc déjà tu as parlé du fait que tu changeais un peu ta voix quand tu étais en League Voice, il y a d'autres choses ?

R7: Ouais, alors souvent ce que je fais c'est que c'est mon conjoint qui parle à ma place comme ça il pense que c'est lui et pas moi Et des fois j'utilises son compte Facebook pour mettre des publications. Aussi, quand je joue avec des inconnus, je change l'image de profil de mon compte Facebook parce que c'est une image plus féminine que masculine donc je mets un truc vraiment neutre. Je joue aussi des personnages qui ne sont pas des persos très joués par les filles aussi. Je me déguise.

Native Davignon: et par exemple le nom que tu as pris le pseudo de ton de ton compte principal, est-ce que tu l'as pris en pensant à l'avance que tu devais cacher que c'est une fille ou tu l'as pris naturellement. ?

R7: Bah avant de jouer à LoL jouer à CS go. Et j'avais un pseudo féminin qui m'a posé des soucis et du coup quand j'ai installé League of Legend, j'ai tout de suite mis un pseudo neutre. Et du coup bah c'est même devenu mon surnom dans la vie de tous les jours, tu vois mais comme ça les gens ne le savent pas que je suis une fille.

Native Davignon: OK et donc du coup tout ce que tu as mis en place là pour l'instant, c'est efficace, ça te permet d'éviter tout ça ?

R7: Ben en fait tant que je fais pas d'erreur, ça va. Si je fais une erreur, c'est foutu.

Après c'est pas forcément de la haine, c'est pas forcément des insultes mais ça a toujours un caractère sexuel qui est pas forcément "tu es nulle", c'est plus "Une fille qui joue à lol tu dois être bien chaude" ou des trucs comme ça tu vois enfin.

Native Davignon: Et c'est quoi qui te marque le plus ? les commentaires généraux ou ceux dirigés sur ton genre ?

R7: Directement ce qui est discriminant parce que quand c'est neutre en fait, je me dis bon bah il y a une raison peut-être que j'ai mal joué, bon bah ça arrive, c'est pas grave. Mais quand c'est "tu es nulle parce que tu es une fille" ou "tu as rien à faire sur le jeu" j'ai l'impression qu'on touche à mon identité et ça me gêne.

Native Davignon: ok, je comprends et du coup au fur et à mesure des années est-ce que tu as remarqué que ta manière de gérer la situation en général a évolué ?

R7: Au début quand ce genre de choses arrivaient, je faisais des crises d'angoisse, je pétais un plomb et je touchais plus au jeu pendant deux ou trois jours. Et aujourd'hui, je suis vraiment arrivée à un trop-plein de mauvais comportements sur le jeu que ce soit sur Instagram, que ce soit sur Facebook que ce soit sur LoL, c'est mon conjoint qui gère ma messagerie. Je ne suis pas en mesure de gérer ça émotionnellement parlant.

Native Davignon: OK Donc, je vais parler maintenant exclusivement des comportements sexistes et discriminants, donc sur base du genre. Selon toi est-ce que ces comportements sexistes et agressifs envers les femmes dans la communauté lol, c'est quelque chose d'accepter ?

R7: oui oui

Native Davignon: Ok donc pour toi, ça fait partie en fait de l'expérience du jeu quoi ?

R7: Ah franchement oui, je suis désolé mais quand tu joues avec 4 mecs et qu'il y en a un qui dit que tu en as encore au coin des lèvres quand tu fais quand tu dis juste que la personne a bien joué et que les trois autres se marrent et trouvent ça drôle. je suis désolé mais c'est pas c'est pas une blague lourde, c'est pas il y a une différence pour moi entre être un peu lourd et faire ce genre de remarque.

Native Davignon: Et pour toi, est-ce que toutes les gameuses sont autant victimes de commentaires sexistes ou discriminés que toi ?

R7: alors je pense que je suis plus exposée de par mon niveau et de part le fait que je stream. En plus de ça, j'ouvre ma gueule et je joue pas support et je refuse d'être le cliché donc je suis vraiment la meuf à abattre. En game on m'a déjà dit de me taire parce que j'avais tué le mec en face et il m'a pété les couilles, il m'a dit que j'étais une p****. Non je pense que toute personne qui sort de la case sur LoL en tant que femme se prendra autant de commentaires que je m'en prends.

Native Davignon: Et du coup, tu le fais tu sortes un peu de la case, tu le fais de manière un peu provocatrice ou tu l'as fait naturellement ?

R7: Ben, j'ai commencé le jeu et j'ai essayé beaucoup de champions, j'ai choisi ce qui me plaisait et ce n'était pas du tout en accord avec le cliché. Puis ensuite mon ex toxique m'a dit non, tu vas rentrer dans ce cliché parce que c'est comme ça et puis c'est tout en fait donc pendant un moment, j'étais dans ce cliché là et en fait et je ne m'amusais pas sur le jeu, ça ne m'intéressait pas. Je suis désolée mais le cliché de la fille sur LoL, c'est la petite fille fragile qui met des boucliers et des soins alors que moi j'aime faire la bagarre. Après, ça m'est déjà arrivé. Tu joues que support parce que tu es une fille et ben tu sais quoi, je vais aller jouer top pour faire chier et du coup je sais jouer tous les rôles justes parce que on m'a dit "une fille ça joue pas jungle".

Native Davignon: Donc les commentaires ça te faisait un peu sortir de confort ?

R7: Ça pousse à leur faire fermer leur gueule, c'est sûr. Puis je suis pas délicate, je rentre dans le tas vraiment.

Native Davignon: est-ce que tu as l'impression que jouer à LoL ça t'a aidé à forger ta personnalité en général ?

R7: Bon en fait jouer à LoL, je trouve que c'est vraiment violent pour une femme en fait et donc forcément, ça forge un peu un caractère. Bien sûr, il y a des choses négatives dans le sens où tu reçois un message, tu mets 5 minutes avant de l'ouvrir parce que tu as peur de ce sur quoi, tu vas tomber. Il y a aussi le fait que quand tu es une femme et que tu arrives à faire quelque chose de positif sur le jeu. en présence de mecs qui ne croient pas en toi, tu te sens invincible, enfin c'est génial. Tu as l'impression d'être un dieu c'est vraiment c'est ah ça c'est bien. Donc il y a du positif mais il y a aussi beaucoup de négatif puis bon. Mais à chaque fois tu dis "ah je pourrais mettre une

publication sur Lol FR” et puis d'un coup tu sens dans ta poitrine qui a un petit truc qui serre comme ça et tu n'es plus sûre de toi.

Native Davignon: Et au niveau de ta personnalité du coup parce que donc tu as l'extrême la communauté lol dans ce que tu m'as expliqué est-ce que du coup toi pour coexister tu as l'impression que tu dois mixer les deux extrêmes de la communauté et des attentes envers les femmes ?

R7: honnêtement quand je joue à LoL, j'essaye vraiment de dissocier, de me mettre une espèce de carapace. J'ai vraiment décidé maintenant de m'en battre les couilles mais vraiment parce que sinon je ne m'en sors pas. parce que vraiment je l'ai déjà entendu plusieurs fois, tu regardes un garçon qui joue support et la première question qu'on va lui poser c'est si il est gay ou genre “Ah est-ce que tu sais jouer ce perso là ? ah bah oui, c'est un perso rose donc tu sais forcément le jouer”. Soit je m'amuse pas sur le jeu parce que mes préférences au niveau des gameplay ne sont pas en adéquation avec le cliché et on me fout la paix ou soit je m'éclate sur le jeu. Donc moi je préfère foutre une armure et foncer dans le tas et faire ce qui me plaît.

Native Davignon: Donc du coup là, on arrive au bout de mon questionnaire, je sais pas s'il y a autre chose que tu voudrais dire qu'on a pas encore abordé ?

R7: Ben qu'il y en a pas beaucoup des joueuses. En fait, je crois que c'est pas qu'il y en a pas beaucoup, c'est qu'elles se cachent bien.

R7: Ouais, c'est pas. C'est pas pareil. Ouais, moi je suis je suis au fin fond de l'argent là vraiment c'est ouais non mais non mais il faut vraiment c'est ouais par exemple. Quand je sais que je vais mettre une photo ou une. Ou un poste sur le les faire par exemple, je fais juste enfin, je fais attention à ce que j'ai comme photo de profil sur facebook pour pas que ce soit trop.

R7: Provoquant genre là, j'ai une photo de profil sur facebook. Je pense que je posterai pas de trucs avec cette photo là, tu vois par exemple enfin.

Native Davignon: Ok ouais, donc tu réfléchis vraiment quand même quand tu postes ?

R7: ah oui oui

Native Davignon: est-ce que le fait de jouer à LoL c'est quelque chose que tu dis dans ton entourage ?

R7: Dans notre cercle d'amis tout le monde joue et en fait, je suis la mieux classée de notre cercle d'amis et les gens entre eux, ils se taquinent en mode “Ouais, je suis meilleur machin etc’ et moi je rigole et je leur dit “je vous éclate tous” et ils me regardent et il y a un blanc à chaque fois.

Et quand je dis ça à des inconnus, ils ne me prennent pas au sérieux parce qu' ils sont en mode “ elle fait mu-muse sur l'ordinateur” et ils se pensent plus fort que moi. Et quand je leur dit que je suis diamant 2 ils répondent “arrête, c'est pas vrai” “Mais non, mais tu mens”...

Native Davignon: Et par exemple sur des personnes qui sont pas du tout accoutumées au jeu etc le fait que tu joues par exemple, est-ce que c'est vu de manière positive ou négative ?

R7: négatif parce que en fait au début c'est ah tu joues au jeu vidéo ok bah c'est nul parce que en fait la première réflexion qui vient c'est un petit niveau donc tu gagnes rien,. et c'est une perte de temps. Et quand je leur dis que j'ai un bon niveau, la réflexion qui vient derrière c'est “ah oui mais alors du coup tu joues en équipe” et je suis en mode non bah non, en fait, je joue seule et je suis forte seule. Et al.ors on me dit que je ferais mieux d'aller faire autre chose de ma vie que de faire ça.

Native Davignon: Ok et tu penses qu'on dirait ça à un homme par exemple ou tu penses que c'est vraiment parce que tu es une fille et que les filles ça ne joue pas aux jeux vidéos entre guillemets ?

R7: Je pense que c'est accentué par le fait que je sois une fille parce que les garçons dans mon entourage qui ont également un bon niveau mais qui est quand même en dessous du mien, on leur dit "Ah c'est bien, tu es pas très loin d'en faire quelque chose de professionnel" alors que moi je suis au niveau pour faire du professionnel et on me dit va faire autre chose.

Appendix V: Coding tree

Themes	Definition of the concept of femininity : how the respondent define femininity and adjectives regarding women in society	Sensitivity to discrimination and sexist behaviour	Identification to femininity and expectations towards women	Level of stigmatisation	Respondent personality : elements of the respondent's personality not discussed yet that can be a factor in the way she manages harassment	Community	Cliché within the gaming community	Game rank	Interaction	Nature of harassment	Reasons why no gender based harassment : explanations and reasons why a respondent believes she did not suffered from gender based harassment
		*High sensitivity to discrimination : explanations of the respondent regarding her sensitivity to the topic	*In line with femininity : explanations of the respondent regarding the fact that she is in line with the accepted notion of femininity	*Low		*definition : how do the respondent define the community	*Cliché explanation : how the respondents define the clichés present in the gaming community	*Respondent's rank	*Respondent interaction : how the respondent act and react to other	* On the way of playing : explanations of the respondent when harassment is based on the way of playing	
		*Low sensitivity to discrimination : explanations of the respondent regarding her sensitivity to the topic	*opposition to femininity : explanations of the respondent regarding the fact that she is opposed to the accepted notion of femininity	*High		*norms and behaviour: what are the norms associated to the community and what are the standard behaviours of this community ?	*Identification to cliché : how does the respondent position themselves regarding this cliché, does she represent it or not ?	*Opinion and disoussion about game rank	* Other players interaction : actions of other players	*On the gender: explanations of the respondent when harassment is based on the gender	
			* in between : explanations of the respondent regarding the fact that she is not fully in opposition or in line with it				*Opinion and impact of the cliché : what the respondent says about it, what are her reflection on it, what is the impact of the cliché on her ?		* Interaction between women: actions and interectio between the respondent and other female players	*Other: explanations of the respondent when harassment is based on something else	

Reaction to harassment	Impact of harassment	Opinion and reflections on harassment	Level of integration of women within the gaming community	Recommendations regarding the game : explanations when a respondent gives recommendations, things to implement to the creator of the game to decrease harassment and negative behaviours	Unclassifiable: when an interesting element of the transcript cannot be classified in one of the codes	Relevant quotes: when a quote is relevant and should be kept to use in the analysis part of the thesis
*Defensive othering : explanations when a respondent blame other girls regarding the cliché existing in the community, when the respondent consider that she is not like other female gamers	*Change of champion: explanations when a respondent makes changes in the champions she choses to play with		*Insider: explanations when a respondent believes she is integrated within the community			
*Acceptance : explanations when the respondent does not contest harassment or acts like it is normal, not problematic	*Change of lanes: explanations when a respondent makes changes in the position she plays in (Positions = Top, Mid, support, Jungle, ADC)		*Outsider: explanations when a respondent believes she is not integrated within the community			
*Denial : explanations when a respondent believes harassment does not exist	*Changes in the way of playing : explanations when a respondent makes changes in the way she plays (mute the chat, plays with friends, does not play alone...)		*Other			
*Inaction/ Avoidance : explanations when a respondent does not react to harassment, when a respondent avoids it	*Pause : explanations when a respondent decides to stop playing the game for some time					
*Active defense: explanations when a respondent fights harassment	*Change of pseudo: explanations when a respondent makes changes to her pseudo to avoid harassment					
* Gender masking: explanations when a respondent masks her female identity while playing	*IRL: explanations when harassment impacts the respondent in her real life, outside the game					
*Voice covering : explanations when a respondent changes her voice to not be recognised as a woman	*No impact : explanations why it had no impact					
*Seeking help: explanations when a respondent gets help from someone (a friend, a boyfriend...)	*Other					
*Other						

Source: own coding tree

Appendix VI: Image of “femme fatale” champions

Miss Fortune



Zyra



Ashe



Ahri



Source: [Champions - Univers de League of Legends](#)

Appendix VI: Images of warrior champions

Garen



Yone



Jayce



Lee Sin

Source: [Champions - Univers de League of Legends](#)

Appendix VIII: Images of cute champions

Yuumi



Lulu



Poppy



Neeko



Source: [Champions - Univers de League of Legends](#)

Appendix IX: Images of champions of other categories

Thresh



Warwick



Source: [Champions - Univers de League of Legends](#)

Appendix X: Screenshots of reactions to a female player's post exposing harassment

Women's reaction

Mais pourquoi tu réponds juste en provoquant à dire : tu veux que ça bb ? Il est con qu'on se le dise et il en vaut pas la peine sa vie est bien triste mais perdre ton temps à lui répondre alors que tu mérites mieux c'est dommage, t'aurais dû le bloquer bien avant ça aurait pu t'éviter bien des insultes, là on dirait que ça t'amuse de lui répondre

Sinon, je trouve que vous êtes tous les deux ridicules. Le mec t'insulte, t'es IG, tu t'en bats les couilles en fait. Tu rentres totalement dans son jeu et au final tu parles comme lui. Désespérant. Tu finis ta game, tu le bloques, et basta. Je pense que t'as une manip pour supprimer en game 🙄

J'aime 34 sem 17

c'est le com' le plus pertinent à mes yeux, merci 🙌

On pourrait éviter tant de dramas avec cette manipulation simple.

J'aime 34 sem

Alors.. Je comprend tout à fais ce que tu ressents, malheureusement je crois que toute la filles ou presque on ça.

Mais meuf, ça t'as servi à quoi de lui répondre ? De la base ou tu sais que c'est un gros chien, et que tu as vue son message, fallait le supprimer direct hein. Et me sort pas ' c' étais pour prouver pour Facebook'.

Je suis d'accord qu'il faut dénoncer ce genre de gars, m'as attisé la haine encore plus comme la, ne changera pas la personne. Tu aurais du le supprimer et le laisser rager comme un enfant dans son coin car il n'as pas eu ce qu'il voulait de toi.

Sur ce, courage quand même, je te soutien à fond haha, mon pseudo à moi, on m'insulte dès la première seconde, tout ça parce que j'ai Bonobo dedans 🤔

Men's reactions

Moi quand qqun ne m'intéresse pas je ne réponds pas, et au pire je bloque. Prq lui répondre plutôt que focus ta game ? 🤔

J'aime 33 sem 2

Mdrrr pk t'as répondu alors ???? C'était un enfant si ça trouve...

J'aime 33 sem

Source: Facebook Group - Allies - League of Legends FR : <https://www.facebook.com/groups/allieslol>

Appendix XI: Image of Darius



Source: https://universe.leagueoflegends.com/fr_FR/champion/darius/

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Executive summary

In an era where inclusivity and gender equality are at the centre of our societal preoccupations, this thesis investigates, through the prism of identity dilemmas, how female gamers manage their identity(ies) in a hostile and gendered gaming community: League of Legends. Accordingly, this research fills a gap in the literature by combining the themes of online communities, female gamers, and identity creation in relation to aggressive behaviours, namely gender-based harassment and stigmatisations. Additionally, this research, by investigating such a challenging topic for the industry, brings food for thought to the gaming sector, namely game developers. As a result, various findings could be drawn from this research relying on in-depth-interviews of 20 female League of Legends players.

First, the focus of this research is based on the definitions of the gaming communities and the notion of femininity accepted by both our society and respondents. I argue that several women and gamer identities must be considered to analyse such an identity process. Then, the sources of identity dilemmas are explored which leads to the conclusion that stigmatisations are the trigger of the studied identity dilemmas, complemented by gender-based harassment and incongruity between identities. Later, this research allows the identification of four types of resolutions to identity dilemmas, also called identity management styles in this thesis. In addition, factors which might influence the identity management styles developed by female gamers are addressed. Thus, the influence of game rank is denied while the influence of exposure to stigmatisations outside the community is assumed. Finally, recommendations for future research are formulated, as well as the identified limitations of this thesis.

Keywords: Identity creation, Identity management, Gaming communities, Female gamers, Identity dilemma(s), Blended identity, Defensive othering, Stigmatisations, Gender-based harassment, League of Legends.

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