

ISTANBUL BILGI UNIVERSITY  
INSTITUTE OF GRADUATE PROGRAMS  
CULTURAL STUDIES MASTER'S DEGREE PROGRAM

FEMALE PLAYERS & STREAMERS OF LEAGUE OF LEGENDS' TURKISH  
SERVER AND GENDER BASED PROBLEMS THEY FACE

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ISTANBUL  
2021

**Female Players & Streamers Of League of Legends' Turkish Server And Gender Based Problems They Face**

**League Of Legends Türkiye Server'ında Oyun Oynayan & Stream Yapan Kadınlar Ve Karşılaştıkları Toplumsal Cinsiyet Temelli Sorunlar**

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Tezin Onaylandığı Tarih: 20/05/2021

Toplam Sayfa Sayısı: .....

Anahtar Kelimeler (Türkçe)

- 1) Oyun
- 2) Toplumsal Cinsiyet
- 3) Twitch
- 4) Siber Kültür
- 5) Kadın oyuncular

Anahtar Kelimeler (İngilizce)

- 1) Game
- 2) Gender
- 3) Twitch
- 4) Cyber Culture
- 5) Female Gamers

## ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

Firstly, I would like to express my heartfelt gratitude to my advisor Dr. Erkan Saka for his wise guidance. He has provided me with the endless support and encouragement throughout the process of writing this thesis. His mentorship and friendship allowed me to be creative in my work. A graduate student could not have asked for a better advisor.

Moreover, I am thankful to Dr. Itır Erhart and Dr. Ertuğrul Süngü for their invaluable insight and advices, which I will remember in my future works as well.

I could never be grateful enough to Başak Aslanyürek Aydınlık, my partner in life and crime. This thesis would surely be incomplete without her, same as everything else in life.

I would also like to thank:

My family, Rıza Aydınlık, Peray Aydınlık and Ekin Emir Aydınlık who have been my source of inspiration and support throughout life.

My friends Bahar Hurma, Ayşe Gökçe Gököz Sarıkaya, Göktuğ Sarıkaya, Mervenur Çetin, Elif Büşra Önce, Mehmet Yağız Kaptanoğlu, Alexandra Brell and Mehmet Sercan Kaya for patiently listening to my incessant speech about the research and always being there for me.

Lastly, I would like to thank the brave women who entrusted me with their experiences and insight for this thesis through interviews.

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## ABSTRACT

This thesis focuses on gender-based issues and discrimination female players face in *League of Legends*' Turkish server and while stream their games on Twitch. In-depth interviews have been conducted with 10 female players & streamers to see if they face any discrimination due to their gender and if that is the case, to understand the discrimination and harassment they faced while playing or streaming and the methods they developed to cope with these harassments. Data obtained here has be evaluated in accordance with Kathy Charmaz's approach to grounded theory. Furthermore, it has also be taken into consideration whether these harassments have an impact on the way they play the game, i.e., roles they pick in the game.

A history of interviewees' gaming experiences has been shared, such as how and when they started playing video games, which types of games they liked in the past and how they started playing *League of Legends*. All the interviewees agreed to that there is sexism among players of *League of Legends*' Turkish server, while most interviewees stated that they appreciated Riot Games' work on inclusiveness and gender equality, they also mentioned that the reason behind sexism takes its roots from factors that are deeper than the game itself. In this regard, interviewees' opinions regarding the reasons behind sexist discrimination and possible solutions has been evaluated. All the interviewees are also Twitch streamers, which has enabled the research to have a perspective on whether there is a sexism towards female streamers in Twitch or not. On the other hand, it is noted that most Turkish players of *League of Legends* also have accounts on EU West server as well, a comparison on their gameplay experience on both EU West and Turkish servers has been made.

Finally, a summarised version of the data obtained regarding sexism and Turkish female players' competitive gaming experience has be shared, which will hopefully pave the way for future research on the field to come.

**Key words:** Game, Gender, Twitch, Cyber Culture, Female Gamers

## ÖZET

Bu tez *League of Legends* Türkiye serverında oyun oynayan ve Twitch üzerinden yayın yapan kadın oyuncuların karşılaştıkları cinsiyet temelli ayrımcılıklar üzerine odaklanacaktır. 10 kadın oyuncu & yayıncıyla röportajlar gerçekleştirilerek oyun oynarken veya yayın yaparken cinsiyetleri sebebiyle ayrımcılığa maruz kalıp kalmadıkları, eğer kalıyorlarsa bunların türlerini tanımlamaları ve bu ayrımcılıkla mücadele etmek için geliştirdikleri yöntemleri belirtmeleri istenmiştir. Burada toplanan veri Kathy Charmaz'ın Grounded Theory yorumundan faydalanarak değerlendirilecektir.

Katılımcıların oyunculuk geçmişleri paylaşılarak oyun oynamaya nasıl başladıkları, eskiden ne tip oyunlar oynadıkları ve *League of Legends*'la nasıl tanıştıkları öğrenilecektir. Katılımcıların çoğu Riot Games'in cinsiyetler arası eşitlik ve kapsayıcılık bağlamında gerçekleştirdiği çalışmaları takdir ettiklerini belirtmişler, ancak bunlara rağmen *League of Legends* Türkiye sunucusunda oyun oynayan kitle içerisinde cinsiyetçilik olduğunu ve bunun sebeplerinin oyunun kendisi olmadığını ifade etmişlerdir. Bunun yanı sıra, cinsiyetçiliğin temelleri ve muhtemel çözümlerine ilişkin katılımcı görüşleri dile getirilecektir. Katılımcıların hepsi ayrı zamanda Twitch yayıncısıdır, bu sayede Twitch izleyici kitlesinde kadın yayıncılara yönelik cinsiyetçi davranışlar olup olmadığı ele alınacaktır. Ayrıca, *League of Legends* Türkiye sunucusunda oynayan oyuncuların çoğunun EU West sunucusunda da hesabı olduğu dikkat çekmiştir. EU West serverındaki oyun tecrübeleri değerlendirilerek Türkiye sunucusuyla kıyaslanacaktır.

Son olarak cinsiyetçilik ve Türk kadınının rekabetçi oyun tecrübesine ilişkin edinilen veri özel bir şekilde paylaşılacaktır. Bu çalışmanın gelecekte aynı alanda gerçekleştirilecek araştırmalara zemin açması ümit edilmektedir.

**Anahtar Kelimeler:** Oyun, Toplumsal Cinsiyet, Twitch, Siber Kültür, Kadın oyuncular

## INTRODUCTION

Sexism in gaming environment and its effects on female players has been a popular topic of discussion for the last two decades. Numerous research regarding the issue has been conducted to evaluate stereotypes regarding female players in online games, such as T.L. Taylor's book *Play between worlds: Exploring online game culture* (Taylor, 2006) which dedicates a whole chapter to the issue to more recent studies as Fox and Tang's article titled: Sexism in online video games: The role of conformity to masculine norms and social dominance orientation (Fox & Tang, 2014) More of the earlier research on the topic will be evaluated in literature review section.

On the other hand, it is noticeable that academic works on Turkish women and online gaming are rather limited. There have been several works previously, such as Furkan Deđer's MA thesis titled 'New product for Turkish women: Esport and consumption' (Deđer, 2019) however: additional study on the issue could be useful to shed a light on this rather undiscovered field.

Moreover, Twitch streaming is also rather a recent field for discovery. Twitch is a streaming platforms which is especially known for game streaming. Its structure allows direct interaction between the streamer and viewers. Taking into consideration its popularity, it would be safe to claim that Twitch's part in gaming culture is undeniable. More information regarding Twitch and the concept of game streaming in general will be shared in the section 'Game Streaming and Twitch'

By including female players who are also Twitch streamers, the thesis is aimed to have an original point of view by evaluating two major questions; whether there is sexism on *League of Legends*' Turkish server & Twitch's Turkish community and whether sexism affects female players' gameplay / streaming. In-depth interviews with 10 people (9 streamers and a Twitch channel moderator) have been conducted to convey their point of view and experiences. Interview questions were prepared



in accordance with Amanda Cote's Julia G. Raz's approach. (Cote & Raz, 2015) Kathy Charmaz's approach to Grounded Theory was used to analyse the data obtained from the participants, therefore: a constructivist and impressionistic stance was taken. Detailed information regarding the methods used for obtaining and evaluating data has been shared under chapter "Methodology".

In-depth interviews were conducted for the thesis with female players from all levels of gaming skills, from beginner to top level to make it as inclusive as possible; considering that a research that evaluates data obtained from professional esports players or beginners only would merely show one side of gaming environment. Moreover, *League of Legends* is among the most popular online games and esports in the world and Turkey, which has a unique feature: a server dedicated to Turkey. In this regard, a research on *League of Legends*' will be playerbase in Turkish server would enable a unique look on Turkish online gaming community.

Moreover, *League of Legends* is also among the most popular games to be streamed / watched on Twitch too. As of 15.12.2020 it is the most popular game on Twitch with the average viewer number of 131,461. (Twitchmetrics, 2020) This global popularity also reflects upon Turkish Twitch community as well, there are numerous Turkish streamers that share their *League of Legends* gameplay.

Considering the points mentioned above, the thesis aims to have an inclusive and unique look to Turkish female players' online gaming and game streaming experiences. Furthermore, their views regarding stereotypes on female gamers & streamers and sexism will be other points of discussion. While taking hints from experiences of high level female players, the research aims to have a broad perspective that includes female players that have different playing levels, social background and at different ages.

## 1. LITERATURE REVIEW

### 1.1 Evolution of Video Games

In his book *The video game explosion: a history from PONG to PlayStation(R) and beyond* Mark J.P. Wolf categorizes history of gaming into following parts(Wolf, 2008):

- 1- Early Days (Before 1985)
- 2- The Industrial Rebounds (1985 – 1994)
- 3- Advancing to the Next Level (1995 – Present)

Before using this categorization, it should be noted that the book is not very recent. It was published in 2008, before the rise of esports, therefore while it might not be correct to categorize 2020's gaming culture in the same group with 1996, this categorization system provides a brief guide to earlier years of video games. Moreover, it should also be mentioned that a history of competitive gaming will be shared in the section: Definition of Esports and Their Historical Background. Naturally evolution and history of video games is a long and complicated topic that needs a fairly more detailed content; however, this section was aimed to be as brief as possible to share only the basics and milestones of video game industry as background information.

David H. Ahl informs that in the 1950s and 1960s computers were still rather scarce, therefore they were not used for entertainment purposes. However, computers were used as tools to understand human thought processes and as educational tools for military officers by simulating hazardous environments for them. (Ahl, 2008) However, there are also rare examples of video games produced outside of these objectives during the period as well, such as the first game of blackjack programmed in 1954 for the IBM 701 followed by a game of pool at the same year, moreover: in 1958, a tennis game, *Tennis for Two* was designed for an analogue computer, which is significant because it is the first game that is playable

for two players at the same time. (Ibid) The first video game of history is an arguable subject according to James D. Ivory. While many consider *Tennis for Two* as the first video game, Ivory compares the game to Alexander Graham Bell's telephone and mentions that simplification of calling it the first also leads to a disregard towards prototypes. (Ivory, 2018)

It was by the mid 1970's that computer and arcades gained popularity, this transition would become a basis for the future industry of video games. (Ahl, 2008) Pinball games have already been a popular for a decade before video arcade games appeared. (Wolf, 2008) 1972 was the year first commercial home video game console was released: the Magnavox Odyssey, which used light signals on commercial TV's to simulate graphics and dominantly featured sports and action games. (Ivory, 2018) Moreover, in June 1972, the first hit of video game industry was released, *PONG* by Atari Inc., which would later be followed by numerous games started to become available for common use in home computers sequels such as *Barrel PONG* (1972) and *PONG Doubles* (1972). (Ibid) Success of *PONG* led to development of many new games and consoles, however, most of them were just copies of *PONG*. Ernkvist takes note that this homogenous market in which every company relied on *PONG* game concept also led to 1977 console industry crash. (2008)

Game industry recovered from 1977 thanks to a legendary game that was created in 1980, *Pac-Man*, a coin-operated arcade game. (Ivory, 2018) Ironically, much expected console version of *Pac-Man*, which was poorly produced, contributed to a second industry crash in 1983. (D. Williams, 2002) Furthermore, personal computer ownership also saw a rise in early, in this perspective, Commodore 64 home computer was released in 1982. (Ivory, 2018) Moreover, Famicom (stands for Family Computer) was released in Japan by Nintendo in 1983 and had over 500.000 consoles sold two months after its release, which made Nintendo to aim for international markets to export. (Arsenault, 2008) In this regard, Nintendo set its sights on the US market to export its product, even though

the US market suffered from mentioned game industry crash in 1983, which might have made it harder to export any products, however; Nintendo's president Hiroshi Yamauchi believed Famicom could repeat the success it had in Japan in the US as well. Name of the product was changed to Nintendo Entertainment System (NES) for the US market.(Ibid) Moreover, *Super Mario Bros*, which would serve as a flagship for Nintendo products, was released in 1985 and became one of the best-selling games of all times, this would be followed by *The Legend of Zelda*, the first game of Zelda games series. (Wolf, 2008)

The 1990's saw an increase in production budgets of video games and many innovations, such as using optical CD's instead of ROM cartridges, which was able to hold much more data. Also the possibility to organize multi-player sessions with Local Area Network(LAN) connection and the internet was introduced. (Ivory, 2018) Games like *Meridien59* (1996) and *Diablo* (1996) offered their players the chance play with others at the same time, moreover, *Ultima Online* (1997), which quickly surpassed 100.000 users is usually regarded as a breakthrough in online gaming with its lively community and popularity. It is widely referred as a revolution in online gaming. (Taylor, 2006) However, it should also be noted that online gaming has its roots from MUDs(Multi-User Dungeon), which were basically text-based online environments. First MUD was produced by two British computer science students at the University of Essex, Roy Trubshaw and Richard Bartle in 1978. Eventually MUD became so popular that it created a new genre of text-based online games, in which the original version created by Trubshaw and Bartle would be referred as MUD1. (Ivory, 2018)

Steam, a platform in which enabled gamers to buy video games online was created in 2003. *World of Warcraft* (WoW) was released a year after by Blizzard Entertainment, an American video game developer that is famous for numerous game series, such as *Warcraft*, *StarCraft* and *Diablo*. *WoW* is a massively multiplayer online role-playing game (MMORPG) that enabled players from all around the world to play in a fantasy world together. It was a huge hit for gaming

industry and two years after its release, in 2006 it had 6.5 million active subscribers which is an implication of its popularity. (Nardi & Harris, 2006) Interestingly, even after 16 years of its release it is still a very popular game as its eighth and most recent expansion pack released in 27 October 2020, *Shadowlands*, sold 3.7 millions on its first day. (Stanton, 2010) Moreover, it was the top grossing title in PC gaming in November 2020, followed by *League of Legends*. (Superdata, 2020)

When it comes to evolution of gaming in Turkey, in his PhD dissertation titled *A Historical Approach to Gaming Subculture In Turkey*, Ertuğrul Süngü argues that earlier gaming culture in Turkey was adapted by middle to higher economic classes, therefore had limited accessibility:

Economic factors are driven by the secular middle class. Comprador culture has immensely contributed to development of game culture in Turkey. Particularly in the 1980s and 1990s, PCs and games were very difficult to access in Istanbul, Ankara and Izmir, and almost unavailable in other cities. Thus, private school students who speak a foreign language and can afford international trips have brought from abroad many products of their choice. The products brought in through personal contacts and private capital have set the stage for the expansion of game culture across Turkey as the Internet and fast information exchange were non-existent at the time.(Süngü, 2019)

Moreover, he also claims that in 2000's gaming subculture in Turkey has created a distinctive stance of its own, like Metal music listeners, a unique approach to music, politics and culture. (Ibid)

Internet Cafés could be shared as another hub for gaming in Turkey, as people who were unable to afford computers or internet connection usually preferred internet cafés to play games. A survey made by Hüseyin Balcılar for his MA thesis dated 2008 shows that %55 of participants mentioned "Lack of computer/internet connection" at home. (Balcılar, 2008) internet cafés' effect on

competitive gaming will be thoroughly evaluated in the section: Internet Cafés as a Home to Competitive Gaming.

Currently, video games have become one of the mainstream types of entertainment methods. Game industry is expected to finish 2020 with a total worth of 197.9 billion dollars, which is higher than sports and film industries combined, which make 175 billion dollars, however when taking these numbers into consideration it might be better to consider that COVID 19 pandemic damaged film and sports industry a lot while release of new consoles, PlayStation 5 and Xbox Series X positively affected game industry. (Gökhan)

### **1.1.1 Gamergate Controversy**

Gamergate, an online harassment campaign against some video game developers and journalists started in August 2014 when Zoë Quinn, an American video game developer received a blog post by her ex-boyfriend, Eron Gjoni. In this blog post Gjoni shared detailed information regarding his relationship with Quinn, accused her of infidelity and implied that Quinn received positive coverage from a video game journalist in exchange of a sexual relationship, even though it was revealed later that the journalist never reviewed her game, *Depression Quest*, which was released in 2013. (Massanari, 2016)

This post quickly became popular in social media platforms such as 4chan's /v board that is dedicated to video games and Reddit. Moreover, it received its name with hashtag #Gamergate first time when Adam Baldwin, an actor known for his right-wing views tweeted it with links to videos on YouTube that contain conspiracy theories regarding Quinn. His support of the movement seemed to be decisive as the hashtag would be shortly adopted and spread by his 188.000+ Twitter followers. (M. Salter, 2016)

As Gjoni shared her personal contact details, such as her home address, phone number, emails etc., Quinn started to receive numerous threats of sexual assault and murder. (Jason, 2015) Moreover, whole set of events soon transformed into a crusade, as called by Andrea Braithwaite, to ‘save innocuous male pastime against Social Justice Warriors’. (Braithwaite, 2016) Following this, other members of video game industry who stood up to defend Quinn were subjected to hacks. Video game developer Phil Fish’s personal social media accounts and the website of his company, Polytron was hacked, these acts were described as ‘public execution’ in retaliation for his SJW tendencies and all other SJW game developers should be careful. (Romano, 2014) This situation led Fish to sell Polytron and leave video game sector altogether, suggesting other game developers to follow a similar approach by saying that:

This is video games. This is your audience. To every aspiring game developer out there: Don’t. give up. It’s not worth it. Nothing is worth this. Give up on your dreams. They are actually nightmares. Just don’t do it. RUN AWAY (Ibid)

Phil Fish was not the only victim to these attacks and hackings, Jenn Frank, an award-winning freelance game journalist wrote an article titled “How to attack a woman who works in video gaming” for the Guardian, which called for level-headedness and empath. However, mentioned article made her a new target for Gamergate community. (Cox, 2014) Following numerous threats and doxxing threats she received, Frank decided to step back from game journalism. (Ibid)

Anita Sarkeesian, who is a critique of female representation in video games in her YouTube channel and website Feminist Frequency and Tropes vs Women in Video Games has received numerous death threats as well, which led her to cancel her talk at Utah University. (Nieborg & Foxman, 2018) One of the threats mentioned it would be ‘the deadliest school shooting in American history’, moreover, there was a 2004 state law forbid public universities from

banning firearms, therefore, it would be possible for anybody to attend to her talk with a gun.(Alberty, 2014) Moreover, as the threats persisted she even had to leave her home for safety. (Golding, 2014)

Braithwaite mentions that Gamergate participants consider themselves as the ‘real victims’ in the incident, as they perceive their gamer identity was under attack and at risk, which makes them think they have moral superiority. (Braithwaite, 2016) Dan Golding defines the event as ‘the death of an identity’. He argues that gamer identity is ‘stagnant and immobile’ as one cannot fit playerbase of different types of games into one basket, such as *Call of Duty* and *Candy Crush* players, moreover; while video games industry developed and changed, the same did not happen to the gamer identity, which has led to a cultural irrelevance for the identity as there is a shift in gamers’ demographics. (Golding, 2014) In addition, he also claims that ‘traditional gamers’ are inventing bias or corruption problems to demonstrate their confusion towards why things traditional gamers do not understand are successful, he defines the incident as a reaction to video games’ shift towards popular culture. (Ibid)

In this regard, it is possible to see a correspondence between Süngü and Golding when it comes a ‘distinctive’ gaming subculture, even though Süngü focuses on a national level while Golding includes gamers all around the world. Both agree that this subculture includes distinctive elements, such as listening to rock or metal music as suggested by Süngü. (2019) However, it is also hard to deny the fact that video game industry has changed and evolved a lot, especially in 2010’s as well. For example, Robert Williams informs that in 2019 mobile games made up %60 revenue of gaming industry, surpassing traditional gaming platforms, such as PC and gaming consoles. (2020) This trend seems to persist in 2020 as well, due to COVID 19 pandemic all game segments saw an increase, however, mobile gaming saw the biggest increase with a %13.3 growth and is estimated to create \$77.2 billion in 2020, in comparison, PC games are estimated to create \$36.9 billion and console games \$45.2 billion, which shows us the huge gap between. (Wijman,



2020) In addition to this, *League of Legends*, subject game of this thesis has released a mobile version in December 2020 and is not alone in having a mobile version as well, considering popular online games such as PUBG and Fortnite also have mobile versions.

Of course a shift in gaming devices is not an enough sign to say that there has been a change in gamer community's demographics, however, a report by Entertainment Software Association (ESA) in 2020 shows that gamers are more than just 'niche groups' of 'nerdy male gamer' stereotype, in the report it is mentioned that %75 of all U.S households have at least one gamer, moreover, average age of gaming community according to the report is 35-44 in the U.S. (Mortimer, 2020) In addition to this, the report shows that there are 88 million female gamers in the U.S only, making up %41 of the players in the country. (Ibid)

Considering the above-mentioned data, it could be said that gaming subculture is transforming into a part of popular culture, therefore, it is hard to disagree with Golding's idea that gamer identity of a niche group of nerdy male players are becoming more and more irrelevant and obsolete with the changing and evolving video game industry. However, gamers who consider themselves natural members of this subculture might feel their identity is under assault, which leads them to react and police their territory against outsiders.(Taylor, 2018) Furthermore; Taylor mentions that it is rather interesting that "what was originally outsider culture becoming so intensely harsh a judge of other outsiders". (2018, p. 324) While it would be an insufficient background alone for Gamergate controversy and sexism or any type of discrimination/harassment in gaming community, this situation might be one of the main grounds.

### **1.1.2 Earlier Studies on Sexism and Video Games**

Before beginning this section, it should be stated that studies regarding sexist discrimination in gaming community are rather vast, therefore, it might be a

difficult task to include all of them in this thesis, moreover, such an enormous data might shadow the data the thesis aims provide as well. In this regard, merely some key works that have been inspirational for this work will be included with the idea to provide further literature for interested parties.

In her book, *Play Between Worlds: Exploring Online Game Culture*, Taylor provides the reader with numerous sociological aspects of online gaming communities and gamer identities through an analysis *Everquest's* playerbase, an MMORPG that was released in 1999. Furthermore, she also dedicates an entire section to female players. She first starts by arguing ‘‘who is a gamer’’ and states that even though it is far from reflecting the reality, gamer identity is still strongly attached to boys and men, she further states that women and girls who play computer games are often regarded as ‘‘oddballs and anomalies’’, therefore, women who play games still hesitate to call themselves gamers (Taylor, 2006, p. 94).

Taylor questions the identity of femininity that is attributed to all female gamers by arguing that:

Does the same girl enact her gender in the same way across her lifespan? Do the practices, the social maps, the various contexts to understanding particular permutations of gender, transfer across all women? While I certainly do not want to suggest we cannot identify some common stereotypes that circulate in the dominant culture about what women and men do, how much those ideas correspond to actual lived practice and experience is another matter. Far too often I have heard students, for example, talk about how women dislike first-person shooters, only to have them quickly follow up by noting that they themselves do enjoy FPS’s but ‘‘those other women’’ do not. I have also encountered men who want to suggest that women dislike competition, but those men are stumped when

asked to explain that assumption given the women in their lives who play sports or tabletop games. (Ibid, p. 101)

This section provides a great basis for research related sexism in video games with regards to the fallacies on stereotyping female players as “non-competitive” moreover, while obtaining data it was rather surprising to see that this stereotype exists even today, 12 years after Taylor wrote these lines, as interviewees often mentioned they were demanded to play support role in *League of Legends*, which is often considered least competitive and best fit for women. Detailed information regarding this will be shared thoroughly in the section: Playing Support, A Conundrum for Female Players. As Taylor mentions, “men are hunters”, “women are gatherers” and “different brains” perceptions still to be popular to some extent. (Ibid, p. 101)

In correspondence with Taylor’s work, numerous other research have focused on perceived “minority” status of female players by the gamer community as well, for example; Salter and Blodgett argue that male players act assertive against minority groups to retain their dominant status. (2012) In a research regarding cyberbullying Ballard and Welch found out that males and heterosexuals perpetrate cyberbullying more compared to females and LGBT participants in massively multiplayer online games (MMOGs).(2017) A research by Brehm among *World of Warcraft* players shows that %63.6 of the female participants reported experiencing sexism in the game. (Brehm, 2013)

In their research McLean and Griffiths state that lack of social support and constant harassment leads female players to face anxiety and loneliness and create mitigation methods, such as hiding their identity or avoiding communication with other players. (McLean & Griffiths, 2019) Amanda C. Cote also focuses on harassments against women in online gaming spaces and methods they created to cope with these harassments in her article titled: I Can Defend Myself: Women’s Strategies for Coping With Harassment While Gaming Online. She states that there

are four main strategies female players adapt, which are “leaving online gaming, avoiding playing with strangers, camouflaging their gender, deploying their skill and experience, or adopting an aggressive persona”. (2017, p. 3)

On the other hand, Cote also informs that trash talking is often regarded as a part of gaming culture, however, using sexual slang or implications of sexual assault are more threatening for women than men, especially if they had had such traumatic experience before. (Ibid) Moreover, it is also interesting when women reacted and reflected the aggression back to the perpetrator they might be accused of “acting like a female” with an implication of being over-emotional and hysterical. (Ibid) Such reaction was also detected by previous studies on online harassments as well. (Herring, 1999) This situation goes hand in hand with traditional view of genders, where men are considered to have higher status therefore be assertive and dominant, while women are expected to act submissively in accordance with the lower status attributed to them. (Ridgeway, 2001)

In this regard it could be considered that women talking back to male players or trash talking in online gaming spaces might be conceived as acts of dominance and assertiveness. As some other players might expect women to act accordingly to their traditionally attributed supportive role, dominant behaviour might be considered a contradiction to these expectations, which causes a backlash. Herring suggests that women are expected to be unassertive and timid in online spaces while men are encouraged to be more forth-coming, moreover, in her study she explains that men are inclined to post longer messages, assert their opinion, start arguments and use slang in computer mediated communications (CMC) while women prefer shorter messages, express their opinions and feelings in a more detailed manner and be supportive towards others. (Herring, 2000) Another study shows that women making positive utterances in online gaming receive more friendship request than women making negative utterances do, yet, men making negative comments receive more friendship requests than make making positive comments. (Holz Ivory et al., 2014) Moreover, Blackburn and Scharrer’s research indicates that people who

prefer video games with elements of violence are likely to support values that includes “aggression, dominance, toughness and the suppression of emotions” regardless of their gender, therefore, disproves the idea that gender identity is correspondent with gaming style of a player. (2019)

According to Consalvo, there are at least two factors behind the sexist, racist, homophobic and ageist anger against other players: “beliefs about the abilities and proper place of female players, and fears about the changing nature of the game industry.”(2012) Changing nature of gaming industry and gamer identity’s rigidness compared to it has been mentioned in the last section. However, when it comes to abilities of female players, a research by Ratan, Taylor, Hogan, Kennedy and Williams that covers both qualitative (with 15 participants) and quantitative (with 16,821 participants) studies on *League of Legends*’ playerbase shows that there are no difference in obtaining gaming skills between male and female players, however, female players who play with a male partner are usually less confident of their skill and play supporting roles. (Ratan et al., 2015) Another research on two MMO’s, *Everquest II* and *Chevaliers’ Romance III* also prove stereotypes regarding female players’ gaming skills to be false. (Shen et al., 2016)

An interesting study was done by Kuznekoff and Rose in 2013 to see how gamers reacted male and female voices in game’s voice chat. The study was done in *Halo 3*, a first-person shooter game on Xbox 360 gaming console. 245 multiplayer matches and 1,660 unique gamers were included in the research, which showed that female voice attracted three times as many negative comments as male voice or no voice did, moreover, there were also three times more messages and queries (such as friendship requests) sent to female voice. (Kuznekoff & Rose, 2013) Gray, Buyukozturk and Hill focus on symbolic violence and the normalization of violence towards women in gaming culture. (2017)

Female characters’ display in video games have also been a point of study as well. Earlier games, such as *The Super Mario Bros* and *The Legend of Zelda*

usually contain themes of “brave male character on a perilous quest to rescue a princess”, which is in accordance with the traditional sexist approach of brave male protagonist on a journey save a damsel in distress. (Summers & Miller, 2014, p. 1028) Therefore, female characters are inclined to be helpless while heroic attributes are reserved for male characters. (Gailey, 1993; Ivory, 2006; Ogletree & Drake, 2007) Moreover, female characters are likely to be designed sexualized and aggressive manner with revealing clothes, therefore; objectified. (Dill & Thill, 2007)

A study conducted in 1998 evaluates 33 popular Nintendo and Sega Genesis video games and shows that there were no female characters in %41 of the evaluated games, moreover; %28 of these games showed women as sex objects. (Dietz, 1998) Dietz suggests that female characters were likely to be depicted as sexualized and seductive as possible, with mini-skirts, large breasts or bikinis, however: female villains were designed unattractive and decorated with long dresses. (Ibid) Even though there have been female protagonists, such as Lara Croft of famous *Tomb Raider* series, they were often designed with “tight, revealing clothing or as disproportionately curvaceous, essentially creating a heroine who is also a sexual object.”(Summers & Miller, 2014) The same research by Summers and Miller also shows that while “benevolent sexism” towards female characters as princesses or innocent damsels in maiden that need rescuing, decreased in video games, “hostile sexism”, such as sexual objectification of female characters, has increased. (Ibid) However, this objectification of female character might be harmful as research shows that long-term exposure to video game sex-stereotyped characters might create greater tolerance to sexual harassment. (Dill et al., 2008)

On the other hand, character design of *League of Legends* will not be covered in this thesis, previous studies suggest that gender stereotypes affect character design and player’s ideas regarding characters’ skills. (Gao et al., 2017) As will be thoroughly evaluated in the section “Picking ‘Girly’ Champions” using more feminine or masculine champions change female players’ interactions, with

others, therefore gaming experience, too. Therefore, it might be said that female representation in video games also affect gamer community's perception of women characters, therefore, their in-game interactions.

Se Jin Kim's MA thesis titled *Gender Inequality in eSports Participation: Examining League of Legends*, which was rather thought-provoking and inspirational during preparation of this thesis, focuses on women's minority status in esports and suggests several solutions to encourage female participation. (Kim, 2017) Kim also chooses *League of Legends* as his study ground, moreover, he shares information regarding relations between gender and sport both in South Korea and the US, making a connection between traditional sports, Esports and traditional approaches for gender regarding both. Moreover, he also provides a comparative vision between the US and South Korea, which is very important as South Korea is traditionally known for its successful Esports players, such as Faker (Lee, Sang Hyeok) who is considered among best *League of Legends* by many.

In his thesis titled *New Product For Turkish Women: Esport And Consumption*, Furkan Değer follows a similar approach by giving a background of Turkish women's traditional relationship to sports and proceeds to share a view of Turkish women and Esports. (Değer, 2019) Değer shares viewpoints of female players of different genres, from FPS's to MOBA's, regarding Esports and Turkish women.

Similar to Kim's and Değer's research, this thesis, albeit lacking the comparative side, aims to share a background of Turkish competitive gaming and how Turkish women fit in. However, by including interviewees from various *League of Legends* ranks, divisions players are placed with regards to their skill in the game, it seeks to share an inclusive perception of competitive gaming culture among Turkish women, sexist discriminations they faced and how it shaped their playing style & preferences, therefore, it could be said that esports aspect is a

secondary theme in this work while Turkish online gaming culture and women is the primary.

Richard Bartle famously categorizes multiplayer game players into four groups as socializers, achievers, explorers and killers, which seek different things in an online game. (1996) He suggests that achievers aim to gain success regarding game-related goals, (such as levelling up or getting stronger items) explorers are more interested in the environment and the world setting game takes place in, socializers tend to focus more on people than the game objectives itself while killers tend to ‘impose upon others’ by using in-game tools to cause stress to other players. (Ibid) These archetypes of players help us understand what different types of gamers understand as the definition of fun and how they prefer to play, instead of evaluating them as a whole. (Taylor, 2012, p. 70) In this regard, it might be said that *League of Legends*, along with other competitive games, attracts achiever type players.

Moreover, Taylor categorizes MMOG players into two groups: casual gamers and power gamers.(Ibid) She claims that the main difference between two is while casual gamers spend a moderate amount of time for a game, therefore considered to ‘one with a life’, power gamers spend much more time to a game to improve their skills, they are usually assumed to have ‘little real life. (Ibid) In this regard, this study aims to include both power gamers and casual gamers of *League of Legends*. Furthermore, as all the interviewees are also Twitch streamers with the exception of one, who is a moderator in a Twitch channel, game streaming for Turkish women is also a point of focus as well.

## **1.2 Historical Background of Esports**

As of 2021, Esports have become an inseparable part of gaming economy and culture. Sade Ayodele claims that even though they is a constant misconception of using the terms Esports and gaming interchangeably, however; there are significant differences between the two. (Ayodele, 2019) First, not all games have



the competitive side Esports have, such as most simulation games, moreover, even in competitive games there is a strong difference between a professional Esports player and a casual gamer, in Ayodele's words:

For many people, 10-15 hours a month may seem like a lot of time spent video gaming or playing basketball. However, from the perspective of a professional NBA player or professional gamer/esports player, this pales in comparison to the 10-15 hours a day they spend perfecting their craft. (Ibid)

As mentioned in the previous section, this thesis does not solely focus on professional players but includes players from all skill groups, therefore; even though there are interviewees that have professional gaming background and high playing skills, there are also participants from lower skill ranks as well. *League of Legends* is undeniably one of the most popular Esports, for example: The League of Legends World Championship 2019 was biggest tournament of the year with highest viewership hours on Twitch and YouTube with 105.5 million hours. (Newzoo, 2020) However, the reason the reason why *League of Legends*' players were chosen as interviewees for this thesis is not because of its success as an eSport, but for two reasons:

Firstly, it has a server dedicated to Turkey, therefore, gives a chance to have a glimpse of Turkish online gaming community. Most of the other Esports, such as *Counter Strike: Global Offensive*, was chosen to obtain data from, it would show not show information solely belongs to Turkish gaming community as players with play on international servers and most probably use English as their language of communication rather than Turkish. Secondly, *League of Legends* is a very popular game that attracts Turkish players from all backgrounds and age groups, therefore, enables an inclusive and **unique** look at various experiences. However, competitive and professional side of *League of Legends* is a vital part of the game, therefore; to truly understand its nature sharing a brief history of Esports was necessary.

Taylor states competitive gaming history has three major parts, described as:

First wave: “Game” is the predominant frame in this moment. It is rooted in enthusiast and serious leisure communities. Amateur and pro-am orientations and competitions dominate.

Second wave: “Sport” becomes the predominant frame. The rise of third-party organizations—sustained infrastructures of competition, formalization, and professionalism—takes over as a dominant rubric for not only players but also many ancillary actors involved in creating an industry.

Third wave: “Media entertainment” rises as the predominant frame. Serious attention is given to media production, audience, and entertainment. Infrastructures, both organizational and technical, become attuned to as well as configure themselves around media production and distribution. Tournaments are harnessed as media events with an emphasis on the visual and narrative. (2018, pp. 136–137)

Cem Toker categorizes the history of Esports into three as 1980 – 1990, 1990 – 2000, 2000 and afterwards. (Toker, 2015) A similar approach will be followed in this section to simplify the evolution of Esports in accordance with the trends noted by Taylor, moreover, it should be noted that current situation of Esports in Turkey will be shared in the section: A Look to Competitive Gaming in Turkey. This section was designed to provide a global history of Esports.

**1980 – 1990:** Competitive gaming took a start at the end of 1970’s when gaming consoles gained huge popularity in the US and Japan. First known video gaming tournament was held in 1972: Intergalactic Spacewar Olympics.(Good, 2012) The event was organized in Stanford University’s Artificial Intelligence Laboratory with two events, a free-for-all and a team competition. (Ibid) In 1974, Japanese video game developer SEGA held All Japan TV Game Championships in

Tokyo. (Lu, 2016) Another tournament for Space Invaders, an arcade game developed in 1978 was held by Atari in 1980 with approximately 10,000 participants. (Toker, 2015) The same event was also broadcasted on live television. (Olsen, 2015) Following this, Tournament Games, a Seattle-based company traditionally organized tournaments of billiards, foosball and darts in 1970's staged a three-day video game tournament at the Chicago Exhibition Center. (Borowy & Jin, 2013)

Televised video gaming also started to gain popularity in 80's. *Starcade*, an American show that ran between 1982 – 1984 aired a total of 133 episodes. (Plunkett, 2011) Focusing on arcade games, the format of the show was as follows:

It was presented as a gladiatorial bout between only two contestants (or sometimes two teams): the show was split into three rounds, and at the beginning of each round, a trivia question would be asked. The person first able to answer correctly then got to choose from one of five arcade games and post a score. The second contestant would then try and beat that score. (Ibid)

Creation of U.S National Video Gaming Team in the mid 1980's could also be considered as a milestone when it comes to professional gaming. (Borowy & Jin, 2013) This team consisted of the U.S's best arcade players and attended tournaments, expos and trade shows. (Ibid) However, multiplayer gaming in this time period usually based on high-score benchmark and lacked the individual or team competition of traditional sports, the main reason behind this was the rarity two-player games. (Borowy & Jin, 2013)

### **1990 – 2000:**

Both with the rise of PC's and developments in internet, multiplayer gaming started to gain popularity in 1990s. In 1988, Jarko Oikarinen created IRC (Internet

Relay Chat) that would allow up to converse with each other through internet. (Hope, 2014) In 1993, when *Doom* was released people would create specific IRC groups dedicated to gaming. (Ibid) Moreover, as the technology developed it allowed players to play on the internet as well, which led to creation of two very popular game genres: First Person Shooter (FPS) and Real Time Strategy (RTS). (Chobopeon, 2012)

A Quake tournament that was organized with the name “Red Annihilation” in 1997 is considered first real esports event. (Toker, 2015)The tournament attracted over 2000 participants and the prize was the Ferrari owned by the creator of the game, John Carmack. (Ibid)

FPS and sports games were favourites along with arcade games at the beginning of the 90’s. (Ibid) An example to popular arcade games of the time would be the *Street Fighter* series; *Street Fighter 2* was released in 1991 and became a huge hit, allowing players to combine special and standard attacks together with its ‘combo system’ it allowed more tactical and competitive gameplay. (Chobopeon, 2012) *Counter Strike* was released in 1999 as a modification of *Half-Life*, gaining huge popularity around the globe it still is one of the largest esports of the world with its latest game *Counter Strike: Global Offensive*. With the release of *StarCraft* and its expansion *Starcraft: Brood War* in 1998 strategy games also started to gain popularity in competitive stage as well. (Toker, 2015) The World Cyber Games Challenge was organized in Seoul in October 2000, it included *StarCraft: Brood War*, *Quake 3*, *Age of Empires II* and *FIFA 2000* and had a prize pool of 200 000 \$.(D. Devil, 2011)

### **2000 and afterwards:**

2000’s were the years that esports took their professional shape as we know today. As mentioned, home internet services becoming more common acted as a

support for multiplayer more common in 90's. It could be said that home internet truly became accessible for many houses around the globe in 2000's and this led to a next level in multiplayer gaming.

The World Cyber Games and Electronic Sports Cup were created in 2000, which quickly became important events in esports and still held annually to this day. (Toker, 2015) The World Cyber games was organized with the cooperation between South Korean government and the private sector, most notably Samsung, and is often called the Olympics of professional computer gaming. (Taylor, 2012, p. 22) South Korea's official support towards competitive gaming further increased in time, for example Korean esports Association (keSPA) was launched in 2000 with the approval of Ministry of Culture and Tourism and started to regulate competitive gaming tournaments, organized and regulated esports in the country. (Ibid, p. 25)

Major League Gaming was created in March 2002; it focused on the US market and console gaming at first. (D. Devil, 2011) In the following years, Major League Gaming started to organize tournaments in various game genres and became known for its generosity for prize pools, such as 170,000\$ prize pool of Winter Championship in 2013. (Toker, 2015) Moreover, Major League Gaming also broadcasted a gaming tournament for the first time in North America as well, in 2006 Halo 2 matches were broadcasted live but did not draw the estimated popularity. (Ibid) However, in South Korea video games drew much more popularity on TV. There are cable TV channels dedicated to video games and professional players are treated like celebrities. (Ryan Kim, 2007) Popular competitive games of 2000's, such as *Warcraft III* and *Starcraft* were televised in these stations.

MOBAs (Multiplayer Online Battle Arena) gained huge popularity as an esport genre in time. A modification named *DotA* (Defense of the Ancients) of *Warcraft III* gained huge popularity in 2000's as it allowed a competitive play by

mixing elements of strategy and mechanical skills. The genre originally dates back 1998 when a modder called Aeon64 created a custom map for *Starcraft*, called *Aeron of Strife*. (Minotti, 2014) *Warcraft III* was released in 2002 and *DotA* was created in 2003 by Eul, a map editor, moreover; while *Aeron of Strife* was but an abstract of modern MOBAs with drastic differences, i.e. heroes did not level up, *DotA* was pretty much the basis of current MOBAs with very similar mechanics. (Ibid) *Demigod*, first significant standalone MOBA game was released in 2009 but was not very popular. *League of Legends* was released the same year and gained huge popularity. *League of Legends'* mechanics and esports aspect will be thoroughly discussed in the section: *An Introduction to League of Legends. Heroes of Newerth* was also released the same year however did not enjoy *League of Legends'* popularity. In 2019 its developers announced that the game will not receive any major updates anymore but small fixes, moreover this update had an ‘end-of-the road’ tone as well with mentioning "Tributes to certain staff members have been put into some item flavour tooltips to thank them for all their hard work throughout the game!" (Fenlon, 2019)

*Dota 2* was announced also in 2009, the year *League of Legends, Heroes of Newerth* and *Demigod* was released. *Valve*, developer of famous video game series *Half-Life* and video game distribution service *Steam*, reported that it employed IceFrog, a modder than took over the role of maintaining *DotA Allstars*, to develop *Dota 2*. (Minotti, 2014) However, while becoming more successful than other rivals *Dota 2* was unable to reach the player counts of *League of Legends* as well, it is stated that there were roughly 120 million people playing *League of Legends* in 2019 compared to 20 million for *Dota 2*. (Pollack, 2019) On the other hand, when it comes to esports, prize pools are much larger for DOTA 2 players, *The International 2019*, annual world championship of *Dota 2* had an astonishing prize pool of 34.33 million USD. (Gough, 2020) In comparison, *League of Legends'* 2019 World Championship had a prize pool of 2.5 million USD. (Webb, 2019)

Battle Royale genre has also been gaining huge popularity as an esports since late 2010's. The genre consists elements of survival, which is described by Carter Melrose as:

Battle-royale games hew to a few core mechanics. The first is helplessness: Everyone starts the game either weak or utterly unarmed, and through either combat or foraging gets whatever they need to survive—and outduel everyone else. Most battle-royale games also use an ever-growing external threat in order to force all players into a smaller and smaller area, and ultimately into combat; in *Fortnite*, it's a storm that saps your strength unless you stay within its eye. And perhaps most importantly, unlike most other multiplayer games, death in a battle-royale is final. No respite, no respawn. (2018)

Numerous games have been published in genre, such as *PlayerUnknown's Battlegrounds*, *Apex Legends*, *Fortnite*, *Call Of Duty: Warzone* and *Dayz*. *Fortnite* had the highest revenue among free to play games in 2019, surpassing *League of Legends* as well, with 1.8 billion USD. (SuperData, 2020)

### **1.2.1 A Look to Competitive Gaming in Turkey**

In early 2000's *Counter Strike* was a popular game for competitive gaming in Turkey. (Kılıçarslan, 2017) As mentioned in the sections before, there have been a significant rise in the interest for competitive multiplayer gaming globally with technological advances, especially internet becoming more and more common in households. It could be said that a similar pattern in popularity is also noticeable in Turkey as well.

Turkish Esports Federation (Türkiye E-Spor Federasyonu) was founded under Ministry of Youth and Sports in 2018. Even well-known sports clubs in

Turkey, such as Beşiktaş and Fenerbahçe have created branches for esports and have their own *League of Legends* teams. Turkish Esports Federation informs that as of 2019 there are 32 million gamers in Turkey while 4 million of these are interested in esports. (Türkiye E-Spor Federasyonu, 2019a) Moreover, there are 70 licensed clubs 907 professional esports players, 844 male and 63 female (Ibid) *Turkey Game Market 2019 Report* by Gaming in Turkey shows an increase in licensed esports teams and players in Turkey with approximately 85+ teams and 1515+ players. (Gaming in Turkey, 2019) Turkey's first official esports tournament was held in 2019 under the name of "TESFED Vodafone Freezone Turkey Cup" which included the games: *League of Legends*, *Counter-Strike: Global Offensive*, *PlayerUnknown's Battlegrounds*, *Dota 2*, *Zula*, *FIFA 2020*, all of which were played on PC with the exception of *FIFA 2020*, which was played on PS4. (Türkiye E-Spor Federasyonu, 2019b)

Bora Koçyiğit, who served as the Regional Director of Turkey of *Riot Games* between the years 2017 – 2019 mentions that only football is able to surpass esports' popularity in Turkey. (Fanatik, 2017) He states that while an average match is viewed by 60.000 people on Twitch and YouTube, championship matches reach the 1.000.000 viewers. (Ibid) *League of Legends* has local servers in 11 locations (North America, EU West, EU Nordic & East, Turkey, Russia, Oceania, Korea, Latin America North, Latin America South, Brazil and Japan). These servers have different language options specialised for their regions. Currently, there are approximately 15 million accounts on Turkish server. (Habertürk, 2020) The game was localised in Turkish in 2013 and Turkish server was opened in the same year as well. *Vodafone Freezone Championship League*, national level league of *League of Legends* has been organized since 2013. The league was traditionally called *Turkish Championship League* (TCL) before being sponsored by Vodafone Freezone. The tournament is held twice a year, as winter and summer championships, which have the structure of league systems followed by playoffs. Champion of summer championship also obtains the right to participate in the preliminaries of *League of Legends World Championships*.



Oğuz Kılıçarslan, who is a former employee of Riot Games, mentions that due to visionary approach of Riot Games, *League of Legends* was able to spread as an organized esports in Turkey successfully. (Kılıçarslan, 2017) He comments that localization efforts and establishing offices in each continent enhances *League of Legends*' status as an esports and such efforts in time leads to successful developments such as Fenerbahçe, Galatasaray and Beşiktaş creating esports branches, Bahçeşehir University providing scholarships for professional *League of Legends* players in *Turkish Championship League* and esports players obtaining higher incomes and incentives. (Ibid) Kılıçarslan's views on the issue seem to be pretty correct as compared to other popular esports *League of Legends* is much more focused on localization, it is rather deliberate that Riot Games gives great importance to provide players with localized context. For example, Riot Games' tactical FPS game *Valorant*, which was released in 02.06.2020 has Turkish voice acting and Turkish texts while many other popular esports lack voice acting and in-game texts in the local language. Furthermore, even though Turkish esports Federation was founded in 2018, TCL has been held since 2013; which might be seen as an indicator of Riot Games' efforts paving the way for further developments in the country with regards to esports.

### **1.2.2 An Introduction to League of Legends**

Several information regarding *League of Legends*' history and popularity were shared in previous sections, in this regard; this section will aim to share an insight regarding gameplay mechanics of the game. Riot Games describes *League of Legends* as follows:

*League of Legends* is a team-based strategy game where two teams of five powerful champions face off to destroy the other's base. Choose from over 140 champions to make epic plays, secure kills, and take down towers as you battle your way to victory. (Riot Games, 2020)

*League of Legends* is a MOBA game that takes its origins from DotA, even though there are different types of game modes, main and most popular game mode includes a map called the Summoner's Rift, Summoner is a name used for players in *League of Legends*. Summoner's Rift has two bases at two different ends and there are three lanes connecting them. One of the lanes cover the top of the map, other one is right in the middle and one is at the bottom, moreover; there are also jungles between these lanes. It is played by two teams consisting 5 members each and the main objective is to destroy the main structure at enemy team's base, called the nexus. There are structures called turrets and inhibitors on each lane and teams are required to destroy these in order to reach the nexus. Turrets actively attack enemy team champions and minions, which are foot soldiers controlled by AI and spawn automatically. Players get gold and experience points by killing enemy team champions and minions and destroying their structures. With experience points they can level their champion up unlocking new skills or enhancing already unlocked ones while gold is useful to buy items that can improve their champion in various different ways, such as attack damage, critical damage chance, health points or utility items that provide support for themselves and/or their teammates.

When one of enemy team's inhibitors is destroyed, aggressor team is able to spawn stronger minions that would be able to assist them dominate the map. However, inhibitors automatically respawn sometime after they are destroyed, balancing the strength between both teams' minions again unlike turrets who cannot be restored again once destroyed. Game ends when one team successfully infiltrates other team's base and destroys its nexus.

To accomplish this objective, each team member selects a different champion that would be able to increase their team's winning chances in different manners. For example, traditionally two team members of each team are assigned to bottom lanes, one is ADC (Attack Damage Carry) and the other one is support. ADC aims to farm, which basically means obtaining gold by killing minions. By

obtaining gold, ADC's try to buy items that increase their damage output, therefore their chances to defeat the enemy in teamfights. On the other hand; support tries to protect ADC while they farm and tank the enemy team's damage in teamfights or offer buffs and utilities for their own team. Mid lanes are occupied by one player from each team whom is usually an AP(Ability Power) damage dealer or an assassin who is expected to have high burst damage. Top lanes are also played solo with champions who are able to absorb large amount of damages in teamfights, called tanks by players, bruisers that are a mix between tankiness and damage output and split pushers who are able to destroy enemy structures swiftly on their own.

Lastly, there are junglers who roam the jungle and kill neutral creatures that spawn there to gain gold and experience points. Moreover; some creatures also provide temporary buffs for the champion that killed them or their whole team, like increased mana regeneration rate for example. Furthermore; junglers have one unique duty to help their teammates that play in lanes: organizing surprise attacks with the aim to kill or at least damage their lane rivals. This action is called ganking. While teammates from other lanes are also welcome to assist, junglers are most often expected to uphold this duty. As the game progresses stronger creatures such as dragons and Baron Nashor spawn on the map. These creatures provide unique and strong buffs to teams, therefore, a point of strategic interest for both teams usually. Junglers are also expected to control respawning times of these creatures and organize their teams to kill them.

To sum it up, it could be said that gameplay elements of *League of Legends* requires the players to have a strong combination of wise tactical decisions and strong mechanical skills. However, each role has prioritizes different assets, i.e: junglers need to have higher map awareness than any other role. Moreover, efficient communication is also a key to the game as without cooperation among teammates and each fulfilling their role to some degree victory is hard to be achieved single-handedly by a single well-performing player, especially for higher level player groups. In this regard it could be said that numerous combinations of skills and team

coordination is required in *League of Legends*, which is among the factors that make it a popular ground for competitive gaming alongside with efforts of Riot Games.

### 1.3 Game Streaming and Twitch

Hamilton, Garretson and Kerne mention that game streaming were previously at the ‘‘fringes’’ of the social media. (2014) However, this trend seems to have changed a lot with the rise of game streaming platforms, mainly Twitch, in 2010s. Twitchtracker.com, a website dedicated Twitch statistics show that as of 22.01.2021 there have been 2,909,014 average viewers in January 2021.(Twitchtracker, 2021) To further clarify the increase in Twitch’s popularity, it might be beneficial to share average viewer counts of month January last few years: for 2020 it was 1,537,375, for 2019, 1,275,970, for 2018, 967,916. (Ibid) If we search even further, for example, 2013, the figure for January 2013 is 147,967 (Ibid) When comparing these figures, a huge leap in popularity from 2020 to 2021 is striking. It might be considered that COVID-19 pandemic and isolation process might have an effect on this. In fact, several interviewees in this thesis mentioned pandemic process was the reason behind their decision to stream their gameplay:

In fact, I started streaming a long time ago, however quit later. Guess it did not attract me much, my courses also kept me busy too. However due to pandemic I am all free at home right now, doing nothing. We cannot go outside either. Moreover, working is hard too, in contrary everybody’s laying off workers. So I asked myself what to do, how to spend time. Then I thought, as I was already playing games, I could stream on Twitch. Maybe people would watch and I would have fun. This way, even though I was stuck at home I would meet people and converse with them. It was a method to let off some steam. (Soraka, personal interview, September 16, 2020)

However, it is also noticeable that even though the pandemic affected the process, Twitch was already gaining popularity each year and increasing its viewer

numbers. In this regard, considering all interviewees were Twitch streamers and some sections of the thesis will be dedicated to their experiences while streaming, a brief background of Twitch's history and environment will be shared here.

Twitch.tv describes itself as ‘ where millions of people come together live every day to chat, interact, and make their own entertainment together’ (Twitch.tv, 2021). Twitch's history dates back to Justin.tv, which was founded on 19 March 2007 in San Francisco by Justin Kan, Emmett Shear, Michael Seibel and Kyle Vogt. Shear describes their intent as: “We were going to enable this new form of reality TV based on streaming people's lives, and that was going to be the business. We were going to be reality-TV moguls”. (Taylor, 2018) The aim of Justin.tv was to enable original content streaming in sports, music and daily lives in the beginning, however; with time video games and esports started to create a space for themselves in the platform as well. (Arik, 2020, p. 54) However, Justin.tv also faced restrictions from government authorities from time to time, for example access from Turkey was restricted as Turkish Super League matches were illegally aired on the platform. (Ibid p. 55) Moreover, criticisms towards violent or sexual streams on the platform were also subjected to criticism, i.e. in 2008 an 19 year old committed suicide to a room of live viewers on his Justin.tv channel. (Stelter, 2008)

In 2011 gaming section was separated by Justin.tv under the name Twitch. Merely a month after Twitch's beta process began, in July 2011 it was declared that Twitch had 8 million viewers worldwide. (Arik, 2020) In 2014 parent company of both Justin.tv and Twitch, Justin.tv, Inc. was renamed Twitch Interactive, which might be interpreted as a sign of popularity game streaming and Twitch received. Also in 2014, Amazon and YouTube engaged in a race to purchase Twitch with each other offering millions of dollars. (Burroughs & Rama, 2015) In the end, Twitch was bought by Amazon for approximately \$970 million. (Welch, 2014)

After its purchase by Amazon, Twitch became more and more a part of gaming community and integrated into its users' lives. In 2015, 421,6 minutes were

monthly watched per viewer, to compare, for YouTube the same statistic is 291 minutes. (Gros et al., 2017)

Even though it is gaming focused it should also be noted that Twitch is mainly focused on game streaming, it is not limited to that. Numerous channels contain in real life(IRL) themes in which streamers share their daily lives, which might be seen as a twist back to Twitch's roots to Justin.tv. (Taylor, 2018) As of 22.01.2021, 'Just Chatting' is the most popular category on Twitch with approximately 317.000 viewers. (Twitchtracker, 2021) This category allows various types of streams, such as cooking, playing music or watching videos with the audience.

Twitch has a built-in chat interface that allows interaction between the viewers and streamer, the chat section is usually moderated by people (moderators) selected by streamer. Moderators are able to delete messages on chat box and ban viewers from the channel if they deem it necessary. However, chat panels of channels with numerous viewers might become too fast for human moderators to check sometimes, to help solving this issue there are channel bots who serve as a helper to moderators by conducting several duties, such as filtering out messages including selected words (i.e. offensive words) to be evaluated by moderators.

An important part of Twitch is donations. Users are allowed to subscribe/donate to their favourite channels to provide financial aid for streamer. Streamers sometimes start donation bars to ask for financial support of their viewers with regards to their daily lives or items they need for streaming, such as a new camera or a new microphone. Subscriptions are categorized into three on Twitch's website:

- 1- Subscriptions (aka subs): these allow viewers to provide at least \$4.99, either for a month or on a recurring basis. Subscribers gain access to emotes and other privileges defined by the streamer

- 2- Gifted Subscriptions: Subscribers are also allow to gift subscriptions to other viewers, gifted subscriptions fall under this category
- 3- Prime Gaming: As with Twitch's integration with Amazon, Amazon Prime is also included with Prime Gaming which allows its users certain advantages, such as non-incurring subscriptions (Twitch, 2021)

Streamers are also allowed to define different tiers of subscriptions that would allow different types of privileges, such as different emotes. (Ibid) Bits are also a method to support streamers on Twitch, they are defined as ‘virtual goods’ that viewers can use to cheer for the streamer, streamers receive \$0.01 for each Bit used. (Ibid)

As a hub for esports and streaming it could be said that Twitch has earned great popularity and will continue to do so considering the popularity of esports events. For example: the 2019 League of Legends World Championship, held in Berlin, Madrid and Paris between the dates October 2 – November 10 2019, had a prize money of 2.5 million USD for the winner. More than 50.000 tickets were sold for the event. (Webb, 2019) The tournament had the concurrent viewer count of 2.9 millions. Total number of viewers for 2018 League of Legends World Championship was over 98 millions, just below the viewer count of Super Bowl 2017 LI, which had the viewer count of 103 millions. (Pei, 2019) Considering these figures, rise of streaming and esports is likely to continue with the following years, changing communication and broadcasting standards, as Paul Graham, one of the founders of Justin.tv states “If this doesn't scare the sh\*t out of TV networks, it's only because they don't understand it yet”. (Rice, 2015)

## CHAPTER 2: METHODOLOGY

### 2.1 Research Design

“One of the earliest lessons I learned in doing internet research is to go where the community leads.” says T.L. Taylor in her book *Watch Me Play: Twitch and the Rise of Game Live Streaming*.(2018, p. 11) This holds especially true when doing research on gaming and gamers as the community is constantly shifting from one platform to another and developments in technology directly affect gaming experience and expectations. As mentioned in previous sections, gaming platforms, trends and popular game genres are constantly in a state of change, such as Battle Royale games emerging as a new type of competitive gaming in the recent years and mobile games becoming more popular. However, this statement should not be interpreted as video game industry lacks traditional games and genres, as certain game series such as *Counter Strike*, *StarCraft*, *Age of Empires* and online games like *World of Warcraft* retain their popularity years after their first release along with many others.

Following in Taylor’s footsteps, in-depth interviews were conducted with 9 streamers and a Twitch channel moderator, all of whom are also *League of Legends* players. Considering restricted nature of research on female players of *League of Legends*’ Turkish server, Charmaz’s approach to grounded interview was deployed to have an impressionistic analysis of the data obtained after these interviews. (Charmaz, 2006) In this regard methodology was greatly affected by the tools used by Se Jin Kim in his thesis albeit with additions of Twitch streaming and Turkish competitive gaming culture, trying to shed a light on relation between gender and Turkish competitive gaming. (Kim, 2017)



## 2.2 Finding Suitable Interviewees and Interviewee Profile

Before approaching possible interviewees, Twitch streamers for *League of Legends* who are playing on Turkish server has been monitored for two months to be able to understand the characteristics of Twitch. Even though the researcher had prior experience and knowledge regarding *League of Legends* and esports in general, Twitch was a new area to discover. In this regard streams in various areas from gameplay to just chatting was monitored for two months to understand Twitch's mechanics and interactions between streamers and viewers. Charmaz states that uninvestigated subjects should be studied with 10 -15 participants, accordingly; 10 participant was interviewed. (Charmaz, 2006)

While choosing interviewees first priority was to be as diverse as possible, this included choosing candidates from different age groups, backgrounds and gaming levels. Moreover, popularity was also a factor; streamers of both popular and more modest channels were approached in order to share different experiences. In this regard, while some of the interviewees are among the most popular Turkish female *League of Legends* streamers, some others are more obscure on Twitch and has fewer viewers. Even though age groups were intended be kept wide, this objective was only partly achieved. Oldest of the participants were 28 years old while youngest was 18. Age average of participants was 22.5. Most of the participants were university studies with few exceptions of people who work from home or laid off from work due to COVID-19 pandemic. Participants were expected to have at least some amount of knowledge on *League of Legends* and gaming in general, therefore beginners or streamers who play *League of Legends* rarely on their streams were skipped and owners of channels that focuses mainly on *League of Legends* gameplay was approached.

Potential interviewees were first approached through chat box in the channel with a message that introduces the researcher, informs about the content of the research and asks the streamer whether if they would like to participate. Usually

streamers, especially ones with numerous viewers, are unable to read all messages while playing game so these messages were posted during champion selection or while game was loading. Reactions to this by streamers and their community was rather mixed and interesting. While some of the streamers were very keen to participate, mentioning this is a very interesting topic worthy of a research, some were puzzled regarding the aim of the study. “It is like studying whether gravity exists or not, of course sexism exists in *League of Legends*’ Turkish server, why are you even studying that?” one asked. Moreover, the community’s reaction to the message was also interesting, while some were confused about the aim of the research some conceived it as an attempt to flirt with the streamer. However, it should be noted that most reactions by streamers were positive, stating sexism in multiplayer gaming as a huge problem unaddressed and they were subjected to it at some point.

It was originally intended to contact interviewees through e-mail and have an interview through Skype or Zoom, due to lockdown and the pandemic online interviews seemed to be the only logical way. However, it was soon found out that streamers, especially younger ones, found those methods a bit out of fashion and preferred communication through Discord. Discord is a website and app that allows people to create rooms or groups and communicate among themselves, including voice chat. Voice chat feature makes it especially appealing for gamers as they often use Discord when playing multiplayer games together to use it. Moreover, it is also preferred by some Twitch streamers to create channels for their viewers to join which allows further interaction between them and create a stronger sense of community among the viewers. Furthermore, Discord also serves as a valuable announcement tool for streamers to inform their viewers when they are going to stream or in cases they are not going to stream for some time due to a sickness.

While nine of the interviewees are streamers, one of them is a stream moderator. This allowed the research to have a deeper insight on Twitch community as moderators are at the frontline when dealing with viewer toxicity and mostly

filter out messages before streamer even notices. Moreover, interviewees were chosen to provide a wide range of backgrounds, such as their families, cities they live in, whether they live alone, with a partner or with their families. Participants were asked to name their favourite *League of Legends* champion, which would be their nickname in the study for sharing their statements, an idea inspired by Se Jin Kim's thesis. (Kim, 2017) As some of the participants were rather high-level players and known streamers, they needed to be kept anonymous, therefore; using nicknames was a necessity. Interviews were conducted on Discord through voice chat in September 2020.

### **2.3 Data Collection**

Necessary data for the research was obtained through in-depth interviews. Language used in interviews was Turkish and interviewees' statements were translated into English by the researcher. Mentioned interviews were conducted online and approximately lasted between 1.5 – 2 hours each. Amanda Cote's Julia G. Raz's work was very influential when preparing interview questions. (Cote & Raz, 2015) Built upon suggestions by them, interview was structured as below:

1- Introduction: Even though the researched briefly introduced himself and his work to streamers in their channel before, a second, more detailed introduction was made at the beginning of each interview. This introduction also included aims of the research as well.

2- Demographic Questions: This phase included background information of the participants. They were asked to briefly introduce themselves, their names, occupation, marital status etc. Participant characteristics were sought after in this section as it was aimed to provide a variety of backgrounds.

3- Warm-up Questions: Participants were asked questions about their gaming experiences before, such as how they took up playing video games, how they gained

interest in competitive games, what roles they like to play in *League of Legends* and why. These questions helped the researcher to gain an insight on gaming history and experiences of the participants while also aimed to put the participants at ease.

4- Substantive Questions: These were aimed gain deeper data with regards to research topics of the work, trying to provoke thoughts for participants by asking open-ended questions. As suggested by Cote and Raz, follow-up questions were used to elaboration on related issues. (Ibid, p. 104)

5-Conclusion: Interviewees were asked if there is anything else they would like to share and if they have a friend who is also a *League of Legends* streamer and would be interested in participating in the research.

This structure is a bit modified version of what is suggested by Cote and Raz (Ibid, p. 104) as they put demographic questions in the final part of the interview. In this research, however, they are just before warm-up questions, serving nearly as a part of them by allowing interviewees to talk a bit about themselves and getting used to being interviewed.

Snowball approach, in which researcher finds one participant and then asks them to direct the researcher to other people that have similar characteristics was tried to be applied here, as suggested by Cote and Raz. (Ibid, p. 102) However; one drawback occurred on this method: as there are not many female streamers of *League of Legends*' Turkish server on Twitch, the research group was not very populous. Therefore, participants usually suggested the researcher to approach a streamer that has already been approached, perhaps even interviewed. However, snowball approach was not without any success, as one of the participants suggested interviewing her channel moderator would prove rather fruitful for the research to gain insight from another perspective.

## 2.4 Grounded Theory and Charmaz's Methodology

Grounded theory was considered the best approach to evaluate data obtained in this research due to the fact that it contains and combines two different themes: Twitch streaming and *League of Legends* Turkish server with regards to sexism. On the other hand, while there have been previous works on them internationally, studies on Turkish gaming society are not very numerous, moreover, as mentioned in earlier sections gaming technology and trends are prone to evolve and change, considering these facts it could be said that flexible methodologies such as Grounded theory are a nice fit. Moreover, the research focuses on a unique gaming community, Turkish speaking players on a server dedicated to them, rather than an international one, therefore; a constructivist and impressionistic approach was also deemed necessary. Charmaz describes grounded theory as:

Stated simply, grounded theory methods consist of systematic, yet flexible guidelines for collecting and analyzing qualitative data to construct theories 'grounded' in the data themselves. The guidelines offer a set of general principles and heuristic devices rather than formulaic rules. (Charmaz, 2006, p. 2)

In this regard, Grounded theory served as a solid basis for the research to establish its procedures to obtain and analysis data. In her book *Constructing Grounded Theory* Charmaz provides hints on how to gather rich data, which are described as full and detailed. (Ibid, p.14) Rich data reflects upon participants feeling and beliefs, therefore provides a 'thick' descriptions which would allow the researcher to build upon. (Colson & Geertz, 1975) In this regard, Charmaz suggests several methods to obtain rich data, such as entering participants and situations as much as its possible which would allow the researcher to obtain data that would be otherwise unknown to them. (Charmaz, 2006, p. 14)

In the research this was adopted through observing streamers' Twitch and Discord channels to see patterns and interactions that arise. Moreover, as participants streamed their games through their Twitch channels it was also possible to spectate their experiences in *League of Legends* Turkish server. Furthermore, as participants' popularity on Twitch and game skill ranks in *League of Legends* varied vastly, it was possible to witness different types of experiences. For example, while Twitch channels with less viewers had a slower chat flow, they also tended to have a stronger communal sense such as the streamer knowing most of the viewers by their names and addressing them as such. Most of the streamers mentioned they sometimes play *League of Legends* on their own without streaming to improve themselves or to enjoy less pressure, with participants permission some of these private games were also spectated to see if their interactions with other players are any different from the games they are streaming.

Mitchell provides a guide on how to evaluate settings in ethnographic research and what to focus on, such as paying attention to the symbols of interactions in the setting and goals of the actors, which was beneficial especially when monitoring Twitch channels. (Charmaz & Mitchell, 1996) Moreover, Charmaz shares suggestions towards how to conduct a successful interview, such as 'Going beneath the surface of the described experience(s)' and 'Restating the participant's point to check for accuracy' these principles were adapted while running interviews. (Charmaz, 2006, p. 26) Moreover, question preparation was also prepared with regards to Charmaz's suggestions, open-ended, non-judgemental questions were used in order to extract most natural and neutral data from the participants. (Ibid, p.31)

Data obtained through interviews were categorized and coded to look for patterns or contradictions between participants' statements in order to further evaluate them. Cote and Raz provide draft coding scheme for research on video games which was very influential in coding data obtained in this research. (Cote & Raz, 2015, p. 111) Charmaz describes coding as 'categorizing segments of data

with a short name that simultaneously summarizes what they might mean.’’(Charmaz, 2006, p. 43) She proceeds to show an example coding procedure that would reflect the feelings, concerns and ideas of participants and advises that Grounded theory coding should consist two phases, first: naming each world, segment and phrase and second: selecting frequent codes to organize large amounts of data. (Ibid, p. 45 – 46)

Moreover, Boellstoff argues that:

The most fundamental approach to data analysis is to engage in a rigorous intellectual process of working deeply and intimately with ideas. Analysis is not primarily about tuning coding schemes or tweaking data analysis software. It is about finding, creating and bringing thoughtful, provocative ideas to acts of writing (Boellstorff et al., 2012, p. 159)

As a combination of mentioned approaches, data obtained was coded into similar patterns that could be evaluated together. Moreover, an intuitive and impressionistic approach was necessary considering the nature of the research. Participants often made remarks of interactions female players and streamers face, which were previously unknown to the researcher who is a male gamer and has no experience in streaming. Considering all of the above, Charmaz’s methodological approach to Grounded theory and Cote’s and Raz’s suggestions on how to apply in-depth interviews to game studies were very significant in gathering and evaluating data in this research.

## **CHAPTER 3: DATA AND ANALYSIS**

### **3.1 Turkish Women’s Introduction to Esports**

How does a person decide to start playing video games and how do they choose which video game genres are more suitable for them? Are they influenced

by their peers, friends, social media or advertisements the most? This section is dedicated to share information on how Turkish women take up playing video games. For this purpose, participants were asked two different questions, first: how they started playing video games and second: how they became interested in esports. This information was deemed important in order to see how Turkish women were introduced to gaming.

9 out of 10 participants mentioned that they were introduced to video games by a male when they were kids, usually by their older brother. However, fathers, boyfriends and husbands were also influential on some participants too. This will be evaluated in detail in the following section ‘Male Factor’. Moreover, which genres of video games they used to play and how they came to be interested in eSports was also inquired. Five participants mention they were interested in competitive gaming since early adolescence, approximately between ages 11-14. It is interesting that these participants were younger ones currently aging around 18-21, which seems to further reinforce the belief that video games and esports are becoming more common and accessible in Turkey with technological and infrastructural developments. Three of these participants stated that they used to play MMORPG’s or FPS’s with their older brother or father. One of the participants says that she was unable to succeed at Turkish University Entrance Exam at her first year due to excessively playing *Counter-Strike: Global Offensive*. She mentions to play the game over 500 hours in her exam year. (Ahri, personal interview, September 24, 2020) Another interviewee, Neeko used to be a professional *Call of Duty* player who contested at tournament before she started playing *League of Legends*. (Neeko, personal interview, September 29, 2020)

Four participants, all of whom are over 23, mention that they used to play different types of video games, mainly *The Sims* or adventure games, however they took an interest in multiplayer gaming with *League of Legends* in their university years, which might be seen as an implication of *League of Legends*’ effect of multiplayer gaming becoming more common in Turkey. Only one of the



participants mentioned started playing video games after her university years, she started playing with her husband. Above-mentioned information could be interpreted as a hint of younger Turkish women start to play competitive video games at earlier ages compared to their older counterparts, which might be an implication of multiplayer gaming becoming more inclusive and common among players.

### **3.1.1 Male Factor**

As mentioned in the last section, 9 out of 10 participants stated that they were introduced to video games by an older male, mostly their older brothers. Only one of the participants mentioned she started playing video games with her friends, therefore; peers and friends seem to have a weaker effect than older brothers, cousins and fathers. This data could be seen as an important hint on how women start playing video games in Turkish society, a topic which deserves a study on its own and will hopefully be further discussed in future research.

One of the participants say that the reason behind this is gender roles appointed to siblings of different sexes. She states that this is not limited to gaming itself, but it was sometimes considered more “appropriate” to provide sons with technological tools more than daughters:

One of the main reasons behind is parents I believe, because it is as if like only boys should be allowed to play games that are violent. It feels like while boys were groomed to be strong in the future. I mean my parents bought my brother a PC and similar technological devices while they were buying me Barbies. (...) No one would show me games like *Counter-Strike*. If someone did, maybe I would have loved it and started to play at a younger age, which would make me better at the game. However; while we might have played other games competitive games like *Counter-Strike* and *League of Legends* seemed distant, because it felt like they were not suitable for girls. Like we

could not play those games. It was as if a girl trying to do military service, like it was a place reserved for men. Which is why girls learn these kinds of games from older male figures, like their father, older brother, cousin etc. I do not have any friends who learnt games like *Counter Strike* or *League of Legends* from their older sisters. (...) No one else than your older brother introduces you to these games. (Neeko, personal interview, September 29, 2020)

Another participant also mentions that she was not allowed to play violent video games as it would not be good for girls:

I started playing video games with *Need for Speed* and *Counter Strike 1.6*. My older brother played them and I wanted to do so too. Well, he did not want me to play *Counter Strike* but did not have any objections for *Need for Speed*. He said there was too much shooting in the game, too much blood and violence. It would not be right for me. However, I would play in secret. (Soraka, personal interview, September 16, 2020)

In her book *Play between worlds: Exploring online game culture* T.L. Taylor argues that gender stereotypes position females as ‘‘naturally’’ inferior at using technology. (Taylor, 2006) In this regard it could be said that Neeko’s experiences and thoughts on the issue are in correlation with Taylor’s, therefore; this gender stereotype is not local but international. Previous research shows us that female players accrue gaming skills at the same rate as their male counterparts, however; females that play with a male partner are less confident in their skill and usually try to support their partner’s progress in the game. (Ratan et al., 2015) Similarly, Neeko, who played with her boyfriend says that her boyfriend would often want him to play support even though she wanted to main ADC:

Whenever I made a mistake my boyfriend would tell me that I was not good enough to play ADC and should play support instead. Especially when his

friends came over to play *League of Legends* it felt like he was ashamed that I wanted to play ADC. Therefore, I had to main support. (Neeko, personal interview, September 29, 2020)

To sum it up, it could be said that “historically core male demographics” as described by Ratan et al. have been changing in the last decade, however; older male figures in their lives were rather influential in Turkish female’s introduction to competitive gaming. (Ratan et al., 2015)

### **3.1.2 From “Girly games” to Multiplayer Gaming**

Half of the participants mention that they started playing video games with “girly games” as they describe. *The Sims* and Dress Up games, such as *Stardoll* are usually the first video games they played. Their transition to multiplayer gaming came years after, usually at their university years. This section is a continuation of the previous one. As stated before, a comparative study on how male and female gamers are introduced to gaming culture in Turkey is a subject that deserves a study on its own, however; some data obtained in this research will be shared to provide a background for any future research.

When asked if there is a difference between gaming skills of female and male players of *League of Legends*, some participants stated that there are more high-level male players than female ones and one of the reasons behind is that they started playing competitive games at a later age:

I did not used to play competitive games really. As most girls I started by playing games like *Stardoll* and *Sanalika*. Most my friends played those games so I started playing them too. My older brother used to play *Counter-Strike* but I never played that one. (...) When I started *League of Legends* many of my friends told me that I played too good for a girl. As men are usually better at football, the same goes for *League of Legends* too I guess.

(...) I think the reason behind this is the mechanical skill. For example, *League of Legends* was the first competitive game I played but most men are raised with *Counter-Strike* therefore have a knack for competitive gaming. I was playing dress up in *Stardoll* when they were playing *Counter-Strike*. (Kai'Sa, personal interview, September 18, 2020)

However, there are also participants who say that they have been playing multiplayer games since their earlier years as a gamer, however, it is worth noticing that these participants are usually younger ones, who happened grow up with internet at their home. Older participants, however, mention that internet cafés were home for multiplayer and competitive gaming during their earlier years as gamers and they were usually male dominated at that time, therefore; their access to multiplayer games were rather restricted. This subject will be thoroughly evaluated in the following section.

### **3.2 Internet Cafés as a Home to Competitive Gaming**

Internet Cafés were first introduced in late 1990's in Western countries to provide full internet access to their customers. As internet access from home was uncommon at the time period internet cafés provided grounds for people to surf on the internet and try this newly developing communication technology. (Binark & Bayraktutan-Sütcü, 2007) Moreover, internet cafés became very popular in Turkey in 2000's too, Kayabal mentions that "Even people that keep a distance to technology seem to be lured to the magic of communicating through computers" (as cited in Taşpınar & Gümüş, 2005) signalling to the rising popularity of online chatting. During this time internet cafés were mostly preferred due to lack of internet access from home, as a study as late as 2008 by Balcılar shows that %55 of internet café customers mentioned they lacked a computer/internet connection at home. (Balcılar, 2008) Percentage of people lacking a computer or internet connection at home could be estimated to be much higher in the early 2000's.

Following their introduction, internet cafés started to focus more on the gaming aspect with the years to come, as gaming was the main demand by the customers. A survey by Taşpınar & Gümüş shows that %68.3 of internet café owners and %54.9 of customers preferred ‘gaming cafés’ as their preferred type of internet cafés. (Taşpınar & Gümüş, 2005, p. 89) Binark and Bayraktutan-Sütcü note favourite games of the time as:

10 -15 age group: *FIFA*, *Counter-Strike* and *Need for Speed*

16 – 19 age group: *Warcraft*, *O-game* and *Counter-Strike*

20 -24 age group: *Need for Speed* and *FIFA 2006*

Over 24: *Knight Online*, *Counter-Strike* and *O-game* (Binark & Bayraktutan-Sütcü, 2007, p. 249)

As Binark and Bayraktutan-Sütcü also notes, *Counter-Strike* seems to be a common favourite among all age groups. Moreover, *Counter-Strike teams* were formed to and gathered to play against one another, some internet cafés held *Counter-Strike* tournaments from time to time in which these teams competed. (Ibid) Özlem Kırık’s MA thesis titled ‘Internet cafes and their problems: Research on primary school students, teachers and internet cafe business managers’ provides valuable information on females’ perception and experiences regarding internet cafés. In accordance with the data she obtained through surveys with internet café owners and customers, Kırık informs that internet cafés are mostly used by males, however; she notes that in the western regions of Turkey females used internet cafés more often in comparison to eastern regions. (Kırık, 2007, pp. 163–164) Moreover, when it comes to reasons of using internet cafés. She also notes that internet cafés were more popular among female students from families with lower incomes, which might be interpreted as a hint that females avoided internet cafés if they had computers and internet connection at home. (Ibid, p. 73) Furthermore: while male students mostly stated playing video games among their major reasons to use internet cafés, it was doing homework for female students. (Ibid, pp. 124–125)

On the other hand, Kırık also shares that females tended to choose internet cafés that already had numerous female customers. (Ibid, p. 104) Interestingly and in direct correspondence with the research area of this thesis, in a workshop organized in 2002 some female participants stated that “If you live in Çankaya males and females can use internet cafés side by side, however; it is not the case in Demet.” Another participant mentions she views internet cafés as a male dominated space and prefers not to use them, moreover, one other participant shares her family allows her brother to use internet cafés however she was forbidden to use them by her family. (Ibid, p.11) To understand the message here it should be noted that Çankaya is usually considered a district with higher-income residents compared to Demetevler, which is sometimes called just Demet.

As mentioned in the last section older participants of this study stated that they were unable to access multiplayer gaming. This might be related to internet cafés status as hubs to multiplayer gaming and their male-dominated nature. Kırık’s study is in parallel with information received during interviews conducted for this research. As one participant mentions:

They (males) have the upper hand when playing video games, you have to admit that their mechanical skills are a bit better. Because there is a difference between beginning *League of Legends* around 13-14 and around 18-19, which was the age I began. You get used to it if you play it for a long time; you earn mechanical skills which can be improved by playing competitive games. It does not have to be *League of Legends*, for example, if you play *Counter-Strike: Global Offensive* you still get mechanical skills of playing games and adapt the mindset, however, it is hard to obtain these after a certain age. Of course, some girls start playing at younger ages but most of us began playing competitive games at a later age. (...) Most of the female players I know around my age began playing multiplayer games at 18-19.

(...)

Women do not really want to visit an internet café due to its environment. For example, I used to go to internet cafés and I was the only girl there. Think of a place that has 45-50 people and I am the one girl in there. Even if I try not to care it feels disturbing. Sometimes men look at your screen to see your username and add you as friend. A clerk at an internet café found my Instagram account and added me there, tried to have a chat. This kind of interaction feels really disturbing. (Lyanna, personal interview, September 22, 2020)

Another participant mentions that she visited internet cafés to play multiplayer games at high school:

I was both afraid and was not allowed by my family to visit an internet café as a 12-13 year old girl. (...) I started visiting internet cafés when I was at second class of high school. However, I still got that strange stares from other customers that felt like ‘‘why is this girl playing a game?’’ And I am not talking about a long time ago, it was 2016. Even at such a recent time people found a girl in an internet café strange. However; I should also say that everyone is getting used to girls playing video games, that means progress I guess. (Sett, personal interview, September 23, 2020)

### **3.3 Female Players of *League of Legends*’ Turkish Server**

This section is dedicated to share a brief information regarding interviewee profile and their experiences with *League of Legends*, such as how long they have been playing the game to demonstrate a clearer perspective on the data obtained. Most experienced *League of Legends* player among the interviewees started the game in 2012, therefore have been playing the game for 8 years when interviewed, on the other hand, newest player has been playing for 2 years. On average, interviewees have been playing the for 5 years.

All the interviewees mentioned that they do not limit themselves to a certain role in a game, on the contrary, they play variety of roles, however; they had a main role that feels like the best fit. These main roles they preferred varied from one interviewee to other, on the other hand, ADC, Support and Mid Lane were the most popular roles respectively. While solo top was a rarer choice among interviewees, none of them mentioned the role jungler as their main. While explaining the mechanics of *League of Legends* it was mentioned that bottom lane is the only lane to have multiple players as two players from each team, an ADC and a support are assigned there. On the other hand, mid lane and top lane are occupied by a single player from each team that compete on one against one basis.

In this regard, some interviewees mentioned that playing with a friend at bottom lane gives them a greater control over team and their dependency upon other teammates become lower, which is the main reason behind their choice. Moreover, when playing alongside with a friend at the same lane they also decrease the necessity of communication with their teammates, which lowers the chances of any toxic interaction.

Online toxicity could be defined as ‘perceived hostility in a player community’ (Martens et al., 2015) It often includes verbal aggression or attempts to harm the victim’s gaming experience, such as deliberately supporting the opposing team, leaving the game or refusing to play by staying AFK (away from keyboard). These aggressions often feature racist or misogynist elements in addition to hate speech. Chatzakou et al. mention that hate speech is more prevalent in online platforms as the feeling of anonymity gives the perpetrators a sense of invulnerability. (Chatzakou et al., 2017)

Furthermore, interviewee base for the research contained players from all skill levels as well. *League of Legends* use ranks that are obtained through ranked matches. There are aimed to determine skill brackets of players. Ranks from lowest to highest are listed as below:



- Iron
- Bronze
- Silver
- Gold
- Platinum
- Diamond
- Master
- Grandmaster
- Challenger

Apart from top three ranks, which have one tier each; all the other ranks also have four divisions. These start from one, lowest division and end at four, the highest division. Lowest rank among the interviewees was Silver while the highest was Challenger. Rest of the interviewees were mostly ranked either as Platinum or Diamond.

### **3.4 Sexism Female Players Face**

To provide a better ground for analysing sexism faced by female players, information received from them was divided into six sections. These sections aim to share different sides of sexism experienced and described by the interviewees. Data obtained was coded by looking for patterns between participants' statements and with accordance with draft coding scheme of Cote and Raz. (Cote & Raz, 2015)

When asked whether there is sexism in *League of Legends*' Turkish server, all the interviewees agreed that they believed the community was toxic against female players. As shared in previous section, when informed regarding the topic of this research some female Twitch streamers said "sexism was as real as gravity" and there was no use studying this problem. Similarly, all interviewees agree that

there is a rooted sexism in Turkish server of *League of Legends* despite Riot Games' efforts to prevent it, which leads female players to take precautions:

It is sad, really sad. What makes me sadder is the fact that we got used to it, wish we did not become used to such a situation. I wish things were different but what can be done? I mean Riot Games cannot just check every game to see if there is sexism or not. (Sett, personal interview, September 16, 2020)

In the following sections main types of toxicity female players face and the methods they developed to fight against it will be discussed to shed further light on the issue.

### **3.4.1 Types of Sexism**

#### **3.4.1.1 In-game Harassment**

All the interviewees mentioned that toxicity is a common theme among *League of Legends* players, therefore females are not the only ones subjected to it. However; this does not mean that female players do not face sexism due to their gender. Showing poor game skills and failing in your objectives (such as losing your lane) can be describes as few of the main reasons that incite toxic communication among players. On the other hand, most interviewees shared their views that once a female player mentions her gender in chat or her teammates deduce it somehow, i.e. determining that her nickname is "girly, toxic communication is likelier to take place in case of a failure by their side. An interviewee mentioned that she posts a link to her Twitch stream for both his teammates and the opponent team to watch if they want to and suffers from negative comments as soon as they see that she is a woman:

Especially when the game is one of my teammates would visit my Twitch channel and write "Why are you even playing, go home and cook

something” Sometimes they said the role I picked was not suitable for a woman, for example if I picked mid they would come say I should have picked support instead of mid. (Soraka, personal interview, September 16, 2020)

Another interviewee also mentions that whenever she used a nickname that clearly indicated she was a woman she had two main responses from other players: some tried to flirt with her while the others insulted her due to her gender after her first mistake:

I used to play with nicknames that clearly showed that I was a girl, now I don't use such nicknames anymore. As soon as my teammates saw my nickname some would say things like “hey baby, want to join me for the next game?” while others said I should just quit playing after my first mistake. They would say I was unable to play the game properly. If I used a nickname that was gender-neutral and played a really good game it was likely for a teammate to compliment my game but if they noticed I was a girl this was less likely to happen. (Draven, personal interview, September 17, 2020)

Assuming lower gaming skills due to gender is observed in other participants' experiences as well, as one of the mentions that she used “girly” nicknames when she started playing *League of Legends* and had a teammate who assumed she would not be able to reach past Silver in ranked games as a girl. This moved her to practice her gaming skills to reach a higher level. (Lyanna, personal interview, September 22, 2020)

Using gender-neutral nicknames seem to be among the major precautions female players use to prevent any sexism, which will be further looked into in the section titled Gender-Neutral Nicknames. An interviewee shares that she uses

nicknames with phrases directly hint her gender, such as Lady, which directly leads to harassment from other players:

In my first year of playing *League of Legends* I used the phrase ‘Lady’ in my nickname, my teammates would directly tell me: well you are a girl that must be why you are playing bad. I do not think that my gender is relevant, if I was a man I would still play poorly in my first year I believe. But reactions were always as if I was playing bad because of my gender, like girls cannot play strategy games, think fast, be practical and use game skills swiftly. (...) You encounter this so very often that you get used to it and start to avoid using chat. You hear that girls cannot play well so frequently that you start to ignore it when you hear it. (...) These harassments are really annoying, but I do not think there is anything we can do to change this but to wait for a really well playing female community. These girls will come and beat everyone else and everyone will acknowledge that girls can play well too.

*League of Legends* does not include an in-game voice chat feature, however; another game by Riot Games, *Valorant* includes it. An interviewee mentioned that she plays *League of Legends* and *Valorant* both and when she uses voice-chat, she receives insults from teammates who became aware of her gender:

I also play *Valorant*, which has voice chat. I like to use that feature. I inform my teammates on whereabouts of other team, and even 10 year old kids start to yell slang at me. I feel shocked, I mean, I would be ashamed to use the word ‘idiot’ when I was 10. (...) Some just start to type 31(a Turkish slang for masturbation) in chat as soon as they hear my voice. (Kai’Sa, personal interview, September 18, 2020)

Her experiences seem to be parallel with a research that was conducted in 2013 to see how players reacted to male and female voice in online games and found

out that female voice received three times as many negative comments. (Kuznekoff & Rose, 2013)

Another participant shares that she once attended to a tournament on local level that was organized on International Women's Day. All of her teammates were females and some were as young as 14. She says that during champion picking phase opponent team acrostically wrote "penis" in reverse with their champion bans. She says that this could not be accidental as the opponent team banned less popular champions just to write the word. She was particularly sad for their 14-year-old teammate when this happened as she believed such an incident might prevent her from playing online games in future. Moreover, she also believes the reason behind such harassments is that female presence is still not acknowledged:

When you offer something to gaming community people start to get annoyed with you, because you are not expected to do anything significant. As a female playing video games you should not express yourself or make yourself known, most important of all: you should not show that you are making an effort to get better at the game. (...) For example, I only play duo with female players but never with a male because when I play with a male I know everyone starts saying that he is boosting my rank. I never play with my boyfriend. (Sett, personal interview, September 23, 2020)

An interviewee who has a higher ranking states that community of *League of Legends*' Turkish server is divided into two: high level players and low level players. High level players are fewer therefore usually know each other, however, this does not prevent sexism from happening. She informs:

When I start a game at least one of the nine other players usually know me and inform their team of my gender immediately, especially if they are on the other team. They think like: we have a girl on the other team, lets crush her mentally. Then they start to write disgusting stuff on all-chat (inter-

teams chat) (...) Its usually like “go kill yourself”, “why are you even playing video games”, or “f\*ck off and start cooking” (...) Some guy I played against took a screen shot of post-game screen after his team defeated mine and posted it on my Discord channel, writing “See that’s how you f\*ck a girl” (Sett, personal interview, September 16, 2020)

### **3.4.1.2 Threats and Abuses**

Experiences shared by the participants were not limited to cyberbullying and online toxicity. As mentioned before, interviewees’ popularity on Twitch and rank in *League of Legends* varies greatly. In this regard, interviewees with high playing levels and popularity on Twitch mentioned that they are often recognized by other players of *League of Legends*. This sometimes leads to personalized threats and abuses apart from a more generalist cyberbullying and sexism. Interviewees were asked if they share personal information during their streams, such as their home address, their school / workplace and specific information regarding their families, or if they refrain from sharing such information for their security. Data obtained regarding this will be evaluated under the section “Female Streamers of *League of Legends* on Twitch”.

However, no matter how much they try to protect their privacy, some participants state that they were threatened with violence from other players, while some had real-life experiences of harassment from other players and their viewers. This section will be dedicated to threats, while real life harassments will be focused in the following section titled “Real-life Experiences” An experience shared by an interviewee that took place in Turkish server is as follows:

‘Once I was playing a support champion, Nami. Had an ADC with me, Vayne. I failed at some point of the game, like every person can. I mean no one plays *League of Legends* perfect right? Then he (ADC) started swearing at me, I feel a bit too embarrassed to share the stuff he said. Well apparently,

he stalked me afterwards. Can you believe it, just because I did one thing wrong he stayed afk(away from keyboard) whole game and cursed at me all game long. Then stalks me and finds out my real name. He then reached out to me and said ‘Hey, I found that your real name is X. I will find your home too and do bad things to you’ I don’t want to get into specifics of his threats. And he does this all because I maybe missed a skill can you believe it? I is really a bizarre thing’’. (Ahri, personal interview, September 24, 2020)

However, in other interviews it was also noticed that these experiences are not limited to Turkish server. Many Turkish *League of Legends* players have accounts on other servers, mainly EU West, as they believe average game skill of players there are higher. In this regard it is not a rare occasion when a Turkish player faces their compatriot on these servers. An interviewee states that a Turkish player from the opponent team recognized she was a Turkish female in their match and threatened her with violence:

‘‘Let me tell you what happened just yesterday. I was playing on EU West. Had a Turkish player on the opponent team. He recognized that I was Turkish from my nickname. Said hi, we had a bit of chat. Then I killed him in lane, really crushed him afterwards. He probably recognized I was a girl too because I had a girly nickname. Then he wrote to me ‘‘If I ever find you in real life, I’ll rape and kill you’’. I mean you know how violence against women and femicide is normalised in Turkey. I was not even writing something to annoy him, like making fun of him. I was just playing my game, I just wanted to win. I believe that he thinks like ‘Well even people who sexually assault or murder women don’t go to prison, what can happen to me by just writing it here?’’ He believes that he won’t even be banned from the game, so he dares writing stuff like this. As women are considered powerless in Turkey, he believes even real-life crimes go unpunished, nothing will happen to me if I write these online. And you know what,

nothing really happens to him.” (Kai’Sa, personal interview, September 18, 2020)

Another interviewee also shares that:

“When I was playing on Turkish server another player did something that wanted me to beat the hell out of him, it was the most disrespectful thing I ever witnessed. He started to write down names of the women murdered in Turkey, starting from Emine Bulut and finished by telling me that ‘Hope you will die like them, hope every girl on *League of Legends* dies like them.’ I couldn’t even write a reply, just sat down and cried. I mean how could he write something like that? That women were killed just because their gender and it was so easy for him to talk about them. I never experienced anything like this in a place other than Turkish server.” (Neeko, personal interview, September 29, 2020)

Experiences like these might be interpreted as signs of the level of verbal abuse Turkish female players face from their compatriots. Sometimes mentioned verbal abuse exceeds cyberbullying and toxicity and aligns with threats or implications of violence and criminal activities. Moreover; female player are targeted for their gender and not with their playing skill & style show that these kind of threats differ from general toxicity that might be expected to be observed in an online gaming environment.

### **3.4.1.3 Effects of Social Media**

Harassments sometimes extend to social media platforms, especially for streamers who share their social media profiles (mainly Twitter and Instagram) in their Twitch channel. Interviewees mentioned two types of harassments that are conveyed through social media platforms, first one is exposing and spreading personal information or photos of a streamer through social media platforms. One



interviewee shares that there are Twitter accounts that are dedicated to “expose” female Twitch streamers. Another interviewee mentions that naked photos random women are shared as photos of streamers “For example they sometimes just google “tumblr girl” and share it as a naked photo of a certain streamer, ruining her life. And it is not even her in the photo” (Sett, personal interview, September 16, 2020)

Corki informs that she uses a pause screen if she needs to stand up during her stream as photos / videos of streamers are taken and shared against their will, especially if their clothes are considered revealing by their viewers.

There is a female streamer, streaming with a sleeveless t-shirt at her home. Her cargo arrives during the stream, so she gets up to receive it. They took a clip of it and uploaded, the clip has around 30 – 40 thousand views. I don’t know if she noticed the video or not, but it’s really weird. I don’t want anything like this to happen to me, so I use a pause screen if I need to get up. (Corki, personal interview, September 25, 2020)

Furthermore, sometimes personal information such as home address or mobile phone number of a streamer might be spread in social media. One interviewee mentions her phone number and address was shared while another had a friend who had people coming to their home after her address has been exposed, which will be shared in the section Real-Life Experiences.

Moreover, sometimes streamers’ personal social media accounts might be harassed as well. Syndra mentions she was a part of a professional all-girls *League of Legends* team, which made her target of verbal attacks through her social media accounts, which she shared in her Twitch channels. Main motivation between these attacks were the belief that “girls did not have a place in professional arena”:

We were attacked on Twitter when we formed the team. People would make fun of our win rates, claim that we were boosted or simply say that “women

are not worth sh\*t.” We had a coach, whom I admired much. They would say that he was coaching us in return of, you know, different kind of favours. We always had to fight against prejudices. When we lacked a player we would ask other girls and they hesitated to join as they did not want to face these attacks. There were videos and tweets that made fun of us, when one of fed its videos would be shared on Twitter to mock us. (...) It felt like people I didn’t know hated me. It is hard to understand why. (...) Afterwards I learnt that they had a Discord channel they used to organize, so I visited there and simply asked “Why don’t you like me?” (Syndra, personal interview, September 16, 2020)

Syndra also mentions that there are YouTube channels that share highlights of Twitch streamers’ gameplays. She shares that these channels usually share “funny” gameplay clips of female streamers failing at the game. Moreover, she believes that these channels have a gender-standardised approach towards female players and tend to prepare videos two female players playing against each other with a “catfighting” theme. (Ibid)

#### **3.4.1.4 Organized Harassment**

“Game sniping” is another concept used to negatively affect streamers’ gameplay performance and experience. It could be explained as watching streamer’s channel and hitting the matchmaking button the same time they do, aiming to be placed in their match. If placed on the other team, this gives an unfair advance against the streamer as the opponent is now able to follow their movements and learn their whereabouts on the map by simply following their stream. Sniping a game is significantly easier for higher ranked players as player numbers are rather lower at their rank, therefore; matchmaking pool is narrower.

During the interviews it has been mentioned that there are Discord channels created to organize in-game harassments against female players and streamers,

especially among higher mentioned higher ranked playing group. Nicknames of players who are discovered to be female are shared so that other members of the community could mock them, especially if encountered in the game. Moreover, players are allowed to create clubs in *League of Legends*. It has also been shared that clubs have a chat feature dedicated to club members, in this regards, some players create clubs to share female players' nicknames in club chat so other members of the club could harass her in-game.

These people create clubs you see, and when they encounter someone who has a "girly" nickname they harass her as a club. They use the club chat for sharing her profile so other members can mock her too. It is like blacklisting. (...) Lets say one of the meets a girl in the game. They share her nickname and profile in their club chat or discord channel, so other members will harass her if they encounter her in a match and prevent her from winning. They really put the effort to organize for this cause and snipe games so they can encounter the girl they target in a match. (...) They do this by hitting the matchmaking button at the same time. I had this happen to me a lot during streams. When I hit the button they would too, so that they could be on our team or the other team. If they are on the other team, they would just watch the stream so they could see where our members are. Then they would come to our stream chat and mock us for losing, of course, not in a polite tone usually. In case they become my teammate after they snipe, they just troll the game so I cannot win. It is as if they are feeling victorious because they did not allow a girl to win. (Sett, personal interview, September 16, 2020)

#### **3.4.1.5 Real-life Experiences**

Sometimes harassments against female players exceed the boundaries of the game and virtual space and take a turn towards daily life. One interviewee mentions that her mobile phone number was shared in Discord channels one week prior to the interview. She received unknown calls numerous times, which caused her a lot

of distress. Stating that the calls led her to a great anxiety, she was preparing for legal action. It should also be noted that in the following weeks of the interview the same interviewee's home address was also shared on social media.

A friend told me that my mobile number was shared on a Discord channel. I do not know who did that or why. I just wanted a screenshot so I could sue the person who shared it. (...) I mean why would you share someone's number? I can just block whoever messages me, but I fail to see the reasoning behind. It is such a private information yet shared on a public platform against my will. (...) Sometimes unknown calls, I answer the phone and person on the other side says nothing. What is he trying to achieve here? Some of these people live abroad, so they know that even if I sue them it will not hurt them in any way. This person lives in X country, so he thinks that he can do anything online. This is literally harassment and I cannot do anything against it. (...) There are so many awful things happening nowadays compared to them sexism on internet is not taken seriously. However, this hurts my psychology. The fact that my mobile number was shared gave me anxiety. (Kai'Sa, personal interview, September 18, 2020)

Moreover, sometimes these personal information shared leads to real-life encounters between the harasser and the streamer/victim. Even though she did not experience it herself, Sett shares that a friend of hers has a popular channel on Twitch and had people coming to her apartment after her address was shared on social media. After several occasions, she had to inform her family on the issue and move out of that address. Harassers watch the stream and look out for details that might indicate the home address of streamer, such as the scenery or where the windows are located. (Sett, personal interview, September 16, 2020)

Furthermore, sometimes contact information of family members of streamers are exposed online as well. An interviewee also states she knew a

streamer whose family members' phone numbers were exposed online, following this, they received a series of phone calls asking whether they knew their daughter was 'prostituting herself online'. (Kai'Sa, personal interview, September 18, 2020) On the other hand it should be noted that exposing phone numbers of streamers and/or their families is not limited to female streamers as well, for example; Elraen, a popular Turkish male streamer shares in a video that his mother's mobile phone number was discovered and sold by some people, which ended up with numerous people harassing her at late hours.

These types of experiences and harassments lead to a great anxiety among streamers, especially for popular and higher ranked ones as they are more likely to be a target of one. On the other hand, they also share that they feel defenceless against these attacks. Most of the streamers are studying at university, therefore; financially dependent to their families and are not very keen to pursue legal action for two major reasons: firstly, they do not have the financial means necessary for legal advice and secondly, they do not wish these kinds of incidents to be known by their families. Most of the younger interviewees mentioned that their families do not know that they are streaming on Twitch. Those who informed their family about Twitch also inform their family was reluctant on the issue on ground of sexism she might face or was indifferent, as they did not have much information on what Twitch is. Data regarding this will be thoroughly analysed in the section 'Family Factor'.

#### **3.4.1.6 Effects on Gaming Experience and Performance**

Influenced by Cote's, Fox's and Tang's similar prior works effects of sexism among participants were searched. (Cote, 2017; Fox & Tang, 2017) This search was divided into two categories. First question was whether sexism affected female players' gaming experience and performance and if there had been a change on how sexism affected their mentality during a game. Second part focuses on

methods these players created in order to cope up with sexism, categorized in accordance with main approaches mentioned by the interviewees.

Significant number of interviewees state that sexism affected their mindset greatly when they were younger, usually made them upset, depressed or outraged. However, they also mention that now they try their best to avoid these harassments affecting themselves as they seem unavoidable. Syndra recalls using a ‘‘girly’’ nickname when she first began the game at the age 19. She describes herself as a calm person with few emotional reactions, however; as people indicated she was a female from her nickname she was harassed, cyberbullied and ended up crying numerous times. She even remembers a time when she was so furious with her opponent’s sexist comments that she kicked and damaged her computer, from that day on, she stopped using ‘‘girly’’ nicknames. (Syndra, personal interview, September 16, 2020)

Another interviewee also shares a similar point of view and mentions that she too was affected very much before and tries not to care so much anymore. Playing online competitive games of different genres such as FPS’s and MOBA’s since her early ages she feels that sexism is a problem that cannot be solved in online gaming. She shares that she cannot understand why such sexism exists and believes that there is nothing she can do to improve the situation, however, she also does not wish toxicity to ruin her experience, in her words:

I think I just accepted the situation. There are people like this and always will be. There is nothing to do about it, I cannot change them. I do not know why they behave this way. On the other hand, why should I stop playing because someone is toxic, why should I change myself because of them? The best thing to do is to ignore them I believe. (Ahri, personal interview, September 24, 2020)

However, not all interviewees state that they are able to ignore sexism and toxicity and even after years of online gaming they still are affected a lot by it. An interviewee with a very high rank and great experience in *League of Legends* mentions that she used to ‘cry herself to sleep’ before and even after all those years she still cries after some games, in fact, she had to quit a game and cry just a day before the interview took place. (Kai’Sa, personal interview, September 18, 2020)

Other interviewees also share similar experiences regarding how sexist toxicity affected their mentality as a gamer, moreover; another common theme detected among interviewees is becoming more ambitious in the game after numerous occasions they were accused of failing at it because of their gender. As shared in the section titled Female Players of League of Legends’ Turkish Server, one interviewee shares that whole reason behind her reaching higher ranks was a toxic teammate who told her she would never see a rank past silver. (Lyanna, personal interview, September 22, 2020)

It should also be noted that this ambition due to toxicity does not always have a positive effect on players’ gaming performance. Corki mentions that whenever she gets harassed due to her gender she gets fired up, however; this does not help her improve her game:

Well I get more ambitious but it does not make me play any better. I just get furious. I would not call it a good ambition. I try to get toxic players to shut up, however; if they persist in their behaviour it just gets worse and worse for me. Even if I mute them in chat, I get curious after some time and unmute to see what they are saying. Similarly, if I do something pretty well in the game I unmute them again to see if they shut up or not. (Corki, personal interview, September 25, 2020)

### **3.2 Methods of Coping Up with Sexism**

Interviewees mentioned two opposing types of methods they developed to fight against sexism. First and most common one was to using gender-neutral nicknames which would not give away their gender, therefore prevent their teammates from assuming it. Main idea behind this approach is to remove gender factor completely from the game, usually reinforced by not using voice chat with people who are not close friends or not sharing real names with people who wish to play again sometime. This goes hand in hand with findings of Cote's work as she mentions some women "camouflage" their gender to avoid sexism in online gaming. (Cote, 2017)

On the other hand, some interviewees believe that women should not hide themselves in online gaming, as in their eyes hiding also meant admitting that they should not be there. Believers of this approach state that instead of hiding their gender they wish to deploy skill and better gameplay to the game for other players to acknowledge them, moreover; some interviewees stated that they reply aggression with aggression in order not to be repressed by other players. Both these approaches also show similarities to Cote's analysis of methods developed against sexism. (Ibid)

#### **3.4.2.1 Gender-Neutral Nicknames**

Using gender-neutral nicknames that did not hint their gender was the most preferred method developed against sexism by players, especially those who are of average level skill bracket in which players are usually not known to one another as opposed to higher skill brackets with fewer players that are usually accustomed. Ahri shares that she avoids using the colours pink and purple in her nickname or champion skins because if other players assumed that she was female they would be toxic over her first mistake. (Ahri, personal interview, September 24, 2020)



On the other hand, Corki takes this approach one step further and use male names as their nickname. (Corki, personal interview, September 17, 2020) Another interviewee mentions that she used to prefer nicknames that clearly indicated her gender, however; she had to face numerous toxicities by other players that correlate her mistakes in game with her gender, which led her to hide her gender. Moreover, she also mentions that some she met women who purposefully use “girly” nicknames, even share their social media addresses to normalize female presence in the game, which she believes is an approach that deserves respect. (Draven, personal interview, September 17, 2020) While it is possible for a male to use his name as a nickname, it is not possible for a female without harassments to follow Sett mentions, adding that she purposefully avoids “feminine” nicknames. (Sett, personal interview, September 16, 2020) This situation is described as “psychologically harming” by Ahri:

It is just horrible, I think. Why should a person be subjected to psychological violence just because they play a game? I am a girl and I can play video games too, why are you insulting me in the game because of my gender? Why cannot I just use any nick I want to use? Why do I have to think of ways to hide my gender? It is such a harmful psychology. It is just a video game one might think but I disagree. I remember numerous times getting depressed or anxious over insults I faced, sometimes trying to understand the reason behind or if I did something wrong. Now I just plainly hide that I am a girl in all online games. (Ahri, personal interview, September 24, 2020)

Similarly, it is shared by Syndra that she also used to prefer nicknames that hinted her gender but when she used that she was not taken seriously by her teammates:

I used to have feminine nickname in Turkish server back then. (...) I usually prefer champions with crowd control, more suitable for teamplay, such as

Lissandra, Orianna, Cassiopeia or Diana. So, these champions with crowd controls usually require teamwork, I would inform my team of what I plan to do next. I would say I will use my skill there or I will attack the other team from behind so follow me and other players would reply “Who are you to boss me around girl?” They felt like their masculinity was harmed by receiving instructions from a girl. (...) To contradict this, they would sometimes do just the opposite of what I tell them to do. (Syndra, personal interview, September 16, 2020)

Even though voice chat is not an in-game feature in *League of Legends*, some alternative platforms such as Discord or Skype are used for this feature as it allows swifter communication among teammates. Several interviewees stated that they avoid using voice chat during these sessions if there were people she did not know very well. Moreover, this is not limited to *League of Legends*, they also shared avoid using in-game voice chat features of games such as *Counter Strike: Global Offensive* and *Valorant* as well. (Corki, personal interview, September 17, 2020)

On the other hand, some interviewees oppose this approach to hide your identity and believe that women should make their presence known in the game. (Kai'Sa, personal interview, September 18, 2020) For example, Neeko states that she uses nicknames that clearly indicate her gender, not only in *League of Legends* but in all online games to prove that women can play competitive games very well too, moreover; she believes that best way to fight sexist opponents is to let them know they were beaten by a girl:

I never thought of changing my nickname, maybe you saw my nickname on Discord, it clearly shows my gender too. (...) I believe female players are constantly harassed and abused by other *League of Legends* players, whenever they understand that they are playing with a girl they state that she will surely feed and play abysmally. (...) I am girl and whether I play good or bad I do not wish to hide it, in opposite, I want you to know that

girls play this game too. A girl can use her own name in the game too and it should not bother anyone. I use a female character's name, I am a girl and want to get better at this game. Moreover, I want the guys I beat up to know that they were beaten by a girl. (Neeko, personal interview, September 29, 2020)

### **3.4.2.2 Fighting the Aggressor Back**

In her research Cote mentions that some participants mentioned they fought aggressors back to earn their respect by not being a pushover. (Cote, 2017, p. 18) A similar approach was also observed in this research as well. Majority of interviewees stated that while they used to be shocked and feel depressed against insults when they were younger, now they just insult aggressors back.

I used to play with a laptop back then and once displaced the processor by punching the keyboard, as I used to feel so furious when other players insulted me. Now I am totally a poker face. When an opponent insults me, it encourages me to play better. Winning against these people is the best response. I do trash talking too but would not insult anyone in all chat for no reason at all. (...) When I defeat opponent toxic players, I just post a question mark on chat or write something like ‘‘don’t you fool around here anymore’’ however I do not insult anyone just because they play bad. (Syndra, personal interview, September 16, 2020)

Draven also shares that she used to be unable to reply insults when she was just a beginner, however; that changed in time and now she insults back as she believes toxic players become more and more aggressive if their offenses go unanswered.

I used to get pretty upset about the insults, when I was younger, around high school years. Then I noticed that it was nothing personal, I am not the only

person they attack. I tried to understand the reasoning but failed to understand why. Then I just said to myself, well these are just bad people, I just do not care about what they say because they are not the smartest kind anyway. I just got used to it. There are toxic people in this world. I should not be bothered with what these people say. (...) However sometimes I get so mad, especially when I am streaming. I close the chat screen with a photo and start to throw slang back at the people. I have never been banned for foul language before but someday I suspect I might be. (Draven, personal interview, September 17, 2020)

Albeit being a smaller group, interviewees showed an interesting pattern when it comes to handling insults and toxicity. While nearly all of them mentioned they were depressed when they were insulted at their younger ages, especially during adolescent years, they started reflecting the toxicity back after some time of playing online games. Moreover, this behaviour too seems to evolve to another level with older interviews, in the age group 25-30. Refraining from toxicity, they try to lead their teammates by reasoning with them, which they believe increases their chances to win the game as a team.

### **3.4.2.3 Creating a Space for Female Gamers**

Another point of view shared especially by interviewees was that female players should not hide themselves and their gender; on the contrary, they should make their presence known. This approach can also be noticed in more traditional sports in Turkey, such as football, most popular sport of the country, as İtir Erhart informs of female fan group of Beşiktaş, one of the most famous football clubs in Turkey; called ‘Ladies of Beşiktaş’. (Erhart, 2013) They address this as a very important stance to be taken as female presence in online games is just another branch of a more general struggle for female representation and gender equality.

I do not think that female players and streamers should hide themselves or feel bad when faced with insults as I think those insults just reflect the character of the person using them. Sometimes they try to make you feel like being a woman playing video games or being a woman in general is a bad thing. I think how women react to this behaviour is the most important part here as in my opinion being a strong woman matters the most in Turkey currently. And by strength, I do not mean financial means. It means how you stand up for yourself as well. You should never back off against them. If you feel very disturbed, you should just report them. I believe *League of Legends* has come a great way in handling these, as when a female player reports sexism it results in a ban of the perpetrator. I think male players will soon understand that if they do not want to lose their account they should not use sexist slur. It is normal for a player to get furious and use become toxic towards others, however; using one's gender as a base for insults is unacceptable. In this regard, I believe women should never back down against such behaviour. (Soraka, personal interview, September 16, 2020)

As the citation shows, some interviewees felt that fight against sexism in online gaming is a part of something greater: female representation and gender equality. Therefore, even though some might look down upon the issue as a minor problem in comparison to real-life experiences regarding sexism, it shares the same background therefore should be addressed equally as well. On the other hand, it should also be mentioned that even though a stance against sexism is very important, most interviewees also shared they do not have much hope on a positive change in online gaming community any time soon, however, this should not be a reason to give in and hide yourself.

Well many players just get used to the problem; however, I believe that it should not be that way. I mean I agree that as long as sexist people exist this toxicity will continue, on the other hand; I have a motivation to prove them

wrong by being a skilful female player and change their perception. (Syndra, personal interview, September 16, 2020)

Moreover, solidarity between female players is also signed as an important aspect that goes hand in hand with empowering female presence as Kai'Sa states 'Bottom line of my view on the issue is that no girl should hide her identity because she fears other players would insult her, this should not affect her choice of nickname or anything else. Women should act in solidarity against any kind of sexism.' (Kai'Sa, personal interview, September 18, 2020)

### **3.4.3 Champions to Pick, Roles to Choose**

As described when sharing gameplay mechanics of *League of Legends*, the game consists of numerous different roles which have different duties and priorities. Therefore, each teammate needs to carry out different tasks in order to help their team win the game. Among these roles, support player needs to assist their teammates in order to win the game, as the name of the role suggests. Early in the game this role helps ADC to get stronger by protecting and assisting them, moreover; support players are expected not to kill enemy minions and champions if it is not necessary, instead, leave kills to their teammates so that other players in their team gains more gold to buy items while support player is required to make do with less gold.

Numerous interviewees shared that as a female they were often expected by their teammates to play support, as they believed support to be a passive role that fit a female. This prejudice and reactions they receive when they do or do not play support will be shared in the following section.

Furthermore, champions have pre-defined looks, gender, voice and skill set in *League of Legends*, players are unable to create custom characters as they would be able to in traditional MMORPGs. Even though they are able to customize their

champions with cosmetics offered by Riot Games, they still do have to play with champions that have fixed characteristics. In this regard, in some interviews it was mentioned that some champions are believed to be more ‘‘girly’’ by the game’s community. Mixed interactions interviewees experienced with other players due to assumed femininity or masculinity of their champion will be evaluated in the section Picking ‘‘Girly’’ Champions.

#### **3.4.3.1 Playing Support, A Conundrum for Female Players**

It was mentioned by several interviewees that women usually start the game as support players, especially when introduced to the game by their partner. There are two main reasons behind this, firstly, support players play with another teammate on their lane, therefore not alone; which enables a more experienced teammate to cover up for their teammate’s mistakes.

Secondly, especially when played with a friend occupying bottom lane as one friend playing support and the other one ADC decreases their interaction with other teammates, especially during the early stages of the game and having a friend by your side provides extra protection against any possible toxicity.

It is said that girls always play ADC or support. The reason behind is that there are two people at the bottom lane and as a woman you usually look for someone to support you in case of a toxicity. Especially if you are beginner, someone needs to assist you and bottom lane is the best fit for that. Which is why most girls start playing as support, so that they will not be alone in the game. (Neeko, personal interview, September 29, 2020)

However, even after they obtain some experience in the game it is noticed that female players are often asked to continue playing support and not to main another role, as the same interviewee mentions that her boyfriend would ask her to play support especially when his friends came over to play *League of Legends* and

would feel embarrassed towards them when she said she wanted to play any other role than support. She also mentions that the reason behind this was that they believed as a girl she would surely play terrible and feed other team, therefore; they were trying to position her in the role that would damage their team the least when played badly. (Ibid)

However, one interesting point is that if a female player obliges to this wish and picks support as her main role, this too is subjected to negative comments from other players. Major criticism directed towards female support players is that they are getting themselves boosted. Boosting means playing with better, more experienced players in order to defeat opponent teams whose average skill is higher than the boosted player. In this regard, the criticism towards female support players focuses around that they are picking the least effective role of the game, support and allow their more skillful players to perform other roles, therefore; granting her wins and allowing her to be ranked much higher than she could rank herself.

This situation here creates a conundrum for female players as they are expected to play support by other players, especially their male partners or friends. If they deny to do so they meet with criticism that they are not playing the role that is ‘suitable’ for them, however, if they comply and play support they yet again face criticism that tells they are getting boosted by better players.

Playing support is a bit easier I think, it does not require much mechanical skill. So if you don't feel like trying hard you can just pick Janna and play. However, when I do that the day after I see people on my Discord channel writing ‘Oh you're playing Janna and getting boosted’ I mean if I play 2000 games as ADC it does not matter for them, you play support for 10 games and you are getting boosted in their eyes. I have many male friends who also play support as well, some are very high level. Never heard anyone telling them that they were getting boosted. Playing support is kind of a stain for female players. People check your *League of Legends* profile online and



see that you have a high rank, however; if you play support in just few of those games people would say “Oh you think you’re any good? You play support!” No one would care you successfully played ADC for most of the games. (Kai’Sa, personal interview, September 18, 2020)

This point of view is also shared by other interviewees as well, especially those who selected support as their main role mention that they feel greatly disturbed of other players implying or directly saying they were boosted and lacked the necessary skills to reach the rank they are in as women playing support. One even states that even though her expertise is support and she enjoyed it, she stopped playing the role in ranked games because she was fed up with people calling her boosted and talentless, she felt the need to switch to another role. (Sett, personal interview, September 23, 2020)

Another player whose main role is support shares that she usually prefers “girly” nicknames and champions and usually met with criticism and prejudice from her teammates regarding her gaming skills. As per her statement her teammates assumed that bottom lane would be won by the opponent team as they have a girl playing there, moreover; sometimes they would even intentionally feed. (dying to opponent team champions so that they would get stronger and beat the player’s team)

My main is support, I try different roles now but a year ago I nearly always played support. I also used a cute nickname that clearly indicated that I was a girl and mostly preferred girly champions too. Once in every few matches someone on my team would say “Bot lane is lost guys, we have a girl as support” Sometimes they would intentionally feed as they believed the game was impossible to win with a girl on their team. I usually asked the team to give me chance and told them I was a decent player. Some would later apologize admitting that they were unfair to me. (Lyanna, personal interview, September 22, 2020)

### 3.4.3.2 Picking ‘Girly’ Champions

As mentioned in the previous sections, design and sexualization of female characters has been a topic of research as well. Criticisms were directed towards some games to portray female characters as damsels in distress. (Summers & Miller, 2014) While heroic attributes are reserved for male characters, female characters are likely to be helpless in the game. (Gailey, 1993; Ivory, 2006; Ogletree & Drake, 2007) Moreover, it was also found out by other researchers that certain games depicted female characters in a sexualized manner through exaggerated feminine features. (Dietz, 1998)

In her MA thesis titled ‘Gender Representation in League of Legends’ Damla İşbilen evaluates *League of Legends* champions available in 2014 with regards to their design and skillset. She concludes that *League of Legends* has a ‘positively changing gender role representation trend in *League of Legends* may alter the society’s view of gender roles over time’. (İşbilen, 2014)

On the other hand, some participants of this research mentioned that there are champions in the game that are perceived as ‘girly champions’ by the players and when a female player prefers to play them, they might receive negative comments from other players. Apparently, this holds especially true for support players, as support role is also deemed ‘suitable for a female’ by some other players.

One thing I am unable to understand is that as a support main I am able to play nearly all support champions. Let’s say there are 20 support champions, I could easily say I can play 18 of them. However, if I pick Janna instead of, let’s say Thresh, I am called a talentless girl. However, if I pick Thresh nobody would pick up on me due to my gender, they do not see a problem

with that champion at all. I am ‘‘allowed’’ to play support by the community. (Sett, personal interview, September 23, 2020)

Janna is a female champion while Thresh is not in a human form, however; portrayed as a masculine figure with a male voice as well. While it might also be argued that the prejudice might be arising from the difference in difficulty offered by both champions, as the interviewee also believed playing Janna was easier than playing Thresh. However, Sett also shares that community views Janna girly not only for her looks but also for her skillset as well, as she shields her teammates from behind while Thresh is a ‘‘manly’’ hero who is able to ‘‘actually do something’’. (Ibid) On the other hand, female players of champions who have feminine looks but an aggressive skillset instead of a supporting one, such as Ahri, are also constantly dismissed by their teammates as e-girls Sett mentions. (Ibid) E-girl is a derogatory term used for women online which will be explained in the section E-girls and Boosting.

#### **3.4.4 Reasons Behind Sexism**

All interviewees were asked to share their thoughts regarding reasons behind sexism in online gaming. During the categorization and decoding process of the information it was noticed that there were three major reasons participants signalled as the reasons of sexism in Turkish server of *League of Legends*.

Firstly, they believed e-girls gave all female players a bad reputation by using their femininity instead of their gameplay skills in their Twitch streams, therefore further strengthened the prejudice against female players. Moreover, some interviewees also stated they did not use camera during their streams so they would not be perceived as an e-girl and would be watched because of their gaming skills, not their looks.

Anonymity was another factor shared as interviewees believed online gaming environment gave people a sense of anonymity which leads them to believe that they could easily get away with verbal harassment. This especially holds true for people outside of Turkey as even if a legal case was to be started against them it might be harder to locate or conduct legal action against them.

Reasons tied with social structure and perception was generalized under the definition of social factors. Firstly, interviewees mentioned that violence against women was a serious problem in today's society and cyberbullying and toxicity against women was just a reflection of the real problem. They believed the problem was so acknowledged by gaming community that even female players got used to sexism in time. Moreover, it was also a common thought that in comparison to real-life sexual assaults and discriminations, online sexism is usually not held in high regard and usually considered less important, therefore; was likely to be ignored.

#### **3.4.4.1 E-girls and Boosting**

E-girls and e-boys are a subculture that emerged in late 2010's, mainly on TikTok, a social media application. Jennings compares e-girls to hipsters from 2006 and mentions that the term e-girl and e-boy are used in the same derogatory manner that was also the case for hipsters. (Jennings, 2019) In the same article she also further informs on what an e-girl looks like; sharing that ‘‘colourful hair clips, mesh T-shirts, little bits of skate culture, hip-hop, anime, cosplay, BDSM and goth’’ are the visual features e-girls and e-boys usually possess. (Ibid)

Paige Leskin describes e-girls as:

The e-girl is, simply, the modern-day scene girl: Both were created as a counterculture to the mainstream aesthetic and standards of beauty. They are tuned into video games, as well as in internet slang on online platforms like Discord and YouTube. (Leskin, 2020)

As shared by Leskin, while using mostly TikTok, e-girls and e-boys are also active on Discord as well. (Ibid) As mentioned in the previous section, Discord is a favourite medium of communication for Twitch streamers and gamers overall. Numerous interviewees shared that e-girls were active in both Discord and Twitch, moreover; they preferred to use their sexual features rather than their gameplay skills when game streaming, in this case when playing *League of Legends*, which leads to a negative outlook on female streamers altogether, categorizing them all as e-girls. Lyanna shares that apart from using their femininity to draw attention of viewers, most e-girls also tended to be boosted by male players to make up for their lack of gameplay skills:

E-girls have their favourite champions, Yuumi for example. When it comes to e-girls I agree to people believing that e-girls are no true gamers, they are just girls who build their life and socialize merely on social media, *League of Legends* and Discord. They would do anything to be boosted and placed in better ranks. However, I believe this leads to a negative stereotype of identifying all gamer girls as e-girls in Turkish *League of Legends* community. However looking down upon e-girls is not unique to Turkish community as well, I see numerous memes mocking e-girls. Most usual themes are an e-girl playing Yuumi or an e-girl asking to be boosted and offering private photos in return. (Lyanna, personal interview, September 22, 2020)

When considering what Lyanna shares it should be mentioned beforehand that Yuumi, a support champion, is designed as a cat who can escort and help other players. By its design, it might be said that it is considered ‘‘cute and girly’’ by many players, therefore, e-girls preference towards ‘‘girly’’ champions such as Yuumi might also be considered as a supplementary information on what has already been shared on the issue in the section titled: Picking ‘‘Girly’’ Champions.

Boosting is the term used for the situation lower ranked player teaming up with higher ranked players and receiving their aid to reach higher ranks, which he/she would be unable to reach on his/her own. Moreover, it sometimes takes place as lower ranked players temporarily handing over their account to higher-level players so they can play and win games on their behalf. While it is sometimes a favour from one friend to another, sometimes boosting has a professional face too. There are websites dedicated to boosting services, in which a player can hand their account over to a higher-level player for a certain price. Boosted player would share their current rank and which rank they want to reach, pay the required fee and a higher-level player would play games in their account and winning them on their behalf. There are even extra services offered if the boosted player is willing to pay the additional fee, such as opening a Twitch channel in which boosted player can watch his account played by another player.

In this case, interviewees seem to think that e-girls being boosted shadows all other female players' efforts to improve their game. This holds true especially for higher-level female players. E-girls usually prefer support champions with passive skillsets, which lead some interviewees to avoid playing support in any case as they did not want to be called an e-girl, moreover; to prove their skill they mentioned they needed to play characters that are hardest to use. Moreover, Kai'Sa even shares that she avoids using a web-cam during her streams as she does not wish to be watched for her looks, like an e-girl, but for her gameplay skills. (Kai'Sa, personal interview, September 18, 2020)

#### **3.4.4.2 Anonymity**

Anonymity is also signalled as another factor that encourages online toxicity. Especially in online games, where you lack a personal photo and network of friends and relatives and represented only by your nickname and your avatar, anonymity effect seems to increase. Previous studies show that online anonymity might increase 'group-endorsed attitudes' and further reinforce social stereotypes,

such as gender norms. (Holz Ivory et al., 2014) Many interviewees also shared this point of view and mentioned that while harassments on social media is rarer, yet still existent, they were more common in *League of Legends* as toxic players believed they could not be reached any way. Soraka describes up the situation as:

Anonymity is a great fact too. I mean there are no ID numbers on *League of Legends*, no photos, you cannot even tell for sure someone's gender. The fact they they are unknown to other players encourage toxic players. (Soraka, personal interview, September 16, 2020)

Draven also shares a similar point of view and further states that she "dares" toxic players to harass her on social media, in which they would be more visible as they had profile pictures, personal information and their real-life social network contacts:

People feel like they can get away with anything, both in *League of Legends* and on Twitch. I believe anonymity is a great factor behind this. Anonymity has drastic effects in social psychology. When I receive an insult or a sexist comment I sometimes dare the perpetrator to repeat the same insults through their Instagram account, however no one took my dare so far. As they know they will be exposed and as a result, might have to face consequences due to their insults. I can sue them for example. But when they are anonymous, they believe they are invincible against such actions. (Draven, personal interview, September 17, 2020)

"Feeling invincible against any consequence" is a common theme noticed in toxic players by interviewees. As shared in previous sections, interviewees felt that sexism online is considered only a periphery of sexual assaults or gender discrimination by most. Moreover, real-life sexual assaults and crimes often go unpunished or underpunished shares Kai'Sa, this fact also increases perpetrators' self-confidence in getting away with online sexism, as Kai'Sa mentions "even real-

life crimes go unpunished, nothing will happen to me if I write these online.’’  
(Kai’Sa, personal interview, September 18, 2020)

### **3.4.4.3 Social Factors**

This section, Social Factors follows a more generalist approach that shares views of interviewees regarding reasons behind sexism that are rooted in contemporary social structure and gaming community. Using cyber spaces for political or social agendas is a common theme in Turkey as Saka informs of widespread politically motivated trolling in social media. (Saka, 2018) One major theme as also shared in previous sections is that most interviewees believed that cyberbullying was considered merely an unimportant extension of sexism in general, therefore, often disregarded, which led many interviewees to get used to the situation as they believed it will not change in near future. Sett mentions that she no longer considers it disturbing when a male player tries to flirt with her, as compared to sexism she witnessed flirt attempts looked innocent:

I think we got used to sexism. Flirting attempts now seem innocent to me really, I mean when someone tries to flirt with me without any insults or toxicity, like adding me as a friend after a game, I do not consider it a bad thing really. As I saw worse things before, I got used to face worse things, all female players did. (...) However, what I do not understand is that the community acknowledges that female players do exist. We have progress on that. However, it feels as if that hate against us grows at the same time as well, I really cannot understand why. (Sett, personal interview, September 23, 2020)

As mentioned before when approached with an interview request some streamers had a negative reaction, stating that sexism in *League of Legends*’ Turkish server was a fact and it was pointless to conduct a research on such a well-known fact. Draven counter-argues this point of view by sharing that acknowledging



sexism online and not fighting it is no different from submitting to sexism in real-life:

I do not think that this point of view is any different than people blaming sexual assault victims by saying that the victim should not have worn a skirt or walk alone in the streets at late night. These sound like faint-hearted people's words to me, those who are unable to fight and change things say stuff like this I believe. (Draven, personal interview, September 17, 2020)

Kai'Sa mentions that patriarchal society is among the reasons behind sexism as people embrace patriarchy tend to look down upon women and their skills. (Kai'Sa, personal interview, September 18, 2020) Ahri also agrees with this point of view and shares that patriarchal society makes male players feel dominant over women, therefore; they believe it is their right to tell women what to do. (Ahri, personal interview, September 24, 2020) Corki too addresses cultural patriarchy as one of the main reasons behind sexism and shares that despite Riot Games' effects to increase female visibility in gaming, prejudices prevent the gamers to get used to female players:

They (Riot Games) always invite women to their events, aiming to increase female presence and in hopes that people will get used to female players. For example, when they announce on Twitter that they invited a woman to an event, people become upset, asking what she is doing in the event or questioning related female player's gaming skills. *League of Legends'* and *Valorant's* Turkish administration wishes the gaming community to get used to female players, however, players insist on refusing female presence. I mean there are women, just like there are men. Community is even harsher on LGBTQ people. They act like they want LGBTQ people dead. I don't know whether it will get any better, perhaps in a hundred years. It requires a dramatic change in the society (Corki, personal interview, September 17, 2020)

Similarly, Syndra also mentions patriarchal society and traditional view on gender shapes views on female gamers in online gaming too by saying:

Well, when you think about it, we are a patriarchal society. Society believes that women should tend to home while men is the breadwinner. It is the same thing in gaming too, women should not do anything serious. Women should play support and use passive skills to increase her rank. Men should play ADC and carry the game for women. I think it is the reason why female players who play ADC usually receive negative reaction on their role not fitting to their gender. (Syndra, personal interview, September 16, 2020)

On the other hand, Warwick states that domestic violence has a hand in online toxicity too, as especially younger players are likely to reflect the violence and misogyny, they witness to at home to online gaming community, therefore; family and society have a hand on younger players' behaviour in online games. (Warwick, personal interview, September 22, 2020)

As shared by Taylor, gamers who consider themselves natural members of gaming community sometimes feel threatened that their identity is under attack with the presence of 'outsiders' who do not fit traditional definition of a gamer, such as female or LGBTQ players. (Taylor, 2018) Lyanna signals no-lifer players are more prone to online toxicity as they have nothing else than video games in their lives, therefore; presence female players, whom they consider as outsiders, are disturbing for them and conceived as a threat to their gamer identity, in par with Taylor's research. (Lyanna, personal interview, September 22, 2020) No-lifer is a derogatory term used for people who lack a social life or friends, instead, prefers an isolated life that is usually focused on video games and internet. Lyanna shares that no-lifer players consider their *League of Legends* rank as the most important thing in their life, in this regard; when a female player reaches or surpasses them in *League of Legends*, they feel insulted. (Ibid)

### **3.4.5 EU West vs Turkey, Comparison of Two Servers with Regards to Sexism**

All interviewees except for one mentioned that they also had accounts on EU West server as well. This is a common behaviour among Turkish *League of Legends* players as EU West server is believed to have a higher average skill level. Moreover, newly adapted gameplay tactics for champions and teams are usually adapted in EU West before they arrive in Turkish service, therefore, EU West provides a strong ground for players to improve their understanding of the game and keep updated on new strategies. (Syndra, personal interview, September 16, 2020)

When it comes to compare toxicity and sexism among players, all interviewees agreed that community is less toxic compared to Turkish server. However, this should not be interpreted as there is no toxicity in EU West server either, interviewees share that even though sexism exists in EU West Server too, as they consider *League of Legends*' players to be toxic in general. Nevertheless, while toxicity is not as severe as in Turkish server in EU West, it is still existent. Ahri shares that players usually prefer to rage quit (a gaming term used for instantly quitting the game after a certain failure by the player or their teammate) instead of harassing or insulting teammates, furthermore; sharing phone numbers or Discord IDs to carry out the argument after the game is concluded, which is not a rare sight in Turkish server, is hardly seen in EU West server. (Ahri, personal interview, September 24, 2020) Lyanna shares this point of view by mentioning that players tend to mute one another to avoid chat at all instead of arguing. (Lyanna, personal interview, September 22, 2020)

Corki states that one thing that is different in players of EU West server is that their toxicity does not usually include elements of sexism. (Corki, personal interview, September 25, 2020) Similarly, Neeko also believes on EU West server

players insult each other due to their failures in the game, which decreases the winning chances of their team, instead of their gender; therefore, it was more unlikely for a female gamer to be insulted for their gender even when she is playing good. (Neeko, personal interview, September 29, 2020) Kai'Sa relates this difference to number of female players in EU West server and share that they are more used to female players:

There are lot more higher-level female players in EU West, by a margin. Like if its 10 in Turkish server it would a hundred in EU West. Moreover, gameplay level is a lot higher in EU West too, on the other hand, it is a lot better place for women to play, as people are used to female players there. When you think about it, maybe that's why female players in EU West are better, because they are not insulted frequently, their mentality is in a much better state. (Kai'Sa, personal interview, September 18, 2020)

While sharing opinions of other interviewees, Syndra also states that e-girls are perceived negatively in EU West too, which is also the case for Turkish server, however; this negative perspective does not extend to all female players in EU West. Moreover, she believes that moderation is a lot harsher in EU West, mentioning that even spamming in chat results in a chat ban. (Syndra, personal interview, September 16, 2020)

Interestingly, two interviewees share that they use nicknames that indicate their gender in EU West but receive no sexist comments from other players. One of these interviewees, Sett, mentions that only once a teammate tried to flirt with her after noticing her nickname, who turned out to be a Turkish player in EU West. (Sett, personal interview, September 23, 2020) Soraka also follows a similar approach by using a nickname that hints her gender and in parallel with Sett's experiences she also believes sexism is rather rare in EU West server:

Well, I never experienced sexism on EU West and my nickname straightaway shows my gender, it directly includes a phrase used when referring to women. What I saw in EU West was that people don't really use chat that much, compared to Turkish server. They only use it to share information and make a joke or two, toxicity and sexism is rather rare. When you think about it, I can't remember an instance of sexism I have encountered in EU West right now. I think sexism is unique to Turkish server. (Soraka, personal interview, September 16, 2020)

### **3.5 Female Streamers of *League of Legends* on Twitch**

This section and the following ones are dedicated to shed a light on Turkish female streamers on Twitch who stream their *League of Legends* gameplay. As mentioned before 9 of 10 interviewees were streamers while one of them operated as a channel moderator, therefore also a part of Twitch community. Even though the main focus of the research was on *League of Legends* and its Turkish player community, mainly located in Turkish server, a look on Turkish *League of Legends* viewer community on Twitch was also considered a perspective that would show much insight on Turkish online gaming culture. The idea was inspired by Taylor's book titled *Watch Me Play: Twitch and the Rise of Game Live Streaming* which is a detailed evaluation of live game streaming. (Taylor, 2018)

The section aims to share a general view on experiences, problems and opinions of Turkish female game streamers of Twitch. Considering the limited number of interviewees and only *League of Legends* players were interviewed, it should be noted that a throughout research on this area would require a more diverse base of participants, i.e.: female streamers of other competitive games such as *Counter Strike: Global Offensive* and non-competitive or single player games. Furthermore, Twitch also has a category called "Just Chatting" and as the name suggests this category focuses on communication between the streamer and their viewers. Many streamers do not always use game streaming but also use this type

of stream from time to time as well. Their experiences with different types of streams are also a potential area for studies. In this regard, these sections aim to pave the way for future research that will solely focus on Turkish streamers on Twitch and analyse the matter in a more specific manner.

In accordance with the Grounded Theory, similar patterns noticed in interviewees' statements were categorized together after a process of codification. Main themes they shared were thoroughly evaluated to process the information they provided in an empirical approach. Firstly, to give a background information all the interviewees were asked how they took up streaming and what was the reason behind their decision. Similar patterns noticed in these experiences were shared in the following section.

Common themes discovered in the interviews were analysed in different sections. Firstly, it was noticed that many interviewees, especially those who lived with their families had a difficult time explaining why they were streaming or opening their camera to anonymous people online. Their wish to become Twitch streamers were usually met with objections from their families. These objections, reasoning behind them and interviewees overcame them will be analysed.

Last section was dedicated to problems interviewees' experiences while streaming on Twitch, especially those that are related with their gender and sexism. Their opinions on Turkish Twitch community will be shared alongside with hardships they encountered due to their gender.

### **3.5.1 Motivation to Stream**

Interviewees were asked how they decided to begin streaming on Twitch to further understand their perception of Twitch and opinions on being a streamer. Interviewees in their university years, age group between 18 – 22 mentioned that they have been watching YouTubers and Twitch streamers since their adolescent years therefore online streaming was not a foreign ground for them. Corki mentions she has been watching Twitch since she was 13 while Ahri recalls the beginning times of now famous YouTubers.

While some of the interviewees share they started streaming in YouTube and moved to Twitch due to lack of viewers, most of them began their streaming career in Twitch and few aim to move to YouTube should they hit large viewer numbers. Interestingly, COVID-19 pandemic seems to affect Twitch streaming too as nearly all interviewees mention that lockdown period gave them a lot of free time which led them to increase their streaming hours. Soraka, in this regard, mentions that she in fact quit streaming long time ago, however; due to COVID-19 pandemic she was laid off from her work and decided to restart streaming. (Soraka, personal interview, September 16, 2020)

Neeko shares an interesting experience on how she began streaming, which could also be interpreted as a patriarchal view of gender roles and how they are applied to Twitch or streaming in general. She mentions that her ex-boyfriend vehemently argued when her wish to be a Twitch streamer, saying that she would not be able to attract viewers and even if she could, it would be only because she was a girl. Moreover, being reprimanded by her boyfriend encouraged her even further to start her Twitch channel Neeko shares:

It was 2 or 2.5 years ago, there were not many female streamers in Turkey back then. (...) I wanted to start streaming, I especially liked playing *Call of Duty*, even attended tournaments back then so wanted to stream that game. When I told my boyfriend about it he became really aggressive. He claimed that no one would watch me because I was a girl or even if they did

watch me it would not be because I was playing good but because I was a girl. He said I could possibly not play better than male streamers on Twitch. I would be harassed and bullied, people would try to flirt with me or act sexist. Finally, he said, as a girl I should not allow people to treat me like that by becoming a streamer. (Neeko, personal interview, September 29, 2020)

### **3.5.2 Family Factor**

For interviewees who live with their parents or who are financially dependent on them, family factor holds an importance part in their streaming experience. This pattern was especially observed in interviewees who are university students, which frequently fit either or both criteria mentioned in the previous sentence. Most common pattern noticed among such interviewees were to keep their streaming career a secret from their families as they would most probably disprove of it. Syndra mentions that it was her older brother that first introduced her to gaming; he was therefore not a stranger to gaming scene himself. However, when he first heard that she was streaming on Twitch his reaction was rather negative and she had to convince him and the family that she was not a ‘‘cam girl’’ that was using her femininity to draw attention:

My brother strictly opposed the idea of me streaming on Twitch, he is rather protective towards me. We do not have much of an age gap, same generation I can say, and he believed he knew the male mindset, and this made him uncomfortable with the idea her sister streaming. I first began streaming four years ago, it was a 30-minute-long test stream. Apparently, many people were interested in watching a girl streamer, so I got a place in the main page of Twitch. A friend of my brother saw this and informed him. My brother gave me all immediately and told me to close that stream right now and hang up on me. It really took me a long time to have my family become comfortable with this idea and you know what, they are still not used to it.



My mother says even if I earn million dollars through Twitch it is still not a proper job. In time, my older brother became my greatest support in this. When I started earning money, they believed maybe what I was doing was not wrong. (...) In the end, a girl showing herself through a webcam was not perceived as a proper thing for my family first, just like the case in Turkish Twitch community back then, but now they are ok with it. (Syndra, personal interview, September 16, 2020)

On the other hand, it should be noted that Syndra's older brother still spectates her streams in a protective mindset as shared by her. Kai'Sa also mentions that her family does not approve of her streaming career along with her aim to become a professional eSports player one day as well. She has kept her streaming career a secret from her family for some time, however; she started legal action against one of the offenders that visited her channel after which her family came to learn about Twitch. She believes that Turkish parents do not wish their daughters to stream on Twitch because they believe their daughter might be a target for sexism online. (Kai'Sa, personal interview, September 18, 2020) In this regard, she purposefully avoids sharing any information regarding her family online as she knows a streamer whose parents' contact information was leaked online and later received calls telling them their daughter was "prostituting herself" online. (Ibid) A similar approach is also followed by Lyanna, as she believes "A pervert might become obsessed with her and find her family's home address" if she ever discloses too much information. (Lyanna, personal interview, September 22, 2020)

### **3.5.3 Community and Sexism**

Most interviewees mention that there is a prejudice against female streamers in Twitch's Turkish community. A major reason behind this situation is signalled as e-girls, who use their femininity to raise donations, therefore; the community is keen to perceive all female streamers as e-girls. Whether using a webcam or not seems to be a major decision for female streamers as they believe they should be

watched for their gameplay skills or streaming content, however; when they use webcams, they might be considered e-girls. Draven shares that when she first began streaming, she did not use a webcam for the first five months. On the other hand, she felt that a streaming experience should include webcam too, which is why she started using one after five months. (Draven, personal interview, September 17, 2020) Kai'Sa mentions that she still does not use a webcam as she believes it should be her *League of Legends* playing skills that attracts viewers, not her looks. Moreover, she mentions she is occasionally accused of "being too ugly to open a webcam" which is not the case for popular male streamers who do not use webcams:

I do not prefer to use webcams, there are lots of other streamers who feel the same way and avoid using webcams on Twitch. There are numerous male streamers who are very popular and do not use webcams. (...) I also do not use webcams because I want people to watch my gameplay, however, occasionally people say that I am ugly which is why I hide my face. No one would say a similar thing to a male streamer for not using a webcam. People think that if you are a female you are obliged to use your sex to draw attention. I respect female streamers who use webcams on Twitch, but I do not think that I am obliged to do it. (Kai'Sa, personal interview, September 18, 2020)

On the other hand, as suspected by Draven, she suffered from sexism and harassment when decided to use her webcam. She recalls harassments such as a viewer writing in the chatbox that he masturbated looking at her face or one another one asking her how much donation she would want for a dinner together. (Draven, personal interview, September 17, 2020) Kai'Sa mentions a professional dancer who streamed her dancing also received such comments from the viewers, requesting erotic postures in exchange of donations. Moreover, Draven also later found out that some viewers took her photos when she stood up or crouched in front of camera to pick up something or answer the door, believing her posture was erotic,

which is why she now disables her webcam when she needs to stand up. Syndra also disables her webcam in similar situations while Corki uses a pause screen to prevent such photos to be taken.

Using donations as a tool of harassment is noticed to be common pattern as after donations a message by the donator is shown on streaming screen. Syndra shares that she streamed earlier at the day of interview a viewer donated smaller amounts such as 2 liras repeatedly to insult her on streaming screen. (Syndra, personal interview, September 16, 2020) Kai'Sa also shares a similar experience:

There were people who donated to channel to insult me. They literally spent money to mock me on my channel. Usually small amounts, like 3 liras. Sometimes the sum can increase to 10 to 20 liras. (...) There was one guy that donated 50 liras and said that he could do anything with me if he paid the right amount. (...) There are lots of obsessed people like this. For example, there is a guy on my channel who has more than 30 accounts, all of them banned of course. It is hard to believe he showed the effort to create 30 accounts. (Kai'Sa, personal interview, September 18, 2020)

Sometimes the source of harassments is not Twitch viewers but other streamers. Neeko mentions that a male streamer shared her stream in his channel while also making lewd comments on her looks. (Neeko, personal interview, September 29, 2020) When a streamer turns off their stream, they can direct all their current viewers to another channel, which is called hosting by streamers. This method is also used for harassing female players as another streamer transfer all their viewers to her channel to fill her chatbox with insults. Neeko shares to be a victim of such harassments, while Sett, who operates as a channel moderator mentions these kinds of attacks are often. As a moderator Sett has to monitor chatbox attentively to mute or ban any toxic viewers and delete messages. She shares that she needs to ban a viewer for toxicity approximately every half an hour. Moreover, she also believes that bans by moderators do not work very effectively

on Twitch as even IP bans are not usually sufficient to stop harassers who create multiple accounts for their purpose. (Sett, personal interview, September 23, 2020)

Soraka and Warwick adapt indifference as a method to cope with any harassment during their stream. Warwick shares that she is occasionally called ‘‘too old to be a streamer’’ by viewers however mostly ignores the message. (Warwick, personal interview, September 22, 2020) Similarly, Soraka also mentions receiving similar negative comments and ignoring them. Moreover, she believes body shaming against female streamers is correlated to sexualisation of female body by media. (Soraka, personal interview, September 16, 2020)

## CONCLUSION

It is easily noticeable that gaming industry is rapidly growing with developments in technology and technological devices becoming more and more accessible globally alongside with internet. This also gives rise to competitive gaming based on internet connection, which serves as a ground for eSports to rise. Following the global trend, eSports are becoming more and more popular in Turkey as well. *League of Legends*, as the most popular eSport in Turkey which attracts great interest of both casual gamers and professional eSports players.

In this regard, when searching sexism in gaming environment *League of Legends* provided a unique perspective for gaming community for two reasons; first: it is the most popular eSport in Turkey and second: it has a server dedicated to Turkey. Sexism in gaming environment has been the topic of numerous research before, however, sexism in Turkish online gaming and Twitch community was a subject rarely discussed before. In this regard, research was designed in a qualitative way to perceive experiences. Charmaz’s approach to Grounded Theory was considered as the best fit for the thesis as it was adapted by similar research before and perfectly fit the empirical nature of the subject. 10 people were interviewed

with questions prepared in accordance with Charmaz's ideas and previous research in game studies.

All the interviewees were approached through Twitch during their stream. Considering some of the interviewees were rather popular streamers, they had fast-faced chat boxes in their channels, therefore a message which introduced the researcher and shared the content of the thesis and interview had to be shared multiple times. Streamers who were interested in participating in an interview were first offered to do it on Zoom, due to COVID-19 interviews could not be made face-to-face. However, soon it was found out that nearly all streamers had Discord accounts and preferred to perform the interview there, in this regard, all the interviews were done on Discord with the exception of one conducted on Zoom.

While some interviewees shared that they believe male players have a tendency to play at higher levels in eSports, they also mentioned this difference in skills was due to exposure to gaming at younger ages. As previous studies show, internet cafes, which served as a hub for competitive gaming in Turkey, were predominantly used by males while female players usually started playing online games when they had internet access at home in later years. Previous research show that internet cafes were dominantly used by males, especially for gaming purposes, therefore; supports the mentioned point of view shared by some interviewees. Younger interviewees in the age group 18-22 however disagree with this point of view, stating that they do not believe a skill gap exists.

It was agreed by all interviewees that there was a negative bias towards female players by other players in *League of Legends*' Turkish server; therefore, sexism was rather common. While interviewees found Riot Games' efforts to improve gender equality and female representation in *League of Legends* positive, they also believed that the community remained indifferent to these works. While most common type of sexism was online toxicity, it was also found out that if the victim of sexism was a player of high profile, therefore was likely to be known by

other players, it was also possible for real-life threats or even abuses to take place. Moreover, sometimes toxic players ganged up to organize harassments against female players. Discord and *League of Legends* teams were signalled as possible grounds for these players to gather.

Nearly all interviewees were introduced to online gaming by a male, usually by their older brother, which might indicate that male dominance continues to persist in online gaming environment. Those who do not have an older brother usually had a father or romantic partner that was interested in gaming, therefore; introduced them to games.

Toxicity and sexism seem to affect female players' gameplay preferences and performance as well. While some mention that it fuels their will to improve their skills so they can prove their value to toxic players, most common theme was frustration against sexism. Some interviewees even mentioned damaging their computer in anger. While younger interviewees seem to be more affected by toxicity, older interviewees shared that they do not let toxicity and sexism to affect their mentality during a game.

When it comes to struggling against sexism, most popular method was to hide their gender for female players. Nicknames are mentioned as the most likely tools that might hint the player's gender, therefore; they tried to use gender-neutral nicknames to avoid any harassment. Moreover, even though *League of Legends* lack in-game voice chat, they also mentioned in games that include the feature, such as *Counter-Strike: Global Offensive* they avoid using it so that other players would not know their gender. This approach of hiding gender was strongly opposed by some interviewees as they believed that hiding themselves would be admitting that women were outsiders to gaming community. Instead, they suggest; they should create a space for female gamers and struggle to make their existence acknowledged by other players. There are two main methods suggested to serve this purpose: first one is to play at a high level with strong gaming skills, therefore proving that

women can play *League of Legends* as well as men. Second one is usually preferred by older interviewees, which is adapting an educative approach toward other players by persuading them what they are doing is wrong. Followers of this approach mention that toxic players against women are usually rather young and should be corrected in their views.

As explained in the thesis in detail, *League of Legends* contains different roles to be played by each team member. Among them, support role is mentioned to be considered more suitable for females as shared by interviewees. The role is usually regarded as a passive one considering less skill, moreover as the name suggest its aim is to support other teammates into victory. In this regard, interviewees who refuse to play support and focus on other roles mention that they are often harassed by other players who claim that they should just play support, however, ironically interviewees who focus on support role is also target for harassment as some players might say or imply that they lack the certain skill to play any other role than support and all female players prefer support role to be carried to success by more skilful male players. On the other hand, even though previous research show that *League of Legends*' character design has a positive stance against social gender prejudices, some champions were considered to be 'girly' by the community and female players who preferred those champions are sometimes insulted for their choice, however; male players who play those champions do not suffer same insults interviewees share.

E-girls and boosting was shown as one of the major reasons behind sexism. Some interviewees believed that e-girls who use their sexuality to gain more followers give a bad reputation to all female gamers. Moreover, e-girls also tended to look for male players' aid to climb to higher ranks in the game which further strengthened this effect. It was a common perspective of interviewees that female players should be acknowledged for their gameplay skill, not their sexuality, therefore; e-girls were harmful for this cause.

Anonymity also incites a feeling of safety among harassers as shared by interviewees. As they lacked a profile photo or a real name as they would have in a social media account, players feel more secure and anonymous in gaming environment, moreover; especially those who live outside of Turkey believe they will not face any legal action for their harassments. Moreover, social factors were mentioned to be among reasons that cause sexism and harassment towards female players as well. Firstly, patriarchal society and perception lead men to feel they should be dominant over women, therefore; it is not acceptable for them when a female invades their space, in this case gaming environment; even more surpasses him in gameplay skills. Moreover, sexism online is prone to be considered trivial compared to real-life sexism according to interviewees, which leads it to be usually overlooked.

Nearly all interviewees shared that they have accounts on both EU West and Turkish servers as they believed EU West players had a higher average for gaming skills therefore playing there was beneficial for improving themselves. When asked to compare attitude towards female players between those two servers, all participants shared even though toxicity is also existent in EU West server as well, sexism was nowhere near Turkish server. Two interviewees even informed that they used a nickname that clearly indicated their sex in EU West and did not encounter sexism once.

All the participants of the research were Twitch streamers with the exception of one, who was a Twitch channel moderator, therefore; still was a part of online streaming. When asked about their motivation to stream it was noticed that most streamers were in their university years and considered streaming an opportunity to earn some pocket money. Furthermore, COVID-19 pandemic also seems to give people the time and opportunity to stream as during some interviewees mentioned they started streaming during the isolation period while others shared they increased their stream time. Interviewees who lived with their family or were financially dependent informed to encountered hardships introducing streaming concept to



their families. Moreover, it was a shared idea that sexism was prevalent in Turkish community of Twitch as well. Interviewees have shared numerous occasions they faced online toxicity and sexism.

On the other hand, it should be noted that this thesis briefly mentions Twitch experiences, focusing mainly on *League of Legends*. In this regard, Turkish streamers' experiences regarding Twitch remains a field to be explored in future research, a brief section regarding Twitch was added to this thesis in hopes of paving the way for such studies.

In the end, interviews conducted for this research could be interpreted as a sign that sexism is not a rare experience in *League of Legends*' Turkish server, albeit Riot Games' efforts to increase gender representation the community remains unaffected by them. Moreover, female players also share the common feeling that their playing style and preferences are affected by sexism and they need to make adaptations to cope with or fight it or to camouflage their gender. When it comes to coping methods it could be said that they were mostly parallel with the findings of Cote. (Cote, 2017)

However it should also be noted that online gaming and game streaming environment is naturally much larger than *League of Legends* therefore further research is required to analyse sexism or other social problems gaming community in general and Turkish gaming community inclusively inhibits, such as sexism or any other type of discrimination and harassment. Furthermore, as some interviewees mentioned that harassers often use other social media websites or tools their advantage, it might be said that sexism on *League of Legends*' Turkish server might just be an extension of a larger research subject with Turkish online community. This thesis is hoped to pave the way for future research about Turkish online community and social problems.

Observations in this research showed that female players were subjected to sexism in online gaming environment with numerous cases they provided. Moreover, sometimes these harassments exceed the limits of internet and gaming space and have real-life effects as well. Considering that Game Studies is a developing field in Turkey it offers numerous subjects to be further studied in future. Hopefully these future research will help us better understand gaming culture and community in Turkey and create ways to address problems faced by Turkish gamers.

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