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REPRESENTATION OF WOMEN IN VIDEO GAMES

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# Representation of Women in Video Games

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## **ABSTRACT**

This study aims to find out how the stereotypical image of women in video games influences the self-esteem level of video game players. The study used a quantitative causal research method that helped identify the variables' cause and effect relationship.

This research intends to draw attention to the impact of stereotypical images on the self-esteem level of players. In addition, it analyzed whether male and female players are aware of a stereotypical image of women in video games. It is essential to note that most of the previous research on this issue is focused on the western population. Focus on the Kyrgyz video game players population makes this research unique and valuable.

**Keywords:** video games, stereotypicality, self-esteem, self-efficacy, women characters in video games, gender stereotypes

## ÖZET

Bu çalışma, video oyunlarındaki kadın imajının, video oyunu oynayanların öz-saygısını nasıl etkilediğini ortaya çıkarmayı amaçlamaktadır. Çalışmada, değişkenlerin neden-sonuç ilişkisini belirlemeye yardımcı olan nicel nedensel bir araştırma yöntemi kullanılmıştır. Bu araştırma, stereotipik imajların oyuncuların öz-saygı düzeyleri üzerindeki etkisine dikkat çekmeyi amaçlamaktadır. Buna ek olarak, çalışma erkek ve kadın oyuncuların video oyunlarında stereotipik bir kadın imajının farkında olup olmadıklarını analiz etmiştir. Bu konuyla ilgili önceki araştırmaların çoğunun batı nüfusuna odaklandığını belirtmek önemlidir. Kırgız video oyunu oyuncuları popülasyonuna odaklanmak bu araştırmayı benzersiz ve değerli kılmaktadır.

**Anahtar Sözcükler:** video oyunları, stereotipiklik, öz-saygı, öz-yeterlik, video oyunlarında kadın karakterler, toplumsal cinsiyet kalıp yargıları

## INTRODUCTION

The history of video games dates back to the 40s and 50s of the last century, but over the past three decades, the video game market has turned into an industry with a multi-billion dollar income. Video games' popularity is growing. As a result, gamers' profile has also changed, which can be witnessed by a wide range of video game consumers. The portrait of a modern gamer is not typically consisted of male users whose age does not exceed adolescence. Nowadays, adolescence of both sexes is major consumers of video games. According to the Entertainment Software Association report, 214.4 million people across the United States are video game consumers. 24% are kids under 18 years old (51.1 million), and 76% are adults over 18 (163.3 million). Of the total number, 59% are males, and 41% are female video game players<sup>1</sup>. Given statistics represent that video games are not exclusively for children's amusement. With the rise in popularity of games, there have been raised concerns about the potentially harmful effects of video games. Most research on game studies has focused on the impact of violent video games on a person's degree of aggression.

In contrast, the other impact effects on many different content features have been largely ignored. They mainly concern stereotypical women portrayal in these games. In particular, female characters are usually portrayed as sexual objects, damsels of distress, trophies for the winners, and insidious villains you need to kill to pass the game. This mediated portrayal of women is not uncommon, as it is pervasive in media culture. However, knowledge about the effect of such images on video game players is still limited.

Video games have become part of the daily lives of many people. Therefore, the messages and images spread in video games have a crucial impact on children's social perceptions. Most of the research on video games states that it is essential to study this medium with the rise in popularity of video games. Since video games impact social actors (mostly the younger population) thus, this study will help

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<sup>1</sup> (2020 Essential Facts About the Video Game Industry, 2020)



analyze how players) perceive female characters in the game, whether they are aware of the stereotypical woman portrayal in games and how they feel while playing. From this perspective, the research question is:

**Does woman portrayal in video games affect video gamers players' self-esteem?**

Most of the research done on this issue is focused on western societies. However, this study will focus on Kyrgyzstan. Video games production is not a well-developed sector in this developing former soviet union country. Though cyber sports has become one of the popular fields that attract many representatives of different ages, gender and skill level all over the Kyrgyz Republic. In Kyrgyzstan, mostly video games are associated with a tremendous number of “internet cafes” and “gaming clubs” opened in the early 2000s. Research on video games in Kyrgyzstan is focused on aggressive behaviour and school performance. Though it is essential to study whether women's portrayal in video games affects video game players, particularly females, since theories on media effect and empirical studies support the idea that people can and should learn about gender roles and gender attitudes and beliefs from what the media offers, including television, advertising, and magazines<sup>2</sup>, in general, these studies show that media use has a significant impact on gender roles and gender perception. According to Barlett and Harris, sexualized and non-sexualized women images in video games affect self-esteem, self-objectification, objectification, respect for your own body and understanding of gender roles (P. Barlett, 2008). Due to the cultural impact of media on people's knowledge of gender issues, it is essential to study the potential impact of the stereotypical and counter-stereotypical image of women in the media, precisely in video games.

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<sup>2</sup> (Davidson, Yasuna, & Tower, 1979)

## LITERATURE REVIEW

### *Video games in Kyrgyzstan*

As mentioned before, Kyrgyzstan's video games industry is not well developed. However, many schoolchildren skip school, run out of their homes, and spend hours and days in "gaming clubs". According to the head of Bishkek City Hall Education Department of Tatyana Kuznetcova, they regularly conduct raids on gaming clubs to identify underage visitors.<sup>3</sup> Further, they invite parents to schools and conduct preventive talks, and some children are taken into particular account. However, Tatyana Kuznetcova states it is still challenging since it is impossible to cover all gaming clubs, and a separate state agency should deal with this issue (Tokmakov, 2009).

Moreover, it is challenging to cover all problematic teenagers. Besides, schools are responsible for them during school hours. After school, the parents are responsible for taking care of their children.

Video game addiction among schoolchildren in Kyrgyzstan depends on different factors. External labour migration can be considered one of the influential factors. Due to the external migration in Kyrgyzstan, many children are left with their grandparents without proper control. According to the National Statistical Committee of the Kyrgyzstan Republic, from 2011 to 2020, 123 267 people (out of 6 747 323 as of the beginning of 2022) have left the country due to the labour migration (Committee, 2022). There should be taken into consideration that these are official numbers. In fact, the numbers are much higher. In addition, conflict at home and school can be considered factors that push schoolchildren to find consolidation in playing video games, leading to addiction.

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<sup>3</sup><https://www.dw.com/ru/%D0%B8%D0%B3%D1%80%D0%BE%D0%BC%D0%B0%D0%BD%D0%B8%D1%8F-%D1%81%D1%80%D0%B5%D0%B4%D0%B8-%D0%BF%D0%BE%D0%B4%D1%80%D0%BE%D1%81%D1%82%D0%BA%D0%BE%D0%B2-%D0%BD%D0%BE%D0%B2%D0%B0%D1%8F-%D0%BF%D1%80%D0%BE%D0%B1%D0%BB%D0%B5%D0%BC%D0%B0-%D0%B4%D0%BB%D1%8F-%D0%BA%D0%B8%D1%80%D0%B3%D0%B8%D0%B7%D0%B8%D0%B8/a-4192975>

Video game addiction among teenagers also has deplorable consequences. First, psychological problems lead to asocial behaviour, aggression, poor school performance and challenge their integration into society. As reported in a documentary film on video game consequences in Central Asian news portal Azzatyk, within the last five years, the parents of a teenage boy have been struggling with his addiction with the help of psychiatrists. The addiction started at seven years old. In the beginning, they did not see any danger in him playing games, and due to often business trips, the child was left on his own without proper control. Then, it started from poor school performance, transited to aggression and ended up wholly isolated (Azzatyk, 2021). Often, parents do not pay attention when kids are involved in gaming. They assume it as an innocent leisure time. Leisure time for kids plays an essential role in the child's personality formation. The central role of leisure time is to relieve the physical, mental and intellectual stress caused by the educational process. In addition, children's leisure plays a significant role in involving children in continuous education, developing various types of children's creativity, and providing meaningful communication<sup>4</sup>. According to Yarmuhamedova, 68.6 % of 70 teenage girls and 82.9% of 70 teenage boys play video games once a week or daily (Yarmuhamedova, 2013). One of the factors influencing the difference in numbers is girls' involvement in household chores. Still, it can be assumed that the percentage of children involved in gaming is relatively high. Though, it is hard to name this data representable since the amount of respondents is minimal, and there are no additional studies on video games in Kyrgyzstan.

As Anderson-Barkely and Foglesong state, video games developers shifted to a “serious” games since they realized that the story could influence consumers' “opinion and attitudes” and can be used as a great tool to speared an awareness regarding critical issues (Anderson-Barkley & Foglesong, 2018, p. 254).

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<sup>4</sup> <https://www.dw.com/ru/%D0%B8%D0%B3%D1%80%D0%BE%D0%BC%D0%B0%D0%BD%D0%B8%D1%8F-%D1%81%D1%80%D0%B5%D0%B4%D0%B8-%D0%BF%D0%BE%D0%B4%D1%80%D0%BE%D1%81%D1%82%D0%BA%D0%BE%D0%B2-%D0%BD%D0%BE%D0%B2%D0%B0%D1%8F-%D0%BF%D1%80%D0%BE%D0%B1%D0%BB%D0%B5%D0%BC%D0%B0-%D0%B4%D0%BB%D1%8F-%D0%BA%D0%B8%D1%80%D0%B3%D0%B8%D0%B7%D0%B8%D0%B8/a-4192975>

Surprisingly in 2020 Open Line Foundation, with financial support from Soros Foundation in Kyrgyzstan and UNICEF, released a role-playing “serious” game, "Swallows: Spring in Bishkek," that raised awareness on bride kidnapping among the young Kyrgyz population. Since 2009 Open Line Foundation has supported victims of bride kidnapping and stands for their rights (Aminova, 2020). Nowadays, bride kidnapping in Kyrgyzstan is becoming a harmful tradition and a norm (Karabaeva, 2012). There are many arguments around this tradition within society. Some people state that it has never been Kyrgyz tradition. According to Karabeva, bride kidnapping has never been a Kyrgyz tradition, especially during the Soviet era (Karabaeva, 2012, p. 196). Going into the roots of traditional bride kidnapping, it was common among young people who were falling in love. However, they were from different socio-economical statuses, meaning they could not get married. Therefore, they made a mutual decision to initiate kidnapping. In this case, the parents of both sides agreed to let them marry (Karabaeva, 2012). However, nowadays, the problem of bride kidnapping transitioned from ancestors' practice to justification of crime. According to the Women Support Centre on the territory of Kyrgyzstan, 32 cases of bride kidnapping occur daily, for one year 11,800 (Women Support Centre: Bride Kidnapping, 2015). It should be considered that these are official numbers and many cases remain unreported. The bride kidnapping still exists because of the patriarchy in Kyrgyzstan. Women's right to decide whom to marry is still not respected and is considered insignificant. Besides, many people still do not know it is a criminal offence. Suppose the authorities convey to society that for bride kidnapping, not only the kidnapper but also his friends, neighbours and parents will go to jail. In that case, the number of kidnappings will decrease. The role-playing game released by Open Line Foundation is not just a game. It can be considered a guide on how to act when you are kidnapped and whom to contact in case your friend or relative is kidnapped (Aminova, 2020). The game producers added notes to the game that players can open anytime and read or make screenshots. As Aminova mentioned in her article, game creators received positive feedback from the users and gratitude for the helpful information. As Anderson-Barkely and Foglesong's development of “serious games” helps to cover “a new

demographics and untapped audience” (Anderson-Barkley & Foglesong, 2018, p. 256). In the case of the “Swallows: Spring in Bishkek” game, there were covered younger populations that do not read sources mainly focused on bride kidnapping. Though through entertainment, they receive informal education.

A new story was released because of the game's success in December 2021. The new game "Swallows: Sary-Kol mystery" covers the issue of arranged marriages and, in the same way, uses notes with tips on how to react and whom to contact. Since both games are focused on women's issues, the main character of the game is a female with both male and female friends who help her out in an occurred circumstances.

This thesis aims to focus on the representation of women in video games. It is essential to mention that the image of women within "Swallows: Spring in Bishkek" is based on typical Kyrgyz society standards of beauty. More precisely, tall, skinny, almond-eyed women around their 20s' and with white skin. Although around 403 486 people out of 6 747 323 are representatives of Slavic people (Committee, 2022). None of the game characters represented the Slavic population, as all game characters were ethnical Kyrgyz. The majority of the Kyrgyz population supports traditional norms and values. Especially after the collapse of the Soviet Union, a rise in religious radicalization was observed. For sure, it influenced the clothing of the game's main characters. Not as the characters dressed in "hijab", but there are no women revealing legs higher than their knees. Tops of all characters cover whole body parts and do not focus on female characters' breasts. Even though there were storylines in nightclubs and Kyrgyz youth in real life dress revealing. In terms of the character's bodies, the only feature to be noted is that all female characters are tall and skinny. As for the older population characters, they were also represented stereotypically. By wearing long dresses, headscarves and no make-up. Impressive that the norms and traditions that older women promote in storylines were argued from the perspective of women's rights. Understandably, the game's primary focus is content and the provision of helpful information. However, the visual part is also essential, especially when the game users are mostly teenagers in the stage of personality formation. By observing women's portrayal and messages spread in

games, young teenagers may build their expectations of women's appearance and gender norms and values. As Dietz, T. L states, images of women in video games develop an identity and construct gender roles within society (Dietz, 1998).

### ***Changes in women's portrayal in video games***

While analyzing the way women are portrayed in video games, it is essential to look at how women have been represented in media throughout history. Therefore, this chapter will analyze changes in women's portrayal throughout history. Further, there will be described how these changes influenced women characters' occurrence in video games and their portrayal.

Any changes related to media and society refer to the process of mediatization. These days the term mediatization is critical to study society and change emergence within society. Moreover, the term per se is new. Therefore, it needs to be studied and analyzed from different perspectives. While analyzing mediatization, Schultz focuses on its process character and develops four aspects of mediatization: *extension*, *substitution*, *amalgamation*, and *accommodation* (Schulz, 2004). Schulz states that these aspects of mediatization define "the process of social change in which the media play a key role" (Schulz, 2004, p. 88). Let's focus on mediatization's second aspect (*substitution*) since it is directly related to video games. Schulz states that media as a social institution replaces social activities which previously were carried out only face to face. Applying this aspect to video games can be interpreted as substituting physical games with other children on a playground. Schulz's statement could explain that *substitution* goes "hand in hand" with *extension* (Schulz, 2004, p. 89). These two go hand in hand and provide the sort of allusion to a "presence" in several places simultaneously—the allusion to opportunities extension.

So how has the image of women changed over time and influenced the image of video game characters? According to Preston, after the crash of the Stock Market in 1929, many people lost their jobs which led America to the great depression. As men lost their jobs, women were called to leave voluntarily and let men work. As a result, the media began to represent women as happy housewives who dedicated

their lives to family and household (Preston, 1988-1989). From this, it can be concluded that it is much more valuable for men to have a job, be economically independent, and be considered primary breadwinners. Media is an excellent tool for spreading moral values and ideology and constructing public opinion. Therefore, during this period, the media's first task was to demonstrate how it is essential for a woman to take care of a household and her family. She needs to step back and let her husband be a "man". Her role is in the kitchen, providing the whole family with moral support and caring for them.

Though, during World War II, women were encouraged to enter the workforce (Stewart & Kowaltzke, 2007). It is understandable since men went to the war and women stayed home to take care of men's legacy. The image of women shifted from the house into the factories. As Preston states, many advertisements had images of a strong woman who could do the man's job. (Preston, 1988-1989). They had to take a man role to support their families and replace their husbands while in the war. Media sent messages to society that at these difficult times, we need to unite, and women have to work and be motivated to bring their forces to support war efforts. Now they can work at the factories and do the men's jobs. However, according to Stewart and Kowaltzke, after the end of World War II, there was a strong need to return women to the houses (Stewart & Kowaltzke, 2007). Since men returned from the war, they had to take their positions as breadwinners back. According to Preston, the media's messages shifted in another direction. They were trying to bring the messages that women working in a factory was temporary (Preston, 1988-1989), which means that as soon as men returned from the war, women had to free space for themselves and go back home to take a supportive role. This demonstrates how women were manipulated and used to fill in a gap. As soon as there is no need for women's force, they should return to their proper places. Of course, this historical period of women's representation left its trace in nowadays portrayal of women in video games. Female-oriented video games have a "girly" image. These games' main message to the player is that women must take care of themselves and their household. While the female character is taking care of a house (improving it and cleaning), she must dress comfortably and in nice "girly" clothes

and have nice hair and make-up. The message here is that female gamer should keep in mind that women must have time for everything. To do household work, take care of family, and simultaneously, she has to look good to make everybody happy and proud of her. Most female-oriented games are focused on dressing, cooking and cleaning. Even in house maintenance specialists games, when female characters need to fix something, they call a male specialist to fix a problem with the plump door. Women's role is in choosing a colour and design.

One of the critical changes in women's rights occurred in the 1960s; women were battling for equal rights in the labour force and equal payment (Rosen). This can explain the inception of working women into the media. Females were portrayed as secretaries and nurses (Preston, 1988-1989), which meant that now they had an opportunity to be employed. However, at the same time, this illustrates the limitation of women in the labour force. Being a secretary or a nurse is the only occupation women can take. Since they are more likely related to women, Secretary needs to support and take care of her boss and do some small office tasks. Nurses have to support male doctors and take care of patients. In other words, do what you know how to do and what you get used to. Even though women's employment situation has improved, it remains limited. They were still in a subordinate and supportive role. At the same time, Stewart and Kowaltzke state that during the 1950s-60s, women's role in media remained at home, and there were few images of independent females (Stewart & Kowaltzke, 2007). Hollywood movies were focused on male characters and had a "frightened or in need of protection" image of women (Stewart & Kowaltzke, 2007, p. 42). This could be interpreted as sending a message to women that although she was almost equal to men during World War II, she was still weaker and needed to be protected. These messages imply that women are dependent on men and incapable of solving issues independently. She always needs a man by her side who will protect her and solve all of her problems. In the video games industry, the victimized image of women is the most common. Most of the games are focused on male characters who are on the way to saving their women. Women are often pictured as weak, handicapped and incapable of protecting themselves. For instance, one of the popular games in the 90s was Super



Mario. The only woman character represented in a game was a princess, which occurred at the end of each series of games within a season. The princess wore a fluffy pink-white gown, and she was waiting to be rescued by Mario. Before rescuing a princess, Mario had to kill a dragon who stole the princess. Princess, as a character, had no actions. She was a victim and a trophy. As soon as Mario rescued her, they stood nearby with red hearts on top of their heads. This example shows that women characters do not need to have their storyline. It is enough for them to occur at the end of the game and finally be saved by a short, nimble, brave and moustached guy.

The 1970s was considered a transitional period of women's increase on prime-time television. (Stewart & Kowaltzke, 2007). According to Stewart and Kowaltzke, the changes occurred in the portrayal of women. They still took the subordinate position. They were shown as women who had an opportunity to work in different spheres (Stewart & Kowaltzke, 2007). This expansion could be understood as improved female opportunities in the labour force due to the numerous movements toward equal rights and civil rights. This battle leads to the change in women's portrayal on television. According to Rabinovitz, the movie series about independent women was aired in the 1970s. One of the bright examples, according to Rabinovitz, was the TV show *The Mary Tyler Moore*. This show was about a social worker/therapist woman who broke traditional women's roles. She talked about gender equality and the role of women within society (Rabinovitz, 1989). This example shows how equal rights and civil rights women movements influenced female portrayal in media coverage. Women were not ignored anymore, and the ideological message to the audience was that women were equal to men. Though, it should be considered that this period refers to the beginning of women's independence. Still, there was a need for changes.

Stewart and Kowaltzke state by the early 1980s, there have accrued significant changes in the portrayal of women. Through being cast as central characters and portrayed as strong women who can fight for themselves (Stewart & Kowaltzke, 2007). This transition period had a significant impact on the occurrence of women in the video games industry. According to Harveston, the first female character

occurred in a video game in the middle of the 80s. Long lashes and some female accessories distinguished them from male characters' long lashes and some female accessories (Harveston, 2017). In addition, Harveston states that in 1986 the "first playable female character", *Samus Aran*, was introduced, though it was hard to call likes female character a female. She looked like a robot with huge muscles, and the only feature that distinguished her from other male characters was the colour of her iron body and some feminine curves. This could be because of the graphics of the games. It was hard for producers to bring other distinguishable characters as computer technology was yet to be developed and had limited details of the image. The early 1990s played a critical role in the representation of females in media. That was a period of the third wave of feminism. According to Snyder, the first and second waves were focused on women's rights to vote, work and have access to education. Whereas the third wave focused less on laws, the main focus was on the stereotypical image of women in media and individual identity (Snyder, 2008). This could be interpreted as women gaining their legal rights. Now they are independent and have their rights and more opportunities. Therefore it needs to be visible. So, why was the third wave so focused on the representation of women in media? Since media is a powerful tool for spreading ideology and constructing public opinion, there was a strong need to change the images of women represented in media. Over decades women fought for their acceptance by society. They wished for a more powerful, independent, strong and emancipated image.

It can be considered that the third wave had a significant impact on the creation of the first woman leading character in the video game industry. Hard to say that Lara Croft is an ideal image of a woman. Up to now, she has many features that many feminist theorists criticize. However, analyzing her image within the transition period shows the transformation of girlish female characters into strong and independent characters. In 1996, the first game with a leading female character Lara Croft had, broken into the video games industry (Kennedy, 2002). She broke the traditional image of a woman, and by being a strong female character, she was capable of standing up for herself and resolving complex tasks. As mentioned before, the third wave of feminism focused on women's representation in media.

Consequently, Lara's appearance was pretty much criticized. According to Kennedy, she was greeted and accepted at the beginning since she was the first female leading character in video games. Later, she was criticized for her exaggerated breast size, fewer clothes, and masculine behaviour (Kennedy, 2002). The sexualized image of women in computer games remains one of the discussible issues. Most video games have an over-sexualized portrayal of women. They wear tight, shorts, and sexy clothes and have unnatural skinny and, at the same time, curvy bodies. However, let's look at this point from the other perspective. It is well known that the video games industry is primarily male-oriented, despite the number of female players. These days, there are many video games with leading female characters, and the female image in games is changing. They are getting to be less sexy and going beyond the traditional view of women. All-female characters in action/adventure games are emancipated and independent. Therefore, it is worth highlighting that many positive changes in women's portrayal are happening. For example, Lara's image has been transformed from the first release. Now instead of a short tank and large breast Lara has a smaller, more extended tank and wears pants. As for her body, this character cannot be overweight because she jumps, runs and climbs mountains. This already suggests that Lara is in good physical shape. Besides having a good look, Lara is an educated and intelligent woman.

As a good example of changes in female portrayal, it is worth mentioning Apex Legends. It became usual to expect battle or action games to portray a more masculine woman within the 18-30 age range. However, according to Delgreco, Apex Legends includes women from different age groups (19-30, 38, 88) dressed not in an oversexualized way. Moreover, Delgreco notes that the game creators include non-binary characters with mental disabilities and representatives of the LGBTQIA community (Delgreco, 2021). This shows an attempt to show the diversity and the ability to choose a more likely character as a player.

Conversely, it allows the players to decide who they want to be. Each game character has its storyline and how certain life circumstances affect them differently. While analyzing characters visually, it can be noted that all female characters are in good shape, representatives of different ethnic minorities and the

age range between 18-30. Even though Delgreco mentions two characters Bangalore (38) and Horizon (technically 88), it is hard to differentiate them from the rest of the younger characters. Specifically Horizon, she looks more like she is in her early 30s, even though she is pointed as 88 years old woman in her storyline. At first gaze, these minor details seem insignificant, though it has deeper signifiers. Such as spreading a message that women in their 19-late 30s are the most attractive and active. As for the dressing, it should be noted that Apex Legends female characters are mostly covered. However, at the same time, they all wear tight clothes that highlight their fit bodies (ElectronicArts, 2022). Out of ten female characters, only one is wearing a top that grabs the attention of her large breast and wearing hills (Loba). This character, in her description, was pointed out as good-looking and fashionable (ElectronicArts, 2022). Although Apex Legends' creators attempt to diversify women characters, they could not go far beyond stereotypical portrayal. Of course, it depends on the genre of the game, and it should be kept in mind that Apex Legends is a battle game and assumes that characters must be fit, strong and wear comfortable clothes that won't limit their actions.

Women's struggle for rights and equality affected their representation in the current media. It is worth noting that this was a long and challenging path of the struggle. Yet, changes should be made in the representation of women in video games. These days women in video games are portrayed from one extreme to another. For example, they can be portrayed as traditional stereotypical housewives or masculine and sexualized characters. To this extent, it can be concluded that modern video games offer to evaluate the impact of feminism on the industry, look at how male and female characters have changed over the past decades, and reveal the attitude of computer game consumers toward the women's equal rights movement.

### ***Previous research***

According to Dietz, T. L images of women in video games develop an identity and construct gender roles within society (Dietz, 1998). As video games are acceptable and prevalent today, many children play games and receive images of stereotypical gender roles. From the analysis of 33 popular video games Dietz, T. L concludes

that women are represented as sexual objects, victims, subordinate positions, and in some games, perform as evil. They have "visions of beauty with large breasts and thin hips", wearing skimpy clothing (Dietz, 1998). At the same time, analyzing the realism of female characters in video games, Martin et al. study; compared video games' female characters' bodies with a sample of actual United States female bodies. They concluded that the game rating and realism significantly impact the portrayal of female characters' bodies in video games (Martins, Williams, Harrison, & Ratan, 2009). The image of women in video games has a thin-ideal appearance compared to other mainstream mediums. Martins et al. study have shown surprising results that the children rated video games have a thinner image of women. At the same time, less realistic games rated for adults have a larger image of women (Martins, Williams, Harrison, & Ratan, 2009).

This, in turn, builds perception and expectation among young people on how the female body should look. The image of women portrayed in media has a crucial role in young girls' perception of their bodies. Due to the propaganda of the thin-ideal body, girls are dissatisfied with their bodies, and boys have expectations of women to be thin as it is more attractive and socially accepted. This is well explained by Trepanier-Jobin majority of video games "contribute to reproducing, reinforcing, and naturalizing preexisting beliefs about men and women. Like any other media form, video games play an important role in the construction of gender identities, which are not— according to a constructivist approach—bound to biological features but socially established through the repetition of similar behaviours, bodily practices, and discourses" (Trepanier-Jobin, 2017, p. 90).

The influence of male and female characters on the perception of own body is well analyzed in Barlett et al. study. According to the scholar, video games that emphasize the ideal body negatively influence both sexes (Barlett & Harris, 2008). It affects body satisfaction, self-esteem, and body esteem. The study results found that the negative perception of the self-body leads to the unhealthy lifestyle of both sexes (eating disorders among females, steroids consumption among men, and abnormal physical exercise at the gym) (P. Barlett, 2008). The importance of the video game's influence on body perception lies in its immersion factor, determined

by the player's involvement in a game. In other words, as long as the player is involved in the gaming, they are unsatisfied with their own body (P. Barlett, 2008). It is common for people to tend to be unsatisfied with their bodies and willing to make changes like plastic surgeries.

To see the level of satisfaction of own body, Franzoi and Shields created a body-esteem scale. The questionnaire consists of 35 questions (32 apply to women and 31 apply to men) and contains questions regarding respondents' physical appearance and stamina. As scholars state, body esteem can be considered one of the “primary dimensions of self-esteem” (Franzoi & Shields, 1984). Furthermore, they state that the satisfaction with own body differs among females and males. Therefore, Franzoi and Shields Body Esteem Scale for women has been divided into three components:

1. Sexual Attractiveness – relates to physical appearance, though it includes body parts that cannot be changed through exercise, only with cosmetics. Since this article was written in the 80s, plastic surgeries were not expected as much as it is nowadays. So besides cosmetics, making plastic surgeries or minor changes (e.g. Botox) may also be considered. The results have shown that the physical attractiveness component is directly related to the sexuality of women, in other words, how they feel when they are sexually attracted to others<sup>5</sup>.
2. Weight control – also relates to physical appearance, though it includes body parts that can be changed through physical activity or eating habits<sup>6</sup>.
3. The physical condition scale – refers to “stamina, strengths and agility”<sup>7</sup>.

Franzoi and Shields analyzed the measurements on the Body Esteem Scale and concluded that females are more likely to focus on three body-esteem factors: “a) weight control and body proportions; b) facial features; c) general health and physical strengths” (Franzoi & Shields, 1984, p. 173).

Similarly male respondents body-esteem scale consists of three components:

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<sup>5</sup> (Franzoi & Shields, 1984)

<sup>6</sup> (Franzoi & Shields, 1984)

<sup>7</sup> (Franzoi & Shields, 1984)

1. Physical Attractiveness- relates to body parts features not functions. It includes facial features and physique. According to the scholars males are more concerned about their physical attractiveness in contrast to female concerns on sexual attractiveness<sup>8</sup>.
2. Upper Body Strengths- refers to men level of satisfaction with the body parts that can be “grown” through exercise. Authors state that women are focused on losing the weight to look skinnier, whereas men concerned about looking “bigger” since it directly refers to the masculinity.
3. Physical Condition – similar to female subscale, though includes body parts that considered by women as weight control. It is more about not evaluating them as “static objects” it is about assessing this body parts as an obstacle to be physically active.<sup>9</sup>

Video games (especially role-playing) allude to being whom you desire. Huntemann explains this via "popular social practice" "cosplay" (Huntemann, 2017, p. 74). The term consists of two words, "costume and play"<sup>10</sup>. Huntemann describes this as "social practice at fan conventions whereby attendees create costumes and role-playing characters from the fictional worlds of comic books, films, television shows, anime, manga, and video games" (Huntemann, 2017, p. 74). Most modern video games allow players to cosplay. Despite the game genre, players have an opportunity to design their characters. However, as Huntemann notes, cosplay is considered harmful since often cosplayers get obsessed with this action and cannot differentiate between reality and fiction (Huntemann, 2017). Therefore, applying Barlett's study and Huntemann's "cosplay," it can be assumed that those more involved in gaming erase the line between reality and game. Sort of merging with an ideal game character and personality.

Video game characters are icons in youth folk culture, but research on their role in gender socialization is rare. Dill and Thill's content analysis of characters' portrayal

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<sup>8</sup> (Franzoi & Shields, 1984)

<sup>9</sup> (Franzoi & Shields, 1984)

<sup>10</sup> Huntemann, N. B. (2017). Chapter Four - Attention Whores and ugly nerds: Gender and Cosplay at the Game Com . In J. Malkowski, & T. M. Russworm, *Gaming Representation: Race, Gender, and Sexuality in Video Games* (p. 280). Indiana University Press .

in video games has shown that in comparison to male characters (83%), female characters (62%) are portrayed as less aggressive. In addition, female characters, compared to males portrayed as sexualized (60%), wearing a small number of clothes (39%), and showing a mixture of lust and aggression (39%) (Dill & Thill, 2007). Dill and Thill went into a more profound analysis by comparing the perception of gamers and non-gamers of men and female images in video games. A teenage survey has shown that the stereotypes of male characters being aggressive and female characters being sexually objectified are noted even by non-gamers<sup>11</sup>. The study is vital in terms of the role of the media in the socialization of sexism.

According to scholars, "gender portrayals of video game characters reinforce a sexist, patriarchal view that men are aggressive and powerful and that women are not healthy, whole persons, but sex objects, eye candy and generally second-class citizens" (Dill & Thill, 2007). Furthermore, the article identifies that the stereotypic way of portraying women changes relationships between people. For example, men are more likely to accept rape behaviour and sexually harass women<sup>12</sup>. In addition, Ogletree et al. state that playing video games may affect interpersonal relationships between daters (men spent more time on gaming) and academic performance (spending more time on games rather than on studies) (Ogletree & Drake, 2007). Though, Brenick et al. study imply that female and male video game players state that the content of video games does not negatively influence their behaviour in real life since they do not apply the character's role to their personality. According to scholars, the perception of images depends on the frequency of playing the games, gamers' age, and gender (Brenick, Henning, Killen, O'Connor, & Collins, 2007). The sample frame within Bernick et al. study consisted of male (41) and female (41) adolescents (mean age 19). The study aimed to analyze attitudes towards stereotyped images of men and women in 3 different video games (games with

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<sup>11</sup> Dill, E. K., & Thill, K. P. (2007). Video Game Characters and the Socialization of Gender Roles: Young People's Perceptions Mirror Sexist Media Depictions. *Sex Roles*, 851-864.

<sup>12</sup> Dill, E. K., & Thill, K. P. (2007). Video Game Characters and the Socialization of Gender Roles: Young People's Perceptions Mirror Sexist Media Depictions. *Sex Roles*, 851-864.



negative male stereotypes, games with negative female stereotypes, and gender-neutral games). As for the portrayal of women in video games, according to the Brenick et al. study, mostly female adolescents noted that the images of women in video games are unacceptable and should be changed. In contrast, men accepted sexualized images of women and did not think they should be changed (Brenick, Henning, Killen, O'Connor, & Collins, 2007). As mentioned before, acceptance of the sexualized images of women in games depends on the frequency of playing the games. Those who play often do not mind sexualized females' image and consider that the decision to play video games should be autonomous. While "low-frequency players deeming the decision to play as an autonomous one under authority, parental and governmental, jurisdiction" (Brenick, Henning, Killen, O'Connor, & Collins, 2007). In other words, respondents stated that parents should control the younger players since they could be influenced by the stereotypical images of women and men within the games. At the same time, Cudo and colleagues state that as long as players spend more time gaming, they are unsatisfied with their real lives. (Cudo, Kopis, & Zabielska-Mendyk, 2019). This could be analyzed through skillfulness in gaming. As more gamers play the game, they get more skilful and professional; on the contrary, in real life, they might take it hard on their professional and personal failures.

## **THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK**

This chapter covers the main points of Bandura's Social Cognitive Theory of Mass Communication and Lippmann's stereotypes theory. Further, Bandura's Social Cognitive Theory will be applied to video games in a discussion section to show how video game players perceive and form social and behavioural norms and actions through indirect processes and observations. It was decided to look through stereotypes since, according to Bandura, many faulty beliefs about social and sex roles, minorities, race and other aspects of life are to some extent developed "through symbolic modelling of stereotypes" (Bandura, 2002, p. 138). Therefore Lippmann's theory on stereotypes will give an overview of how stereotypes form, root, standardize and form video game players' perception of personal appearance.

### ***Social Cognitive Theory of Mass Communication***

The social cognitive theory of mass communications describes the psychological mechanisms of the mass media's influence on individuals' behaviour, thinking, and feelings through symbolic communication (Bandura, 2002). In particular, the theory considers psychological functioning within the framework of the interaction of three elements - personal factors in the form of "cognitive, affective and biological events; behavioural patterns" and environmental factors (Bandura, 2002).

As a result, the system described above is designed to process, retain, and use coded information. It provides an opportunity for the functioning of human abilities, among which Bandura identifies the following processes:

1. Symbolizing capability – most of the external factors impact the behaviour of individuals through cognitive processes that determine what external events the individual will observe, what values he will be given to them, and whether these factors will have any lasting effect, etc. In other words, it is the symbols of the processing and transformation of spontaneous experience

into cognitive models that guide decision-making and the formation of specific behaviour<sup>13</sup>.

2. Self-regulatory capability - is described in the fact that people tend to set goals, assume the likely consequences of the expected actions, and (based on this) plan differently behavioural models that are likely to produce the desired results and avoid undesirable consequences (ibid). In other words, motivation and behavioural models self-regulate through internal standards and assessing reactions to one's behaviour.
3. Self-reflective capability is the capability of an individual to assess the adequacy of one's thinking (ibid). This means that effective cognitive functioning requires the ability to distinguish "between accurate and faulty thinking" (Bandura, 2002, p. 124). When verifying the correctness of the thinking process through self-reflection, people generate ideas and behave in accordance with them. Then, based on the results of such behaviour, they judge the adequacy of their thoughts and, accordingly, change them. Validity and functional significance of thoughts are assessed by comparing how well the thoughts correspond to "indicant of reality". Worth to mention four "modes of thoughts verification can be distinguished"<sup>14</sup>:
  - a. *Enactive verification* relies on the adequacy between thinking and action results, i.e. "good matches" confirms thoughts and mismatches disapproved of them (Bandura, 2002, p. 124).
  - b. *Vicarious verifications* are based on observing other people's interactions with the environment and provide "correctness of one's thinking" (ibid). It is not just an addition to into enactive experience. "Symbolic modelling greatly expands the range of verification experiences that cannot otherwise be attained by personal action" (Bandura, 2002, p. 125).

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<sup>13</sup> (Bandura, 2002)

<sup>14</sup> ibid

- c. *Social verification* occurs when “experiential verification” is challenging or unseen. Bandura explains it as checking the “soundness” of your views with other people’s beliefs (ibid).
- d. *Logical verification* is described as verifying your thoughts based on the common knowledge and what to deduct from that knowledge for personal use (Bandura, 2002).

As Bandura notes, “such metacognitive activities” can also create faulty beliefs (Bandura, 2002). For instance, video game players build their thoughts regarding the image of women and gender roles based on the games they play. As a result, they might believe that it is common knowledge and should be applied to real life or builds an image of an ideal woman they are willing to be.

- 4. Vicarious capability – emanates from the fact that to survive (adapt and self-develop), it is common to perceive large amounts of information through simplified models. This process is fundamental if we consider that significant amounts of information about values, styles of thinking and behaviour are assimilated by individuals from multiple models formed by the symbolic environment of the mass media. Accordingly, individuals' multiple conceptions of social reality are primarily formed through indirect processes (what they see, read, and hear) rather than direct/conscious thought processes (Bandura, 2002). Therefore, individuals must demonstrate specific behaviour based on their perception of social reality, primarily formed through indirect thought processes.

According to Bandura, symbolic modelling is used by media to influence the behaviour of individuals, which is expressed in observational learning (Bandura, 2002). Four following sub-functions control this type of learning:

- 1. “*Attentional processes* determine what is selectively observed,” from a variety of “modelling influences and what information is extracted from the ongoing modelled events” (Bandura, 2002, p. 127). At the same time, several factors affect the exploration and interpretation of simulated events. Some of these factors involve “cognitive skills, preconceptions, and value preferences of the observers” (ibid. p.127). In addition, the “salience and

attractiveness” determine other factors and functional significance of the modelled activity. Finally, other factors, such as the structural organization of human interactions and associative networks, basically determine the types of models available to people.

2. *Retention processes*- individuals encode and remember the received information in the form of symbols<sup>15</sup>. “In social cognitive theory, observers construct generative conceptions of behaviour styles from modelled exemplars rather than scripts of habitual routines” (ibid. p. 127). i.e., mental representations of particular persons or events that the individual forms in perceiving general or typical characteristics common for these persons or events.
3. *Symbolic* concepts are translated into specific, appropriate action styles in the behavioural production process. This happens by correlating symbolic concepts with certain behaviour styles to determine their adequacy. As a result, based on comparative information, behaviour modification occurs to achieve a more accurate correspondence between the “conception and action” (ibid. p. 129).
4. *Motivational processes* are based on studying cognitions adopted by the individual and are also embodied in his behaviour<sup>16</sup>. For example, people are motivated by the success of other individuals (similar to themselves). Still, they refuse to learn and demonstrate behaviours that, according to their observations, often lead to adverse consequences.

As a result of these processes, specific patterns of behaviour are formed. Still, the most crucial result (of implementing these processes) is the improvisation/change of the individual's attitudes to meet certain conditions.

According to Bandura, these improvisations are carried out in the course of *abstract modelling* that, in general, leads to the following processes: a) extracting common characteristics from different social models/patterns of behaviour (exemplars), b)

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<sup>15</sup> (Bandura, 2002)

<sup>16</sup> ibid

assimilating/encoding “information into composite rules”, and (c) using rules to produce “new instances of behaviours” (ibid. p. 131).

In the motivational process, the following observation is also crucial: *transgressive behaviour* (due to which specific social norms are violated - reprehensible behaviour) is regulated through two main types of sanctions - social sanctions and internal sanctions of self-regulation of each individual<sup>17</sup>. At the same time, interestingly, the mass media can change social sanctions by reflecting the consequences of different behaviour styles, i.e. similarly, they can form specific patterns of behaviour (ibid).

Accordingly, since internal control mechanisms can be selectively activated or deactivated, severe changes in the moral behaviour of individuals can occur (“without changing personality structures, moral principles or self-evaluative systems”) (Bandura, 2002, p. 136). As Bandura states, this process is often referred to as TV's “disinhibitory effect”. As a result, viewers tend to the violence reinforced by media by justification for harmful behaviour, “blame and dehumanize victims, displace or diffuse personal responsibility, and sanitize destructive consequences” (Bandura, 2002, p. 136). Furthermore, studies that research the mechanisms of self-regulation by an individual of their behaviour confirm that sanctioning social conditions are associated with the influence of self-regulation mechanisms initiated by behaviour tabooed in society<sup>18</sup>. Sanctioning social conditions can be explained as those conditions that allow/approve individuals' particular behaviour, which is taboo in society.

The cognitive theory also pays special attention to the impact of information flows. In particular, as Bandura shows, there is no single model of social influence (Bandura, 2002). Thus, “the role of mass media in social diffusion must distinguish between their effect of the media on learning modelled activities and their adoptive use and examine how media and interpersonal influences affect these separable processes” (Bandura, 2002, p. 142).

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<sup>17</sup> (Bandura, 2002)

<sup>18</sup> ibid

The social cognitive theory discussed in this chapter also analyzes the social diffusion of new behaviour patterns. Moreover, diffusion occurs within three processes (and the psychological factors that control them) (Bandura, 2002). These processes include acquiring knowledge about progressive/innovative behaviours, adopting these behaviours in practice, and using social networks to disseminate and sustain innovative behaviours<sup>19</sup>. Bandura refers to Rogers, who states diffusion of innovations “follows a common pattern/behaviour”, i.e. reaches its maximum when a significant part of society begins to assimilate and demonstrate in practice innovative behaviours. These behaviours function as notable examples.

### ***Stereotypes by Walter Lippmann***

While analyzing the mass, everyday consciousness and the role of the press in shaping public opinion, Lipman concluded that stereotypes entirely control people's perceptions (preconceived opinions) (Lippmann, 1998). In developing his concept, he relied on the data of psychological science about the reflex nature of the human mental activity.

The core of Lippmann's concept is as follows: since “we are told about the world before we see it” and reality is too vague, complex and changeable for direct acquaintance with it, a person rebuilds the world around according to a “simple model” (Lippmann, 1998). Under the influence of information about events, rather than direct observation of them, Lippmann argues, simplified images, standardized ideas about the world around us, “pictures in our heads,” or stereotypes, are formed in the human mind. But, based on external, superficial knowledge about phenomena or objects, they can be false<sup>20</sup>. Lippmann distinguished between the outside world and the “pictures in our heads” by emphasizing their inadequacy, i.e. pointing to the illusory nature of stereotypes. But, of course, doing so simplifies the process of cognition and thinking. Therefore stereotypes have an impact on the formation of new empirical experiences. They filled a new vision with old images and applied

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<sup>19</sup> *ibid*

<sup>20</sup> (Lippmann, 1998)

them to the world we perceive in our memory<sup>21</sup>. Although it can be concluded the degree of their adequacy is highly labile, stereotypes are mostly inadequate images of objective reality based on the mistake of a person who, by force of habit, takes a biased vision.

Lippman pointed out that stereotypes are always simpler than reality. First, people acquire stereotypes (from surrounding people, family, the media, etc.) rather than formulating them based on personal experience<sup>22</sup>. For instance, the ideal woman should be blonde, with blue eyes, not overweight, with high breasts and long legs. These are the most often image of women we see in media. All stereotypes are false, to a greater or lesser extent. They consistently attribute to a person features that he is obliged to have because he belongs to a particular group. And finally, stereotypes have existed for a very long time. Even if people are convinced that the stereotype is not true, they tend not to abandon it but to argue that the exception only confirms the rule<sup>23</sup>. For example success of a plus-size model confirms that to be a popular and successful model, you need to be skinny. It can be explained by comparing the number of successful skinny and plus-size models. Therefore, according to Lippmann's logic plus-size model presents as an exception.

The primary function of stereotypes is that they serve as the “core of our tradition, the defense of our position in society”<sup>24</sup>. According to the scholar, stereotypes form a more or less structured picture of the world, including our tastes and habits. It is a world where we feel safe and comfortable, having a sense of belonging to this world. Therefore “any disturbance of the stereotypes seems like an attack upon the foundations of the universe. It is an attack upon the foundation of *our* universe. Where big things are at stake, we do not readily admit that there is any distinction between our universe and the universe.” (Lippmann, 1998, pp. 95-96). Stereotypes are more than simple “structuring” of our universe. They serve as a guarantee of our self-respect and protect us and our rights in society. Therefore, stereotypes contain feelings, preferences, likes or dislikes associated with fears and desires

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<sup>21</sup> *ibid*

<sup>22</sup> *ibid*

<sup>23</sup> *Ibid* p.95

<sup>24</sup> *ibid*



(Lippmann, 1998). The object that activates the stereotype is evaluated in connection with the related emotions. In this case, the stereotype is a stimulus that evokes a person's reaction. These are feelings of sympathy and antipathy, fear and anger, love and hatred concerning certain social phenomena. Psychological impact through such emotionally charged models will have an effect because the impact that “create and maintain the repertory of stereotypes that Lippmann notes are “the subtlest and most pervasive” (Lippmann, 1998, p. 89).

In Lippmann's opinion, the main reason for using stereotypes is the “economy”, i.e. to save time and effort: “For the attempt to see all things freshly and in detail, rather than as types and generalities, is exhausting, and among busy affairs practically out of the question.” (Lippmann, 1998, p. 88). Indeed, when complex ideas are embodied in a simplified collective image, it takes less time and effort to perceive and comprehend them. Therefore it can be concluded that stereotypes wean a person to analyze phenomena, evaluate them critically, and accustom to accept them unconditionally.

Worth to mention that prejudice is a characteristic feature of a stereotype.<sup>25</sup> Sustainability and prejudice of an emotional symbol can contribute to its transformation into a label and prejudice. As a result, such a stereotype is strong. It is difficult to destroy it. For instance, in Kyrgyzstan, it is still widespread to have a prejudice that women are bad drivers or female players are not skilled enough to participate in cyber sport contests on a republic level.

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<sup>25</sup> (Lippmann, 1998)

## METHODOLOGY

The gaming industry is a fast-growing phenomenon, a new form of art that has evolved over 30 years. Video games originate from literature and cinema but use many unique ways to influence people. Such an early age in the industry has determined an even greater dependence of developers on the using stereotypical portrayal of female characters than in cinema and literature. Computer games originated from a gender niche product traditionally developed for entertaining men in the first ten years of the industry's existence. However, female images in the modern gaming industry have much more features than it seems at first glance and affect the consumer.

This study aims to see whether female players are aware of the representation of female characters in video games. Focusing on the issue of the stereotypical women portrayal in video games, the research question is following:

RQ: Does woman portrayal in video games affect players' self-esteem?

### Participant Sample and Sampling Method

It was decided to conduct an online survey of 60 individuals via google forms. The non-probabilistic sampling method was used: a quota sample of 30 females and 30 males.

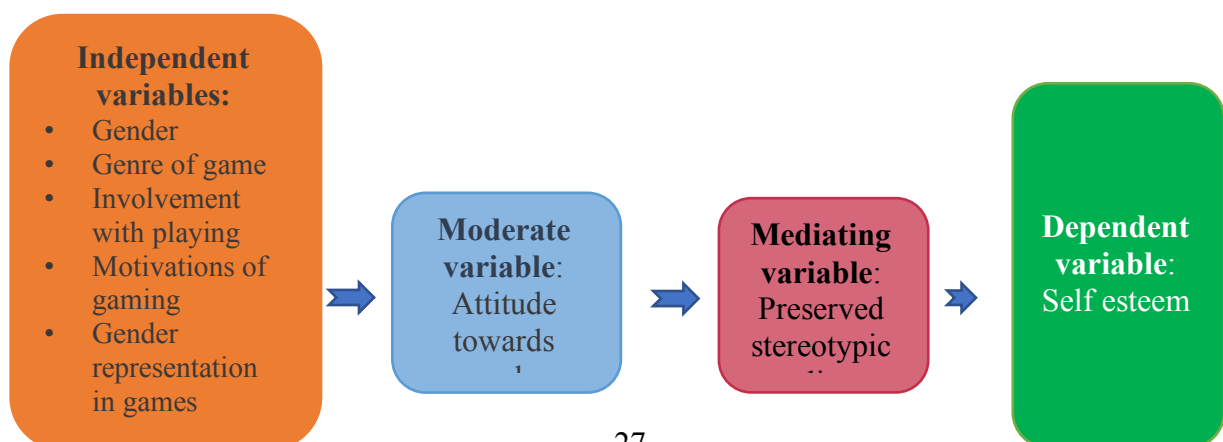
**An element:** video game players between the ages range 18-35

**A sampling unit:** Individuals who play at least one game

**Extent:** Bishkek, Kyrgyzstan

**Time:** April – May 2022

### *The Model*



## ***Measures***

### **Dependent variable**

Self-esteem – Sense of individual's value or worth, the extent to which an individual likes themselves. (Self Report Measures for Love and Compassion Research: Self-Esteem)

Rosenberg self-esteem scale (1965). Body-esteem scale – level of satisfaction with own body (Franzoi & Shields, 1984)

### **Mediating variable**

The stereotypical image of women – is believed to be a fixed image representing women (Dietz, 1998). Women represented as sexual objects and victims

- Wearing clothes that barely cover the body
- Large breast, thin hips, skinny
- Being in a subordinate position, weak, and in need of a rescue
- "Housewife" image
- Wearing pink fancy clothes and gowns

### **Moderate variables**

Attitude towards gender norms- individuals' perception of gender norms (Brenick, Henning, Killen, O'Connor, & Collins, 2007)

- Views on gender norms

### **Independent variables**

Demographics – information on population

- Gender
- Age
- Number of children
- Marital status

A genre of game – types of the games

- Adventure
- Puzzle
- Simulation
- Role-playing

- Strategy
- Fighting
- Sports
- Racing
- Educational
- Action
- Arcade

Motivations of gaming – reasons for playing the games

- Sense of power
- “Killing” time

Involvement of playing – degree of being involved in gaming (number of hours)  
(Brenick, Henning, Killen, O'Connor, & Collins, 2007)

- Behaviour habits (when, how, with whom they like to play, on what device) (Phan, Jardina, Hoyle, & Chaparro, 2012)
- Frequency of playing (hours per week, weekdays, weekends)

Opinion on gender representation in games (Phan, Jardina, Hoyle, & Chaparro, 2012)

- Gamers' perception of women characters in games

### ***Hypothesis to be tested***

HP 1: Involvement of playing, gender and stereotypicality of women characters in games have an influential impact on video game players' self-esteem.

### ***Data Collection Method and the Tool***

Since this study assesses the impact a stereotypical image of women in video games has on female players' self-esteem dependent variable will be the self-esteem of video game players. This variable will be measured through Rosenberg's self-esteem scale dated 1965. The level of self-esteem is measured through a cumulative score of responses—the higher the cumulative score of responses, the higher the respondents' self-esteem. The questioner consists of ten statements. Statements number 1, 2, 4, 6 and 7 are scored with by the following points: a) Strongly Agree

= 3; b) Agree = 2; c) Disagree = 1; d) Strongly Disagree = 0. On the contrary items numbered 3, 5, 8, 9 are scored by the following points: Strongly Agree = 0; b) Agree = 1; c) Disagree = 2; d) Strongly Disagree = 3. The scale ranges with a minimum score of 0 and maximum 30. The results are based on the following cut-off scores: 0-15 Low self-esteem; 16-25 Normal self-esteem and 26-30 High self-esteem (Rosenberg Self-Esteem Scale, 2014 ).

Since body esteem directly related to self-esteem it was decided in addition to Rosenberg's self-esteem scales, to use Franzoi and Shields Body Esteem Scale. Given scale consists of three sections 1) Sexual Attractiveness for females (13 items; min. score -13; max. score -65); Physical Attractiveness for males (11 items; min -11; max score 55) 2) Weight Concern for females (10 items; min. score 10; max-50 and Upper Body Strengths for males (9 items; min – 9; max – 45) 3) Physical Condition for both sexes (Female: 9 items; min 9; max. 45. Male: 13 items; min. 13; max - 65). Each section will consist of a cumulative score that includes the level of satisfaction with particular body parts. The higher the cumulative score, the higher is level of positive or negative feelings. Five points evaluate each body part: 1= have strong negative feelings 2 = Have moderate negative feelings 3 = Have no feeling one way or the other 4 = Have moderate positive feelings 5 = Have strong positive feelings. (Franzoi & Shields, 1984)

The preserved stereotypicality has an impact on players. Therefore, it was determined as a mediating variable. It will be measured through statements rated on a five scale. The statements are about images of women characters in games. The statements are developed per Dietz's examples of women characters.

A moderate variable included in the model is an attitude towards gender norms. This will be measured through statements rated on a five-point scale (strongly disagree and strongly agree) on respondents' opinions regarding gender norms.

Demographics of the players directly affect their self-esteem level of players—this part of the questionnaire includes respondents' age, marital status and number of children.

An independent variable genre of video games is essential since women are represented differently in each genre of the game. Therefore, respondents will determine how often they have played different games in terms of a genre.

It is essential to mention that some of the independent variables include subdimensions. Such as motivations and involvement in playing. These variables will be measured through Phan et al. factors as frequency, behaviour and spending habits (Phan, Jardina, Hoyle, & Chaparro, 2012)

Last but not least independent variable opinion on gender norms will be measured through the list of statements that should be rated using the five scale (strongly disagree and strongly agree).

### ***Proposed Data Analysis Method***

The regression analysis method fits best for this research. Since it is planned to analyze the relationship between variables that directly impact independent variables on the self-esteem of female game players, the data will be analyzed by SPSS.

## RESULTS

### 1. Involvement of playing

The independent variable on the playing involvement is focused on how many hours the respondents spend on gaming. What kind of effect does gaming have on their personal lives. Whether they can manage their gaming habits in terms of the spent time, also, this section will describe the difference between respondents in terms of the gender. The relationship between the number of children and hours spent on gaming is also described.

The sample size is 60 respondents: 30 males and 30 females. The age range of respondents is from 18 to 35. The average age among men is 26 (SD=5) years and among females is 28 (SD= 4.7). The most frequent age among women is 35 years (20% = 6 out 30) and among males is 25 (13.3% = 4 out 30). As for marital status, most male respondents are single, 73.3 % concerning 40% of single females.

**Table 1.1**

<b>Marital status Males</b>		
	N	%
Single	22	73.3%
Married	8	26.7%

**Table 1.2**

<b>Marital status Females</b>		
	N	%
Single	12	40.0%
Married	14	46.7%
Divorced	4	13.3%

As for the number of children, 60% of female respondents (18 out of 30) have no children compared to 76.7% of males (23 out of 30). As for hours playing games per day, female respondents tend to play for at least 20 minutes and males for 15 minutes. The average hours of playing video games per day among females are 2.4 (SD=1.4) among males is 2.1 (SD=1.4). The maximum for female respondents is 5 hours per day. As for male respondents, it's 6 hours. Let's look at the relationship between the number of children and hours of playing. It may be assumed that for women, the amount of having children at all may affect their involvement in the gaming. While analyzing graph 1.1 (see annex), it can be concluded that female respondents with more than one child tend to play no more than two hours per day.

In the case of the man, it can be concluded that the amount of children does not affect the hours they spend on gaming. On the contrary, the data shows that men with more than two kids play for more than 2 hours (see graph 1.2 in Annex).

**Table 1.3. With whom you play games (females).**

	Never	Seldom	Sometimes	Regularly	Always
Friends	40.0%	10.0%	23.3%	13.3%	13.3%
Relatives	60.0%	10.0%	20.0%	3.3%	6.7%
Spouse	80.0%	13.3%	3.3%	3.3%	0.0%
Children	80.0%	10.0%	10.0%	0.0%	0.0%
Online Strangers	40.0%	6.7%	30.0%	10.0%	13.3%
On my own	0.0%	0.0%	3.3%	23.3%	73.3%

**Table 1.4. With whom you play games (males)**

	Never	Seldom	Sometimes	Regularly	Always
Friends	13.3%	16.7%	20.0%	23.3%	26.7%
Relatives	50.0%	26.7%	13.3%	0.0%	10.0%
Spouse	86.7%	6.7%	0.0%	3.3%	3.3%
Children	83.3%	16.7%	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%
Online Strangers	26.7%	13.3%	20.0%	16.7%	23.3%
On my own	3.3%	6.7%	20.0%	23.3%	46.7%

Most of the respondents “never” play video games with their kids. Worth to mention that none of the respondents pointed out that they regularly or continuously play games with children. It shows that having children does not affect with whom they play games. 96.6 % of female players play independently, whereas male respondents tend to play with their friends (50%) and on their own (70%).

The majority of the respondents prefer playing on mobile phones. This can be explained through the mobility and availability of mobile phones. On the other hand, most respondents, around 80 %, don’t prefer the consoles and some play on PC and notebooks (see table 1.5 and 1.6 in Annex).

From the collected data (see table 1.7 in annex) it is seen that the most popular genre of games among females are Adventure (40% = 12), Puzzles (40%=12) and Educational games (36.6% = 11), as for male: Fighting (56.6% = 17), Strategy



(33.3%=10) and Action (40%=12). Simulation and role-playing games are the least popular among both sexes. In addition, female respondents are less prefer playing sports and racing games in comparison to males.

**Table 1.8. The tendency to play video games**

	Gender			
	Male		Female	
	Yes	No	Yes	No
I usually play on weekends	23	7	17	13
I usually play on weekdays	18	12	16	14
I tend to play during the day	12	18	15	15
I tend to play during the evenings	27	3	16	14
I spend more time on gaming rather than on household chores	6	24	2	28
I spend more time on gaming rather than on my studies	8	22	6	24
I spend more time gaming rather than spending time with my family	5	25	5	25
I spend more time gaming rather than spending time with my friends	3	27	4	26
I tend to play for an extended period	11	19	7	23
Gaming is my main hobby	9	21	7	23
I play only when other people are playing	12	18	19	11
I am a member of video games social media groups (telegram, Facebook, etc.) with other players whom I did not meet in person	6	24	11	19
I am a member of video games social media groups (telegram, Facebook, etc.) with people I know.	8	22	10	20

From the data regarding the tendency to play, it can be concluded that men tend to play during weekends (76.6%) in comparison to women (56.6%). The same goes for the evenings. Men are more likely to play during the evenings (90%), whereas 53% of female players tend to play in the evenings. Surprisingly female players more often become a member of social media groups with other players. No matter whether it is strangers or people whom they know. It was essential to know whether it is common among respondents to tend to play for an extended period. Male respondents are likelier to admit that they can play for an extended period (36.6%).

The data shows that others more influence females in their gaming. Since 63.3 % of them reported that they tend to play when others do. At the same time, a small amount of both sexes noted that gaming is their main hobby.

Notably, 90% of female respondents claim that playing games do not distract them from household chores. This could be explained through the norms in Kyrgyz families. Women are responsible for household chores in comparison to men. At the same time, 80% of male respondents reported that they do not tend to spend more time gaming than doing household chores. This proves that 90% of respondents can balance gaming habits and personal life. The same refers to balancing spending time with family or friends and gaming. The majority responds that they prefer socializing instead of gaming.

From the collected data on video game players' involvement in gaming, it can be concluded that the majority of interviewed people are aware of the time they spend on gaming and can balance playing games and their personal life.

## 2. Motivation of gaming

This independent variable will analyze what motivates players to play video games. How they evaluate their skills and whether they plan to play video games in the future. In addition, there will be analyzed respondents' attitudes towards what games are given to them.

**Table 2.1. How do you evaluate your gaming skills**

			Very good	Not very skilled	Moderately good	No skill	
Gender	Male	Count	11	5	14	0	30
		% within Gender	36.7%	16.7%	46.7%	0.0%	100.0%
	Female	Count	9	5	15	1	30
		% within Gender	30.0%	16.7%	50.0%	3.3%	100.0%
Total		Count	20	10	29	1	60
		% within Gender	33.3%	16.7%	48.3%	1.7%	100.0%

Table 2.1. shows that the majority of gamers consider themselves moderately good at gaming. Considering the results of being very good at gaming, it is worth mentioning that men (36.7%) evaluate themselves higher than females (30%). Surprisingly interest in playing video games in the future is equal among both sexes (see table 2.2. in annexe). 76.7 % (23 out of 30) are planning to play in the future. Therefore, it can be assumed that respondents are not bothered by playing. Though, it can be partly related to addiction. Since this study is not focused on obsessive behaviours, it is challenging to measure the level of respondents' addiction to video gaming.

**Table 2.3.**

	Gender			
	Male		Female	
	Yes	No	Yes	No
	Count	Count	Count	Count
Playing games allows me to express myself.	6	24	17	13
I like to develop my world and rule it.	13	17	18	12
I play games just to “kill” time.	12	18	17	13
Games are just an entertaining way of self-education	17	13	23	7
Games help me find friends with whom I share a common interest	4	26	17	13
I play games to find a romantic partner	0	30	2	28
Games allow me to get over bad news	11	19	20	10
Games help me develop my creativity and imagination.	10	20	21	9
Playing games help me relax and get away from my daily routine	25	5	26	4

The statements are presented in table 2.3. shows the playing motivations of respondents, whether they see something more than just leisure time in games. As shown, 56% of female respondents stated that games help them express themselves

and, at the same time, develop their creativity (66.6%). This shows that female respondents are likelier to use their imagination and creativity while playing. For instance, designing and decorating a space for your character or dressing up. These types of games are more common among females. Therefore it can be assumed that the percentage of respondents who agreed with mentioned above statements is higher among females.

Both sexes reported finding a way to relax and get away from daily routine (Males 83.3%, females 86.6%). This means that games are a great source of distraction and leisure time. In addition to relaxation, a high percentage of female respondents find games as one of the ways to find friends (56.6%) and even a romantic partner (6.6%). On the contrary, 100 % of male players do not see that games can help them find a romantic partner, and 86.6% think finding friends with common interests is not an option.

As for the “killing” time and getting over bad news again, female respondents are likelier to admit it as a motivation to play games.

From the results on motivation, it can be concluded that female players' motivation to play is more diverse compared to male players. However, the significant reason male players play is for relaxation and distraction.

### **3. Opinion on gender representation in games**

An independent variable on gender representation in games opinion will help see the difference in how male and female players perceive female characters in games. Whether they notice those representations and the extent to which they matter.

Table 3.1 (see annex) represents the subtotal of agreeing and strongly agreeing and those who are neutral regarding the statements on women's representation in games. From the below table, it can be concluded that 40 % of female respondents have negative feelings about playing games where women are represented offensively. Moreover, compared to the neutral responses, statements regarding the offensive representation of women were less than 10% compared to male responses. On the other hand, in the responses to the statement regarding ever thinking about the way women are represented in games, male respondents have shown a higher percentage

of agreeing with this statement. As for the caring about women's representation in games, it was surprising that 50% of female respondents had a neutral response to this statement. Though 30% disagree and strongly disagree with a given statement. 50% of men, in turn, agreed with the statement that they do not care about the images of women in games, and only 30% have a neutral opinion. Overall it can be concluded that 80% of male respondents don't have strong feelings regarding women's representation in games compared to male respondents. The same relates to the statement regarding male representation in games 53.3% of males reported that they are not concerned about male characters. In comparison to women's responses regarding male characters, 33.3% agreed that it doesn't matter how male characters are represented.

**Table 3.2.**

		Gender			
		Male	%	Female	%
		Count		Count	
It is just a game. We shouldn't take seriously represented images of women	Subtotal Agree and Strongly agree	21	70.00%	14	46.6%
	Neither agree nor disagree	4	13.3%	8	26.6%
Games are played by different age groups and genders; therefore, there is a strong need to change women's images in games	Subtotal Agree and Strongly agree	12	40.00%	8	26.6%
	Neither agree nor disagree	6	20.0%	15	50.00%
Women's images in games influence the perception of their roles in society.	Subtotal Agree and Strongly agree	6	20.0%	13	43.3%
	Neither agree nor disagree	7	23.3%	9	30.00%

Table 3.2. represents statements regarding the influence of video games on players. 70% of male respondents consider that games should not be taken seriously

( $M=3.83$ ;  $SD=1.2$ ) because they are just entertainment. The several female players agreeing with this statement was significantly less (46.6%). As for the influence of women characters in games on the perception of their role in society, 43.3% of females agree with this statement compared to 20% of males who share the same point of view. The difference in numbers is 20%, which can be considered significant. It shows that male players are not taking much serious women's portrayal in games. Looking at the numbers (see tables: 3.3. 3.4. and 3.5 in annex), 96.6% of males state that female characters occur in the games they play. Still, they are not much affected by they are represented. The way they see women characters in games will be discussed in a stereotypical image of women in the games section. Female players reported that 93.3% of female characters occur in their games. These numbers show that women characters in the games are almost always present in some way. As for the being fond of choosing women characters to play, 50% (“Sometimes”=43.3%; “Regularly” and “Always” = 6.6%;  $M=2.2$ ;  $SD=1$ ) of male respondents stated that they choose them sometimes and regularly. It was expected that the female respondents' percentage would be higher 93.3% (“Sometimes”=53.3%; “Regularly” and “Always” = 40%;  $M=3.8$ ;  $SD=1.2$ ). In Kyrgyzstan, a popular game is the mobile game PUB G. Is an action strategy and simulation game. You can choose any sex of the character you play and customise it. There is a belief among male players that high professionals play this game with women characters. It is a sort of signifier of your skills. It means you are a good player if you play with female characters. In addition, worth to mention that players consider the presence of female characters in the game significant (male 66.6% and females 80%; see table 3.6. in annex).

As for the avatar<sup>26</sup> in the game, 93.2% (see tables: 3.4. 3.5. and 3.6 in annex) of female respondents choose female characters. As for the male respondents' none of them chose female characters as avatars “Regularly” or “Always”, and only 23.3% chose them “Sometimes”. This can be explained through identification. Since avatar comparison to the female character in a game represents a player itself. It is

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<sup>26</sup> Avatar is a graphical image that represents the user (ego or alter ego) (Avatar, 2018)

their digital personality. Therefore female avatars are chosen mainly by female players.

It was essential to find out what opinion players have regarding facial features and body image of female characters in games. Surprisingly, 70% and 73.3% of males do not see female characters' bodies and faces as an ideal. Therefore, it can be assumed that male players will likely differentiate between real-world and digital. Besides, it can relate that they are realistic and do not expect real women to look like game characters. Women players, from their turn, preferred to take a neutral (43%) position and agree (30%) with these statements. This can relate to the point that women are more influenced by female characters' appearance and might be more likely to self-criticizing.

#### **4. Moderate variable: Attitude toward gender norms**

Attitude towards gender norms was chosen as a moderate variable since it can influence the relationship between the independent and dependent variables. Furthermore, since gender norms vary in every society, it was essential to add this variable as moderate since it will help to see the standard gender norms in Kyrgyzstan and whether they are perceived similarly by both sexes.

Although Kyrgyzstan is a secular and democratic society, it is still considered patriarchal and traditional, especially in rural areas. For example, traditionally, women should focus on household chores and childcare. In addition, most of the high positions in the government are occupied by men.

It was apparent that most female respondents are against traditional norms and values. For instance, regarding the statement on women's place in the kitchen, 83.3% of female respondents disagreed with this statement in comparison to 53.3% of male respondents. The same goes with the statement of being a housewife. 70% of female respondents disagree that women should stay at home, whereas only 40% of male respondents consider that women should be a housewife. These numbers show that men still adhere to the traditional norms.

**Table 4.1**

			Gender		Gender	
			Male	Female	Male	Female
			Count	Column N %	Count	Column N %
Man has to focus only on earning	Subtotal	Strongly disagree and Disagree	14	46.7%	18	60.0%
	Subtotal	Agree and Strongly Agree	10	33.3%	11	36.7%
		Neither agree nor disagree	6	20.0%	1	3.3%
The woman's place is in the kitchen	Subtotal	Strongly disagree and Disagree	16	53.3%	25	83.3%
	Subtotal	Agree and Strongly Agree	8	26.7%	1	3.3%
		Neither agree nor disagree	6	20.0%	4	13.3%
A woman should be a housewife	Subtotal	Strongly disagree and Disagree	12	40.0%	21	70.0%
	Subtotal	Agree and Strongly Agree	8	26.7%	2	6.7%
		Neither agree nor disagree	10	33.3%	7	23.3%

**Table 4.2**

			Gender		Gender	
			Male	Female	Male	Female
			Count	Column N %	Count	Column N %
There should be equality between couples in terms of self-development	Subtotal	Strongly disagree and Disagree	8	26.7%	2	6.7%
	Subtotal	Agree and Strongly Agree	19	63.3%	26	86.7%



	Neither agree nor disagree	3	10.0%	2	6.7%
Men have to be involved in childcare care	Subtotal Strongly disagree and Disagree	3	10.0%	1	3.3%
	Subtotal Agree and Strongly Agree	24	80.0%	26	86.7%
	Neither agree nor disagree	3	10.0%	3	10.0%
There should be equal household labour division	Subtotal Strongly disagree and Disagree	11	36.7%	3	10.0%
	Subtotal Agree and Strongly Agree	12	40.0%	24	80.0%
	Neither agree nor disagree	7	23.3%	3	10.0%

Table 4.2 .shows respondents' opinions regarding the share of household chores and childcare with their partner. The data shows that 80% of male players consider childcare essential to parenthood. It can be stated that the notion of childcare being only females' role changed to the point that it must be shared, and the involvement of both parents is essential. Though, it correspondingly directly relates to the gender of the child. In Kyrgyz society, there is a common point of view that sons need the strong involvement of fathers in the rising and girls to need mothers.

A significant difference in opinion regarding sharing household labour, as seen in table 4.2. 40% of male respondents consider it a women's role, whereas 80% of female players think it should be shared.

From the data on attitude towards gender norms, it can be concluded that most male respondents adhere to the traditional, stereotypical points of view. This can be explained through the messages they receive from people surrounding them and from the environment they have been raised. Since men in Kyrgyz society are in a superior position, they are unwilling to make significant changes. The same applies to women respondents. However, while being in a subordinate position and

influenced by many feminist movements, they understand there is a time for a change.

### 5. Mediating variable: The stereotypical image of women

The stereotypical image of women in games is determined as a mediating variable in this study since genres, gender, involvement in the playing and feelings about female characters affect the consciousness of whether female characters are represented stereotypically, influencing video game players' self-esteem and body esteem.

Table 5.1. consists of the most frequent images of women in games. The data show the highest rates in representing female characters with large breasts (females 86.7%, males 76.6%). In addition, they are skinny, as respondents note. Male respondents (60%) are more likely to assume that female characters are represented as sexual objects than female (53.3%) respondents. The data may be influenced by the perception of male players on the way women should look in real life. For instance, they may consider wearing revealing outfits turns women into sexual objects.

As for the clothing and roles of women characters, the difference in responses is vivid due to the genre they play (see tables 5.2, 5.3, 5.4. in annex). Those features are more common among “girlish games”<sup>27</sup>. Both sexes responded (70%) that women characters are good fighters in the games they play. This might relate to the point when male players choose female characters to play with.

**Table 5.1**

		Gender			
		Male		Female	
		Count	Column N %	Count	Column N %
	Subtotal Never and Seldom	14	46.7%	9	30.0%

<sup>27</sup> Role-playing games on designing, decorating and dressing

Wear clothes that barely cover their bodies	Subtotal Regularly and Always	8	26.7%	5	16.7%
	Sometimes	8	26.7%	16	53.3%
Represented as sexual objects	Subtotal Never and Seldom	12	40.0%	14	46.7%
	Subtotal Regularly and Always	10	33.3%	4	13.3%
	Sometimes	8	26.7%	12	40.0%
Represented as victims	Subtotal Never and Seldom	19	63.3%	18	60.0%
	Subtotal Regularly and Always	4	13.3%	2	6.7%
	Sometimes	7	23.3%	10	33.3%
Are very thin	Subtotal Never and Seldom	12	40.0%	5	16.7%
	Subtotal Regularly and Always	8	26.7%	15	50.0%
	Sometimes	10	33.3%	10	33.3%
Have a large breast	Subtotal Never and Seldom	7	23.3%	4	13.3%
	Subtotal Regularly and Always	13	43.3%	12	40.0%
	Sometimes	10	33.3%	14	46.7%

## 6. Dependent variable: Self-Esteem and Body esteem

The Rosenberg Self-Esteem scale (see table 6.1 in annex) has shown that 70% (21 out of 30; M=2.1; SD=0.5) of female respondents have a “normal self-esteem” score, 10% (3) “low self-esteem” and 20% (6) high. Male respondents have shown a higher self-esteem score of 33.3% (10) “high self-esteem”, normal 53.3% (16) and 13.3% (4) low. The Rosenberg scale shows a general view of respondents’ personalities. In contrast, the body-esteem scale focuses on opinions regarding

respondents' physical appearance. The body-esteem scale performs as a dependent variable for this study and will test our hypothesis.

The results have shown that male players have a higher body-esteem satisfaction level in all three components. First, though, it should be considered that each assigned component varies in terms of the body parts it includes to some extent.

1. Sexual Attractiveness/ Physical Attractiveness (see table 6.2, 6.3 in annex)

Sexual Attractiveness is a component assigned to female respondents, and Physical Attractiveness for male respondents. The data shows that male players (40% high) are more confident than females (13.3% high).

2. Weight control/Upper body strengths (see table 6.4, 6.5 in annex)

Female players (6.7% high) are more concerned about their weight rather male respondents (36.7% high) regarding their upper body strengths.

3. Physical condition

Same with physical condition, male (40%) players have a higher level of satisfaction rather than females (20%)

It can be concluded that female players have lower body-esteem satisfaction levels than male respondents.

## **DISCUSSION**

This study aimed to determine whether women's portrayal in games affects video game players. Undoubtedly, it affects both sexes. However, it differs to what extent. Both sexes reported that women's portrayal in games is exaggerated. Most women are represented as skinny, with large breasts and as sexual objects. Therefore, it was decided to test the following hypothesis:

HP: Involvement of playing, gender and opinion on stereotypicality of women characters in games have an influential impact on video game players' self-esteem. The results have shown that the hypothesis was partially confirmed. Involvement in playing can be considered a factor that influences female self-esteem since they see women images more frequently and play with women characters more than male players. The same goes for opinions on women characters in games. Female players are more aware of the representation of women in games and consider female characters an ideal example of how women should look in real life. At the same time appearance of female characters is perceived as offensive and stereotypical for female players. Therefore, it can be concluded that the involvement of playing, gender and opinion stereotypicality of women characters in games have an influential impact on video game players' self-esteem. However, it is significant to highlight that it only impacts female players.

It was decided to include male respondents in this study to see whether they were aware of the stereotypical image of women in games. Besides, it was essential to study whether women's image affects males' self-esteem and body esteem since they are represented according to the beauty standards within our society. However, as mentioned in a results section, male respondents do not see represented images of women as an ideal example of how women should look in real life. Moreover, most male respondents state that it should not be taken seriously since it is just a game. Therefore, it has been shown that they do not relate women's images in games to themselves. Hence it does not affect their self-esteem and body-esteem levels. On the other side, this study can be an entry-point for further research representation of men in video games and see whether it directly impacts male players. Video

games' influence on self-esteem lies in their immersion factor, which is determined by the player's involvement in a game and self-efficacy. According to Terlecki et al. study, men consider themselves well-skilled players, whereas women were likelier to state that they felt less skilled in playing video games (Terlecki, Brown and Harner-Steciw). Identical results were received in this study. Most male players evaluate their skills as very good, whereas women players consider themselves moderate. In addition, involvement in playing was measured through hours players spend on gaming and with what character players mostly play; as mentioned before, female players have shown higher frequency. According to Bandura, some studies show that television reality does not always adequately reflect reality. Some scholars believe that people who watch a lot of TV, perceptions and beliefs change, closer to the world depicted in television programs than in the real world. Scientists call this phenomenon the social construction of reality. This can be applied to the point that a high percentage of female players in this study perceived the image of women in games as an ideal example of how women should look in real life because they spend more hours gaming.

According to Bandura, media educates “new forms of behaviour” and motivates further actions, changing individuals' values, preferences, expectations, perceptions and beliefs (Bandura, 2002, p. 142). In other cases, those individuals who learned specific behaviour patterns tend to disseminate their knowledge, motivating the rest to learn from those who learned and mastered from media. i.e. those who have not learned from media fall under the influence of media transmitters. Therefore within these social influence patterns, it can be concluded that mass media “generate and reinforces influence”. This process demonstrates the impact of communication on behaviour directly and through media conditioned, i.e. through the influence of the social system, direct and indirect influence. In the case of video game players, they also build their perception of female characters based on the messages they receive from people surrounding them and from the environment they have been raised. The results have shown that male players are likelier to adhere to traditional norms and stereotypical beliefs than female players. Since men in Kyrgyz society are in a superior position, they are unwilling to make significant changes. The same applies

to women respondents. However, while being in a subordinate position and influenced by many feminist movements, they understand there is a time for a change. The stereotypical beliefs built-in Kyrgyz society are substantial. As Lipmann states, sustainability and prejudgment of an emotional symbol contribute to its transformation into a label and prejudice. It is difficult to destroy this stereotype. Those respondents (both male and female) who support statements on equality have also been raised in the same society. However, in this case, Bandura's logical framework <sup>28</sup>is used when respondents acquire common knowledge and decide what to use.

It was interesting to find out that many male respondents play video games with female characters. This practice could be explained through acquiring knowledge about progressive/innovative behaviors, adopting these behaviors in practice, and using social networks to disseminate and sustain innovative behaviors<sup>29</sup>. Bandura refers to Rogers, who states diffusion of innovations “follows a common pattern/behaviour”, i.e. reaches its maximum when a significant part of society begins to assimilate and demonstrate in practice innovative behaviors. For example, it was mentioned before that in a popular game, Pub G, there is a belief among male players that high professionals play this game with women characters. It is a sort of signifier of your skills. It means you are a good player if you play with female characters. This notion was disseminated among Pub G social groups. In addition, there is a belief that a female character may mislead other players, i.e. that the player behind the female character is a female who already states she is not well skilled and does not require significant attention or can be mercified.

Gender stereotypes are a phenomenon that distorts mass consciousness and hinders the development of society as a whole. Today, centuries-old gender stereotypes are outdated but still very tenacious. Therefore, it is crucial that the media, in this case, video games, not reinforce these stereotypes but help change them.

This study can be a basis for further research on the perception of Kyrgyz youth towards the stereotypical image of women and its effect on self-esteem. It is

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<sup>28</sup> (Bandura, 2002)

<sup>29</sup> *ibid*

suggested for further research to take a significant sample size and focus on heavy video game players since the level of involvement can be considered one of the essential factors influencing populations' perception.



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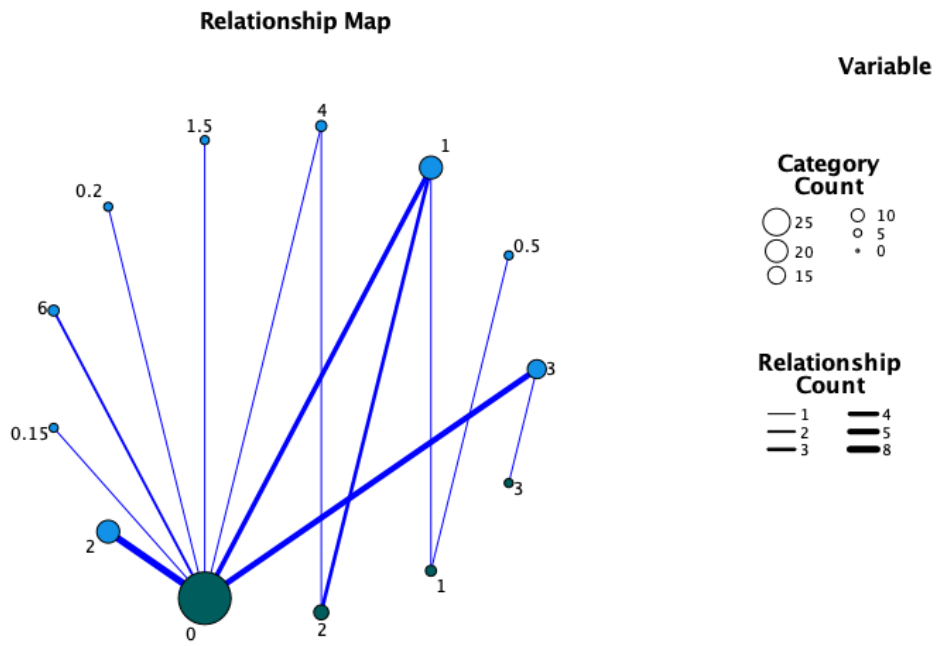
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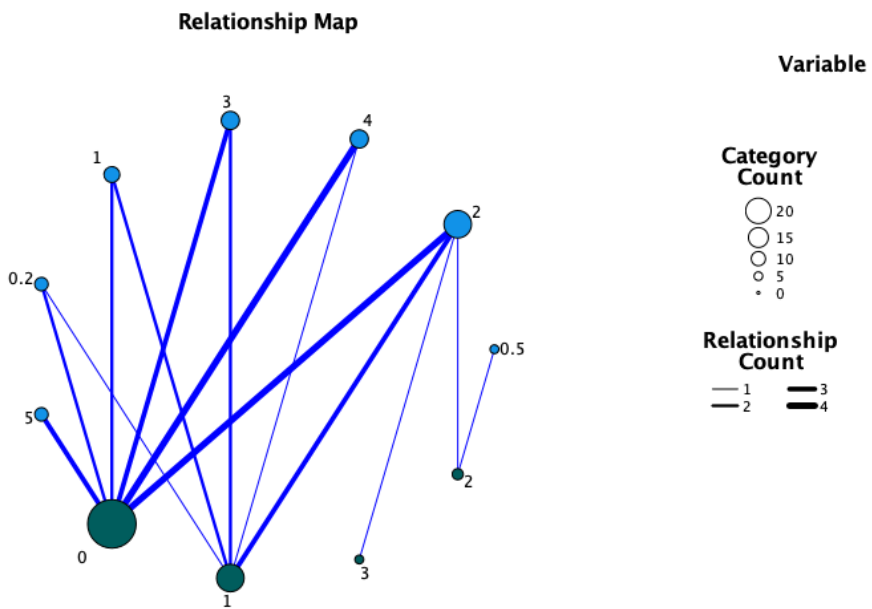
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# ANNEX

**Graph A.1.** Relationship between number of children and hours playing games (females)



**Graph A.2.** Relationship between number of children and hours playing games (males)



**Table A.5.** Devices you play with games (females)

		Mobile phone	Console	PC/ Notebook
Never	Count	2	19	7
	%	6.7%	63.3%	23.3%
Seldom	Count	0	6	3
	%	0.0%	20.0%	10.0%
Sometimes	Count	6	4	10
	Row N %	20.0%	13.3%	33.3%
Regularly	Count	4	1	6
	%	13.3%	3.3%	20.0%
Always	Count	18	0	4
	%	60.0%	0.0%	13.3%

**Table A.6** Devices you play with games (males)

		Mobile phone	Console	PC/Notebo ok
Never	Count	3	9	6
	Row N %	10.0%	30.0%	20.0%
Seldom	Count	4	14	6
	Row N %	13.3%	46.7%	20.0%
Sometimes	Count	7	6	7
	Row N %	23.3%	20.0%	23.3%
Regularly	Count	4	0	6
	Row N %	13.3%	0.0%	20.0%
Always	Count	12	1	5
	Row N %	40.0%	3.3%	16.7%

**Table A.7** Genre of games

		Gender Male Count	Female Count
Adventure	Sum of Regularly and Always	4	12

Puzzle	Sum of Regularly and Always	6	12
Simulation	Sum of Regularly and Always	3	3
Role Playing	Sum of Regularly and Always	4	2
Strategy	Sum of Regularly and Always	10	7
Fighting	Sum of Regularly and Always	17	5
Sports	Sum of Regularly and Always	3	2
Racing	Sum of Regularly and Always	7	3
Educational	Sum of Regularly and Always	4	11
Action	Sum of Regularly and Always	12	7

**Table B.2. Interested in playing in the future**

			Yes	No	Total
Gender Male	Count		23	7	30
	%		76.7%	23.3%	100.0%
Female	Count		23	7	30
	%		76.7%	23.3%	100.0%
Total	Count		46	14	60
	%		76.7%	23.3%	100.0%

**Table C.1.**

		Gender			
		Male		Female	
		Count	%	Count	%
I don't play games where women are represented offensively.	Subtotal Agree and Strongly agree	4	13.3%	12	40.0%
	Neither agree nor disagree	9	30.0%	6	20.0%
I never thought about the representation of women in games	Subtotal Agree and Strongly agree	13	43.3%	11	36.60%

	Neither agree nor disagree	6	20.0%	8	26.6%
I don't care about the images of women in games	Subtotal Agree and Strongly agree	15	50.00%	6	20.00%
	Neither agree nor disagree	6	20.00%	15	50.00%
I don't care about the images of men in games	Subtotal Agree and Strongly agree	16	53.3%	10	33.3%
	Neither agree nor disagree	6	20.0%	14	46.6%

**Table C.3**

		Gender			
		Male		Female	Row N
		Count	Row N %	Count	%
There are NO women characters in the games I play	Subtotal Never and Seldom	21	70.00%	19	63.3%
	Subtotal Regularly and Always	1	3.3%	2	6.6%
	Sometimes	8	26.6%	9	30.00%
I like to play with women characters	Subtotal Never and Seldom	15	50.0%	2	6.6%
	Subtotal Regularly and Always	2	6.6%	16	53.3%
	Sometimes	13	43.3%	12	40.0%
I choose women characters for my avatar	Subtotal Never and Seldom	23	76.6%	2	6.6%
	Subtotal Regularly and Always	0	0.0%	17	56.6%
	Sometimes	7	23.3%	11	36.6%

**Table C.4 Females**

	N	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std. Deviation
I like to play with women characters	30	1.00	5.00	3.8333	1.20583
I choose women characters for my avatar	30	1.00	5.00	3.8333	1.17688



Valid N (listwise)	30				
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**Table C.5 Males**

	N	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std. Deviation
I like to play with women characters	30	1.00	4.00	2.2000	1.03057
I choose women characters for my avatar	30	1.00	3.00	1.7333	.82768
Valid N (listwise)	30				

**Table C.6**

		Gender			
		Male		Female	
		Count	Row N %	Count	Row N %
The body of the female character in the game I MOSTLY play is an ideal example of how females bodies should be in real life	Subtotal Disagree and Strongly disagree	21	70.0%	9	30.0%
	Subtotal Agree and Strongly Agree	3	10.0%	9	30.0%
	Neither agree nor disagree	6	20.0%	12	40.0%
The facial features of the female character in the game I MOSTLY play are an ideal example of how females face should look in real life	Subtotal Disagree and Strongly disagree	22	73.3%	8	26.6%
	Subtotal Agree and Strongly Agree	4	13.3%	9	30.0%
	Neither agree nor disagree	4	13.3%	13	43.3%
I think there SHOULD NOT be women characters in games	Subtotal Disagree and Strongly disagree	20	66.6%	24	80.00%
	Subtotal Agree and Strongly agree	3	10.00 %	4	13.3%

Neither agree nor disagree	7	23.3%	2	6.6%
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**Table E.2**

		Gender			
		Male		Female	
		Count	Column N %	Count	Column N %
Wear casual clothes	Subtotal Never and Seldom	15	50.0%	8	26.7%
	Subtotal Regularly and Always	8	26.7%	8	26.7%
	Sometimes	7	23.3%	14	46.7%
Wear pink gowns	Subtotal Never and Seldom	21	70.0%	15	50.0%
	Subtotal Regularly and Always	1	3.3%	3	10.0%
	Sometimes	8	26.7%	12	40.0%
Wear aprons	Subtotal Never and Seldom	25	83.3%	18	60.0%
	Subtotal Regularly and Always	3	10.0%	1	3.3%
	Sometimes	2	6.7%	11	36.7%

**Table E.3**

		Gender			
		Male		Female	
		Count	Column N %	Count	Column N %
Women in games clean the house	Subtotal Never and Seldom	26	86.7%	20	66.7%
	Subtotal Regularly and Always	1	3.3%	1	3.3%
	Sometimes	3	10.0%	9	30.0%
Women as babysitter character	Subtotal Never and Seldom	26	86.7%	20	66.7%
	Subtotal Regularly and Always	1	3.3%	1	3.3%
	Sometimes	3	10.0%	9	30.0%
Women as hairdresser character	Subtotal Never and Seldom	27	90.0%	18	60.0%

Subtotal Regularly and Always	1	3.3%	1	3.3%
Sometimes	2	6.7%	11	36.7%

**Table E.4**

			Gender		N	
			Male	Female		
			Count	Column N %	Count	Column %
Women as independent characters	Subtotal	Never and Seldom	13	43.3%	8	26.7%
	Subtotal	Regularly and Always	14	46.7%	12	40.0%
	Sometimes		3	10.0%	10	33.3%
Women as strong characters	Subtotal	Never and Seldom	9	30.0%	6	20.0%
	Subtotal	Regularly and Always	16	53.3%	7	23.3%
	Sometimes		5	16.7%	17	56.7%
Women as a good fighter	Subtotal	Never and Seldom	9	30.0%	9	30.0%
	Subtotal	Regularly and Always	16	53.3%	9	30.0%
	Sometimes		5	16.7%	12	40.0%
Women as a good racer	Subtotal	Never and Seldom	12	40.0%	15	50.0%
	Subtotal	Regularly and Always	6	20.0%	5	16.7%
	Sometimes		12	40.0%	10	33.3%

**Table F.1 Self-Esteem scale**

Gender	Male	Count	0-15	15-25	25-30	Total
			Low Self-Esteem	Normal Self-Esteem	High Self-Esteem	
		4		16	10	30

	% within Gender	13.3%	53.3%	33.3%	100.0%
Female	Count	3	21	6	30
	% within Gender	10.0%	70.0%	20.0%	100.0%
Total	Count	7	37	16	60
	% within Gender	11.7%	61.7%	26.7%	100.0%

**Table F.2 Sexual Attractiveness**

	N	%
13-38 Low SA esteem	7	23.3%
39-52 Medium SA esteem	19	63.3%
53-65 High SA esteem	4	13.3%

**Table F.3 Physical Attractiveness**

	N	%
13-38 Low PA esteem	4	13.3%
39-52 Medium PA esteem	14	46.7%
53-65 High PA esteem	12	40.0%

**Table F.4 Weight control**

	N	%
10-29 Low WC esteem	9	30.0%
30-40 Medium WC esteem	19	63.3%
41-50 High WC esteem	2	6.7%

**Table F.5 Upper body strengths**

	N	%
9-26 Low UBS esteem	4	13.3%
27-36 Medium UBS esteem	15	50.0%
37-45 High UBS esteem	11	36.7%

**Table F.6 Physical condition**

	N	%
9-26 Low PC esteem	9	30.0%
27-36 Medium PC esteem	15	50.0%
37-45 High PC esteem	6	20.0%

**Table F.7 Sexual Attractiveness**

	N	%
13-38 Low SA esteem	4	13.3%
39-52 Medium SA esteem	14	46.7%
53-65 High SA esteem	12	40.0%