

Gender Dynamics of Players in Online Video Games

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Abstract

With the rise of First-Person Shooters (FPS) as a means to spend quality time with other people, online video games of this genre became popular digital social spaces, where social dynamics are present. Although the FPS genre is considered male-oriented, women play such games on an equal footing with men, but their presence is still considered controversial. This sparks various interactions that are understudied in the Kazakhstani setting, specifically from the perspective of female players. Therefore this capstone project seeks to answer the main research question: how do women in Kazakhstan experience and navigate social interactions in FPS? The research primarily builds on the theoretical framework of Judith Butler (2004, 2007 [1990]), treating gender as fluid and performed; subsequently, multiple femininities arise as a consequence of the performances, which is based on concepts discussed by Shelley Budgeon (2014) and Mimi Schippers (2007). The research design is qualitative, and it consists of semi-structured interviews with the online participant observations of gaming sessions. Together, the analysis of collected data reveals that the studied FPS is shaped by male-dominated, performance-oriented norms, where cyber-aggression is normalized through in-game behaviors and moderated from rank to rank. Women's experiences include a wide range of cyber-aggression that includes instances from verbal harassment and exclusion to more severe cases of sexual harassment, threats, and stalking. Yet, despite considering such behaviors common within the digital environment, women choose to negotiate or resist the toxicity, primarily by masking their identity, assessing their surroundings, ignoring or responding to insulting remarks with the same attitude. Besides the cases of hostile attitudes, the participants reported instances of cooperative behavior from teammates, such as peer support, trusted networks, and female solidarity, which helped them in navigating the FPS.

Keywords: Online gaming, First-Person Shooters, cyber-aggression, gender, female gamers, coping strategies, hegemonic masculinity.

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Introduction

With the rise of the gaming industry, people around the world now have access to various online games that bring people together and allow them to communicate, interact and even build meaningful social ties with each other. Due to these factors, Steinkuehler and Williams (2006), for instance, recognize massively multiplayer online games (MMOs) as social “third places”, which means that gamers use these platforms not solely for entertainment purposes, but also for cooperation. First-person shooter (FPS) is another one of the most popular genres among online video games, consistently attracting large active player bases on platforms such as Steam (SteamDB, n.d.), due to its fast-paced, competitive playstyle, where players are expected to rely on communication with each other to perform better as a team, and, potentially, secure a win. Communication mainly occurs through in-game text or voice chat, which allows players to construct meaningful and complex dialogues, similarly to MMOs, which can suggest that both genres can be perceived as social spaces.

Although FPS genre is considered male-oriented (Hopp & Fisher, 2017), women play such games just as much as men, as evidenced by numerous sources from “gray literature”, however, in a Western context, their numbers generally do not exceed those of the male population - the media often reports that in large-scale surveys conducted in the U.S., 53% of respondents identify as men, while 46% identify as women (ESA, 2024; Esports Insider, 2025). The seemingly controversial presence of female players in these communities sparks widespread prejudices about women’s alleged lack of skills in the gaming field, or that they should not belong to the industry completely given their gender expectations. In the cases, where a woman talks via voice chat or uses feminine accessories or nickname in game, gender becomes visible to her teammates, and stereotypical beliefs about “innate bad performances” might lead to immediate reactions, “trash-talking”, or disruptive behavior from male players; some of them occur in harsh forms, making scholars describe them as “cyber-aggression” or “cyberbullying”¹ (Jagayat & Choma, 2021). It is possible that the women themselves hold similar views about their own gaming abilities or those of their female peers, and reactions to this are not currently the subject of widespread discussion within the academic community.

While there is a possibility of both positive and negative interactions to occur within an FPS game match, it might be unclear how women deal and respond to them. Up to this point, FPS games behave as digital social spaces due to arising dynamics between players during the matches, thus, it is reasonable to expect that certain power dynamics between players (that also exist in the physical realm) will be observed in game matches. Understanding the female gamers’ perspective is important in studying social spaces, therefore this capstone project seeks to find the potential gaps in previous scholarly conversations regarding the gendered interactions in online video games and contribute to the examination of potential social structures in FPS games.

¹ According to Jagayat and Choma (2021), cyber-aggression can refer to any intentional aggressive behaviour that occurs electronically, without requiring repetition or a power imbalance (p. 2). Cyberbullying in this context requires intention and repetition of aggressive behaviour towards a person who cannot stand up for oneself, also happens electronically (2021, p. 1).

Given that the female presence in online gaming environments is still considered uncommon within the community, less attention has been paid to how women navigate the digital social space. Therefore, this capstone project seeks to understand how women in Kazakhstan perceive both positive and negative gaming experiences and what are their mechanisms of dealing with negative interactions, if encountered. By focusing on both supportive and hostile encounters, the study provides an extensive overview of the gaming environment through the lens of the minority group, which can help in identifying the potential issues they face on a daily basis, strategies for including themselves despite said challenges, and in filling in the cultural context of gaming in Central Asian countries. Having outlined this, the main research question of this work is: *how do women in Kazakhstan experience and navigate social interactions in FPS?*

Theoretical Framework

For this research, I am adopting Butler's (2004, 2007 [1990]) conceptualization of gender as performative, meaning that gender identities are continuously produced through repeated behaviors, expressions, and interactions, varying from context to context. In online gaming environments, female players can perform them by concealing or openly displaying socially expected feminine features that the next section will talk about. Building on this, Schippers (2007) and Budgeon (2014) introduce the concept of alternative femininities, referring to women's performances of masculine traits (in the gaming context, it can be portrayed as being assertive, aggressive, and competitive as well as having measurable to men's skills) that, in theory, aimed at helping women in navigating male-dominated environments. They are usually constructed by neoliberal ideals of individual agency, self-reliance, and empowerment through adopting these traits.

Although alternative femininities are originally constructed to potentially empower women, in practice, they are still sanctioned and often require expected violent traits that hegemonic masculinity possesses (Connell & Messerschmidt, 2005; Rogstad, 2022). In the video gaming context this can be portrayed as women being rude to their female colleagues as a means of navigating a hostile environment themselves. These cases may result in women being stigmatized through derogatory labels that frame their participation as attention-seeking (Jagayat & Choma, 2021; Zhou & Peterson, 2024). Opposite to that, instances of positive male to female or female to female interactions, such as supportive language, advocating for marginalized communities, or empathetic behavior, cannot be excluded from the findings of the research.

Similarly, male players' behaviors can be understood through the framework of hegemonic masculinity, as the culturally dominant form of masculinity that legitimizes male authority, competitiveness, and control over the field (Connell & Messerschmidt, 2005; Messerschmidt & Messner, 2018). This lens explains how men assert power and status in FPS environments through displaying skill, dominance, aggression in communication. The interplay between hegemonic gender identities with their alternative counterparts demonstrates that

hegemonic masculinity stays at the top of the hierarchical ladder, subordinating both women and marginalized forms of masculinity².

Considering the potential cultural differences across masculinities, it is important to acknowledge them in this work. It can be evident from the literature that post-Soviet hegemonic masculinity is constructed mainly due to socioeconomic disruptions following the USSR collapse. This often means that men are tied to expectations of responsibility, patriarchal power, strength, control, and success in life, which reinforces the subordination of women (Zhao, 2022; Tereskinas, 2009; Randall, 2012), and when the conditions to fulfill these roles are not met, men experience “shame, despair, and powerlessness” (Tereskinas, 2009). Contemporary Western societies, on the other hand, produce more fluid masculinities that combine similar to post-Soviet expectations but allow the extent of sensitivity (Connor et al., 2021). Therefore, post-Soviet masculinity is characterized by regression to traditional norms, when Western masculinity currently experiences diversification.

Gendered Interactions within Gaming Communities: Review of the Literature

When examining the existing literature on online gaming, it was evident that the main subject of scholarly discussions were male experiences; outlining the interactions between male and female players acted as secondary findings. Thus, in Jagayat and Choma’s study (2021) on male gamers’ psychological indicators, the authors contended that women primarily experience cyber-aggression towards themselves from men due to individuals’ high preference for hierarchy and inequality between social groups (Social Dominance Orientation or SDO). Adefope and Bayraktar (2025) further note that male players’ perception of women as a threat to the male-dominant field lies in interdependence belief³ and frequent opposition of one gender group to another. Moreover, Demir et al. (2024) suggested that teenage boys have a tendency toward gender stereotypical thinking, for instance believing that girls do not play certain game genres or stereotyping female characters based on appearance and role relative to male characters (pp. 7-8). Such thinking might potentially further develop a strong sense of in-group from an early age. Together, the studies show that the violence is a form of maintaining existing boundaries between social groups, reinforcing established hierarchies. It is suggested that hegemonic masculinity, which takes root at a young age, in the gaming environments can indeed be characterized by skill-based dominance, competitiveness, and aggressive communication practices; as a result, exclusionary practices and cyber-aggression toward women function as mechanisms for maintaining group boundaries.

From the perspective of the marginalized gaming community, Scidone et al. (2024) reports that female players acknowledged societal views on gaming culture as a predominantly male field and shared positive instances of forming either mixed or women-only safe sub-groups

² Connell and Messerschmidt (2005) describe marginalized forms of masculinity as those that do not fully embody hegemonic masculinity, and as a result may lack certain traits, which can lead to conflicts between men with a hegemonic gender identity and men who differ from it. In the context of gaming, this may manifest as a reluctance to engage in “trash talk”, a lack of aggressive behavior, or disagreement with the notion that women are less skilled at video games.

³ Interdependence belief - the idea that different social groups are in competition with each other for status or recognition; gains of one group are perceived as losses for the other (Demir et al., 2024).

within the game. However, in cases of their gender identity disclosure, some reported loss of friendships and increase in flirtatious behavior from male counterparts (Scidone et al., 2024). These instances - specifically, the formation of safe sub-groups and the strategic disclosure of gender - indicate strategies of navigating digital social environments and both their positive and negative consequences alongside the direct proof of gender acting as a performance (Butler, 2004, 2007 [1990]) to which some women face sanctions: either their presence in the community is rejected fully or accepted under the condition of positively responding to sexualized interactions. As a result, women are often viewed as inferior in gaming communities, forcing them to prove their worth to men.

One of the important gaps in the provided literature is non-Western cultural contexts and absence of topical literature for the FPS genre. Previous discussion was based on the data of mostly European, American and Australian participants, with Demir et al. (2024) studying the Turkish population. Potential differences from non-Western society need to be addressed in various aspects: how men's behaviors differ within the FPS community, how women view these instances of alternating interactions, and what other responses to negative experiences can be found among female gamers. Also, by focusing primarily on women's experiences, this paper centers the perspective of the subordinated group, which is understudied in the non-Western context.

Broader Studies of Gaming Communities

Nowadays the participation of female gamers goes beyond casual gaming - they can be seen competing in professional eSports arenas worldwide, where competition at high levels is essential for improving skills. As seen in Rogstad's (2022) paper, women often cannot properly access the same technical enhancement due to excessive online harassment. Zhou and Peterson outline the primary types of disruptive behaviors: rape jokes, nonconsensual sexual remarks, romantic advances, and rude comments about their appearance (2024). "Participating in banter and 'trash talk,' and adopting more in-your-face behavior and misogynistic taunting" are their general responses to the existing system (Rogstad, 2022, p. 204). Aguerri et al. (2023) further note that these disruptive behaviors are normalized within the gaming community, which makes their occurrences in women's interactions yet another strategy to fit in.

Even though Zhu et al.'s (2022) paper did not consider professional players, one of their findings revealed correlation between perceived power and prosocial behavior. If the feeling of influence on teammates is high within an individual, they are more likely to invest in supporting their teammates, encourage cooperation and thus reduce cyber-aggression within the team (Zhu et al., 2022). Conversely, obsessive passion in an individual's identity often fuels aggression when the player's performance is low (Zhu et al., 2022). In the professional eSports context, these dynamics need to be considered as well, since women who are often denied such leading positions may eventually find themselves in a vulnerable social position that restricts their in-game development.

Taken together, these studies demonstrate the broader implications of gender power dynamics within the gaming community. While some scholars may argue that toxic behavior is

normalized in this environment and cases of excessive cyber-violence are rare occurrences, it is crucial to understand the features of particular games and keep in mind the structural instances of hierarchies present across different genres. Moreover, considering the experiences of public-facing players is important, because they can be representative of casual female players' daily gaming sessions. However, the studies fail to account, firstly, for the forms of interactions and how they influence the coping mechanisms of women, and secondly, for the potential influence of public-facing players on strategies to navigate the FPS environment.

Analytical Expectations

Taking all of the above mentioned literature on gaming, Table 1 is made to present the types of experiences produced within the gaming environment that occur to women with their meaning for this research project and corresponding common instances of each experience mentioned in the literary sources. With such synthesis of theoretical dimensions of women's experiences, the data is conveniently organized into sections for further comparison with this project's outcomes. Each section helps to clarify what instances can be expected during the data collection processes of this study in the setting of Kazakhstan gaming community. Based on the data in the table, the research seeks to understand how these conceptual dimensions are produced within Kazakhstani participants, which patterns are present and which outcomes are new to the scholarly discussions.

However, it is worth noting that the research allows for new themes to emerge during the data collection and analysis processes, since gaming spaces are still understudied. The combination of these approaches is beneficial because it minimizes the risk of forcing data into rigid categories and allowing the outcomes to both contribute to scholarly discussion and extend existing theoretical insights. In the following section, I introduce the methodological strategies that will help me analyze these dimensions.

Table 1: Conceptual Dimensions of Women's Gaming Experiences

Dimension of experience	Description	Patterns presented in literature	Key sources
Social norms in gaming culture	Generally accepted behaviors and communication styles in games	Environment perceived as competitive, normalization of aggressive language, “trash talk”	Aguerri et al. (2023); Zhu et al. (2022)
Gender role	Gender visibility: Situations where players recognize another teammate as a female through various means	Usage of voice communication; feminine username, profile pictures; behavioral cues (heavy gender stereotypical); public identity	Zhou & Peterson (2024); Demir et al. (2024)
	Gender stereotypes: Beliefs about female players' abilities, roles, and behavior in games	Women may be perceived as less skilled, disinterested in games, less suited for competitive environment	Demir et al. (2024); Adefope & Bayraktar (2025)
Capturing Experiences	Forms of cyber-aggression: Specific hostile behaviors directed toward female players	Insults, sexual comments, sexual threats, exclusion, dismissive behavior	Zhou & Peterson (2024); Jagayat & Choma (2021)
	Coping strategies: Ways women respond to hostile environments	Gender concealment, ignoring harassment, adopting aggressive communication, forming safe groups	Scidone et al. (2024); Rogstad (2022)
	Cooperative behavior: Supportive or cooperative behavior between players	Instances of encouragement, teamwork, or defense of female players; usually not systemic	Zhu et al. (2022)

Methodology

Having outlined the literature gaps, the project utilizes qualitative research methods to explore women's experiences in different areas of playing a mainstream tactical multiplayer FPS game released in 2020. The game features team-based matches where two teams of five players compete against each other using a combination of weapon mechanics and character abilities. The teams, or *lobbies*, are created through an automated matchmaking system, which brings individuals into temporary groups based on factors such as similarities in their skill rating, or *rank*, and queue options⁴. Communication among the players occurs primarily through voice or text chat with occasional usage of built-in features, namely voice commands and markings on the in-game map. Before the match starts, the team can communicate during the "agent selection" screen - the initial process when the teammates are already found and put together, and they are expected to negotiate which characters they want to play as. The selection lists consist of mainly male and female characters of different races, appearances, and corresponding in-game abilities⁵. Agent selection screen also demonstrates each individual player's nickname, if they did not hide it manually. Within the match itself, the players may possess accessories such as different weapon color schemes (as called in the community, "skins") that vary in both shapes and colors. Skins are purchasable accessories in the game, thus, not everyone possesses them, and they are stylized differently - some are stereotypically feminine (pink or purple serves as a main color on a skin, they produce "cute" visual effects), some are stereotypically masculine (mainly muted colors in the scheme, emphasize aggressiveness), and some can be considered neutral (minimalistic color palettes, lack gender-coded visual effects).

Given the basic overview of the FPS, this capstone project centers on Kazakhstani female gamers that play this game either casually or with a public facing element (either streaming for entertaining purposes or competing on semi-professional arenas). 12 women were recruited through purposive and later snowballing sampling methods: an online survey was posted in the game-related Telegram channels that asked participants to indicate basic demographic information about themselves (age, gender, whether they play the game itself), which I used to determine whether the participant was suitable (for more information, see Appendices A and B); later, some of the participants recommended other potential candidates that were willing to partake in the research, and I reached out to them to fulfil the desired number of at least 10 interview participants (further in the research, this is shortened to "IP").

To investigate phenomena that occur in the digital social space, this study utilized feminist methodologies (that is - research approaches which center women's voices) to produce knowledge that critiques gender inequalities (Saeidzadeh, 2023). The data was collected with semi-structured interviews and online participant observations. The questions in the interviews were specifically constructed to understand women's experiences holistically through different dimensions, namely: (1) the perceived social norms and in-game culture, (2) the role of gender in

⁴ In the studied FPS, players can enter matchmaking either individually or as part of a pre-made group (e.g., duo or full team).

⁵ Here, "abilities" are referring to unique, agent-specific skills that players can activate during a match to influence gameplay beyond standard weapon use.

shaping interactions and expectations within matches, and (3) players' personal experiences of both supportive and hostile interactions during matches (for more information, see Appendices C and D).

A total of 10 interviews were conducted among the IPs. They were reportedly from urban backgrounds⁶, the majority in the process of gaining their degree⁷, aged between 18 and 23, all of whom had at least two years of experience playing the game. Most participants reported having regular access to gaming from home, but only one relied exclusively on computer clubs due to limited personal access. Additional information on the IPs can be found in the following section with findings of the study (see Table 2). The times for the interviews were discussed in Telegram chats with each participant individually, and all of the interviews were scheduled at times convenient for them, ranging from 10:00 AM to as late as 2:00 AM. Each interview lasted between 45 minutes and 2 hours, with an average duration of approximately 70-80 minutes. All interviews were conducted online via Zoom, using its built-in recording and transcription features to ensure accuracy and consistency in data collection. While my camera was consistently turned on for the whole duration of each interview, the participants were given the option to turn their cameras on or off, ensuring comfort and ethical sensitivity.

Simultaneously, online participant observations were conducted among 6 of the participants (further in the research, this is shortened to "OP", observation participants) from the whole sample by either joining their gaming session or observing private streams of their matches through the social media platform Discord. The first method was applicable in cases, where my rank matched the rank of the OP, and the FPS game mechanics allowed us to play together in one lobby. The second method was applied in every other instance of rank discrepancy. Both methods of observation made it possible for me to analyze in-game lobbies across different ranks rather than studying women's experiences only in one rank division, which increased the diversity of collected data. During these sessions, I particularly focused on the forms of communication that occurred between my OPs and their teammates, the language used in the conversations, the topics (game-related or personal) and frequency of their appearance during the match, and the initiation of interactions. The data was recorded in the form of field notes during the sessions and immediately after they ended, with their later integration during the thematic analysis. Online participant observations, in this case, do not serve as standalone findings, but are rather done to better understand the phenomena that semi-structured interviews described.

Gathered information was later open coded using NVivo software. Initial codes were grouped together, resulting in the following themes: social norms in gaming culture, gender visibility, gender stereotypes, forms of cyber-aggression, coping strategies, and cooperative behavior.

⁶ The question of residency was not asked at any stage of the study to protect the privacy of participants, but many respondents volunteered this information on their own.

⁷ The question of education was not asked at any stage of the study to protect the privacy of participants, but many respondents volunteered this information on their own.

Ethical considerations were followed on each step of the research process as well due to participants' sensitive experiences. All participants provided written informed consent online prior to data collection and were made aware of their right to withdraw at any stage without consequences during the process of signing the consent form and at the start of the interview. To ensure confidentiality, all identifying information was either removed from the transcripts manually or replaced (for instance, participants' names were redacted to "IP 1" and so on, based on the chronological order of the interviews). During participant observation, no identifying information was recorded as well, and the participants were given their attributed numbers from 1 to 6 based on the same chronological order. Given that some participants shared experiences of cyberaggression and distress, care was taken to conduct interviews in a supportive and non-judgmental manner, with an option to skip certain questions without any consequences. All data was stored securely on a personal laptop until the end of the analysis process, and it was used for academic purposes only.

Kazakhstani Women in FPS Community

The following sections present the findings of the study, addressing the main research question of how women in Kazakhstan experience and navigate social interactions in FPS gaming environments. The findings are organized into several key areas that correspond to conceptual dimensions of women's experiences described in Table 1. These sections extend the patterns identified in the literature by incorporating my participants' experiences. They are also arranged in the corresponding order of dimensions in Table 1.

However, before presenting the main findings, it is important to outline the characteristics of participants as well to demonstrate which factors potentially affect their gaming experiences. Thus, Table 2 summarizes reported in-game characteristics of each interviewed participant, including their approximate level of game proficiency (low, mid, or high); preferred gaming mode (casual or competitive); whether they prefer to play alone (solo), with one friend (duo), or in premade team of up to 5 people (friends); how they report to play in game (cautious⁸ or aggressive⁹ approaches); and whether they had public-facing experience at least once (streaming, playing on public arenas). As seen from the infographics, the sample of IPs varies across skills, gaming preferences, and engagement in public-facing activities, which can help with contextualizing further findings presented in the following sections. Similarly, Table 3 lists the participants' identification numbers and their approximate ranks, which helps to better understand the category (rank) to which the results belong.

All participants have also reported several years of gaming experience in the studied FPS by the time of the interviews (three and more years), and participants' engagement in the game greatly varied from person to person - the majority were casual players, but several girls mentioned that they participated in semi-professional tournaments, with one of them being former streamer and content creator. The competitive element of the game was one of the most

⁸ Cautious playstyle includes risk-averse actions, such as minimizing chances of mistakes in the match, avoiding high-pressure roles, and prioritizing team play.

⁹ Aggressive playstyle, on the contrary, is characterized by proactive engagement, higher willingness to take initiative, and acceptance of potential failures.

important factors for almost every respondent due to their in-game rank progression or consequent personal validation, which is often expressed in an opportunity to contest gender stereotypes by achieving higher skills.

I found these characteristics important to report, as the differences in each feature can potentially influence both exposure to and responses to social dynamics within the match. For example, a participant who only plays with her friends may experience more controlled, familiar interactions, compared to a participant that only plays solo, as the latter is exposed to a new social surrounding every match. Similarly, situating the lived experiences of female gamers within these categories makes it possible to interpret their reported interactions better, and further suggest areas for future research focusing on correlation between each characteristic and the types of interactions.

With these insights in mind, the following sections will present the results of the interviews with each of the participants according to the previously mentioned umbrella terms.

Table 2: In-Game Demographic Profile of Interview Participants

Participant	Rank	Preferred Game Mode	Who They Play With	Playstyle	Public-Facing Experience
IP 1	Low	Casual	Friends	Cautious	No
IP 2	Mid	Competitive	Duo	Cautious	No
IP 3	Low	Casual	Solo	Cautious	No
IP 4	Mid	Competitive	Friends	Aggressive	No
IP 5	Mid	Competitive	Friends	Cautious	No
IP 6	High	Competitive	Friends	Cautious	Partially
IP 7	High	Competitive	Friends	Cautious	Yes
IP 8	Low	Competitive	Solo	Cautious	No
IP 9	High	Competitive	Friends	Aggressive	Yes
IP 10	High	Competitive	Friends	Cautious	Yes

Table 3: In-Game Demographic Profile of Observation Participants

Participant	OP 1	OP 2	OP 3	OP 4	OP 5	OP 6
Rank	Low	High	Low	Mid	Mid	High

Social Norms and In-Game Culture

One of the important findings was obtained during the stage of participant recruitment. When posting a recruitment message in Telegram chats, my project received support from the administration of one of the chats by pinning my message on equal footing with other important messages in the community, and many members of both chats supported the recruitment process with “likes” put on my message. The finding is particularly interesting, considering the surrounding beliefs about the toxicity and aggressive behaviors that are normalized within the community (Aguerri et al., 2023; Zhu et al., 2022). This observation suggests that FPS gaming communities behave depending on the context in which the interaction occurs. My instance of communication appeared as supportive and cooperative, but studying my participants’ experiences demonstrated a more complex in-game dynamic.

Across the majority of my participants, their competitive orientation coexists with the frequent disfavor of playing alone, without at least one teammate with whom a relationship had previously been established (reported relationships were either a friend, a family member or a romantic partner), which corresponds to the literary observation by Uz and Cagiltay (2015) on the matter. According to participants, the preference for having someone to play with usually stems from either desire to spend quality time with the close circle of people or, conversely, reducing the risk of negative in-game interactions. Hence, IP 4 justifies this preference on both of these grounds, when asked why she likes the game: “It’s a way to hang out with friends. ... When I play with [them], there’s less of a chance that they’ll treat me badly”. On the other hand, IP 3 shared that if she is playing competitive mode of the game, she will “probably play solo ... because [she] perform[s] better on [her] own - that’s just how it is”, yet, when playing casual mode, she enjoys playing with friends for entertaining purposes. The majority of the participants reported having conflicting schedules with their friends as one of the reasons to play solitary; the other reason was losing interest towards the game overtime, as discussed by IP 3 and IP 5.

Contrary to the expectations of higher ranked women to have greater confidence in their performance and, consequently, being more proactive in team communication (Budgeon, 2014), IP 2, 5 and 7 with mid to high rank tended to communicate through text chat or other built-in features of the game more often, sometimes even delegating the voice chat communication to the person they are playing with in order to reduce the risk of “being yelled at” as was said by IP 2. Observations revealed hesitation to speak into the voice chat as well due to a fear, when I was observing OP 6’s gaming session. This demonstrates that the studied FPS is a highly social environment where players communicate meaningfully, and each conversation has a real emotional impact on the participants. Taken together, the social nature of the gaming environment is evident, as discussed by Steinkuehler and Williams (2006).

This digital social space is mainly described by the participants as male-dominated, which also supports the existing literature (Scidone et al., 2024), and hierarchical with individual performance weighing the most across both high and low ranks. The practical evidence for this phenomenon was speculated during the OP 4’s match, where a conflict arose due to her teammate’s poor performance and escalated quickly into verbal aggression. Although the

common player type was speculated to be “passive, quiet and non-verbal” during the matches, which was also supported based on the observations of OPs 1, 2, 3’s gaming sessions, the IPs often highlighted that “high rates of toxicity” were common findings within the community to an extent that some girls got used to it (IP 7, 8, 10) or quit the game entirely on this sole factor (IP 9). Many participants suggested that the subsequent atmosphere of the game can be guessed by the teammates behavior in the agent selection screen or in the early stages of the match.

Girls with average and below average performance indicators expressed their hopes that the rates of negative interactions drop with the increasing skill level, with the exception of IP 3, who believed that gender-based cyber-aggression can be expected across all in-game ranks. She proposed her view on the matter, describing it as “a daily reminder of what women face outside of game” - a clear connection between digital interactions and real-life social structures. In return, higher placing female players asserted that toxicity is still present within their game sessions, although the rates of it are decreased and rarely based on gender prejudices. Thus, IP 10 shares that “At higher levels, men treat women more fairly because it matters more how a person conveys information and plays the game”. The finding also corresponded to the online participant observation data, where OP 2 and 6 were positively engaging in the conversations with their teammates.

Yet, IP 6 talked about a fraudulent situation that occurred during a semi-professional tournament, where a male player was allegedly placed in an all-women team against the participant’s team. According to IP 6, the player was acting overly confident compared to the other members, which raised the mentioned suspicions. Taken together, these findings might suggest that negative interactions and their nature are reduced with rank progression, and liberal concept of merit works in such an environment, although not fully (Budgeon, 2014). However, the insight provided by IP 6 complicates this interpretation. It is important to acknowledge that the situation was framed as a “rumor”, but it still points to gender-based vulnerability.

Another interesting distinction that was drawn by the participants was regional: due to the internationality of the game, it has many servers that one can play on, and some girls noticed that cultural difference mattered during communication with teammates. Players from CIS or Post-Soviet countries consistently behaved more negatively towards them compared to other European regions, and, additionally, IP 10 believed North American servers to be the most respectful ones. Thus, the performance of masculinities varied from one cultural context to another, as was expected on the stage of literature review (Butler, 2004, 2007 [1990]; Connell & Messerschmidt, 2005). This also suggests that the FPS social norms are constructed by the hegemonic masculinity that prevails on one server or another.

Role of Gender

All of the participants acknowledged that gender was a marker of their own competence. Women are believed to be worse players by the FPS community, which lead to IP 7’s comments: “I have no right to play badly” - otherwise, all of the stereotypes about her not being able to perform well will be once again embedded in the digital society. IP 3’s comment on the discussed matter, “That’s because you see this as a matter of honor - you’re now playing for all

women”, clearly shows one of the potential reasons for the previous thought - she feels the need to prove not only her capabilities, but overall challenge the social stereotypes about female players. Simultaneously, other lower-rank participants also shared similar fears of contributing to these prejudices with their skills. Adding to Jagayat and Choma’s (2021) discussion of male cyber-aggression functioning as means to maintain dominance over the video-gaming environment, these findings can be interpreted as ways of female players subjecting themselves to these standards and having to prove their belonging to the space (Budgeon, 2014). Interestingly, the situation is completely opposite for women in high-ranking positions.

The said situation is better understood through the gaming terminology of “boosting” that was mentioned on numerous occasions by IP 6, IP 9, and IP 10. The term refers to a process of increasing a player’s rank by playing with someone more skilled. When a higher skilled person joins the lobby of a weaker teammate, their team has inherently bigger chances of winning the matches, leading to an unfair rank achievement. IP 9 believes that many women actually participate in such activities as the ones whose rank gets artificially increased, which therefore makes male players support the stereotypes of female players’ achieving their high rank through illegitimate means. In her opinion, most often it is women themselves who initiate boosting, as they are purposefully looking for a strong player to “hang out with and try to boost their rank”. Most commonly engagement in boosting is observed, as she explains, in romantic heterosexual couples, where a man wins the match because of his higher-skilled performance, while a woman “does nothing, but supports him, only him”. Generally, it is seen that IP 9 has a negative attitude towards boosting. With this information in mind, it can be hypothesized that both men and women participate in such activities as part of doing their gender (Butler, 2004, 2007 [1990]) - men take leadership roles, while women act as a more caring figure. The reinforcement of stereotypes, in which women take part, makes them seem like cheaters, which complicates the process of legitimizing their achievements even further.

Unexpectedly, a divergence of opinions happens within the participants regarding the topic of boosting, as IP 10 shows a more positive side of it. She acknowledges that, overall, it primarily leads to a worsening gaming experience for other people, who do not participate in it and randomly happen to be placed against the higher-skilled player. Yet, she explains that boosting can also help improve a player’s skill level, as it allows this individual who is “stuck¹⁰ at a certain rank” to experience gameplay at higher levels, understand how stronger teammates think, play, and “learn something new for themselves”. Similarly, IP 6 helped her female friend once through such illegitimate means (although, the participant herself does not consider this situation as boosting). The perception of who initiates boosting also diverges from IP 9’s understanding, as IP 10 believes that men primarily offer such illegitimate strategies, perhaps, due to the genuine willingness to spend quality time playing the FPS with their potential romantic partner. IP 6 agrees with the idea that men suggest boosting initially, but thinks of the other motive behind this: “I think guys hit on girls to impress them somehow... to make a

¹⁰ In the gaming context, a player can experience stagnation in their rank progression that seemingly cannot be explained solely by their performance.

connection, start a relationship, e-date¹¹ them, and all that. That's why they drag girls to the higher lobby". Considering all these findings, boosting might also be women's coping strategy, as engaging in it provides easier access into "more serious" lobbies, possible protection from other aggressive players, and makes navigating safety in the FPS environment not as emotionally draining.

Taken together, boosting acts as a gendered practice that makes the gaming community question women's achievements, when they have high rank. The reports suggest that it is often embedded in social dynamics, such as romantic heterosexual interactions, through which hegemonic masculinities and femininities are performed (Butler, 2004, 2007 [1990]; Connell & Messerschmidt, 2005). However, the practices can also occur within women's networks, functioning as a form of in-group support system that are explained in more detail in the next section of findings.

Continuing the discussion of gender performativity (Butler, 2004, 2007 [1990]), as reported by many interview participants, gender becomes visible through multiple means in the FPS game. However, unlike cases in the theoretical framework where gender is seen from gendered username or profile pictures (Demir et al., 2024), the participants generally did not recall any instances of their gender identity being spotted before they communicated in the voice chat - this suggests that gendered nicknames or cosmetic elements do not necessarily signal a feminine identity within my research. On the contrary, IP 3 outlined that the usage of feminine names in the users nickname suggested a male gender of this player. At the same time, several interviewees mentioned a widespread belief among the community that female players tend to choose certain characters, and if a person selects them during the agent selection screen, the team might be suspicious of this person's gender being female. Some participants, such as IPs 4, 5, 6, 7 and 8, identified with this pattern themselves, especially when recalling the earlier periods of getting into the game for the first time. They justified this selection with two main narratives: a certain group of agents is perceived as "easier to learn the game with" or they simply chose because of the character's "beautiful appearance", latter being suggested by only two of the respondents. The first group of "easier agents" is characterized by their in-game abilities - they are specifically aimed at supporting or "caring" for other players (Budgeon, 2014), for instance, by healing¹² them. Moreover, IP 7 mentioned that specifically her male friends had advised her to play these characters when she was just starting out in the game; IP 3's quote adds to the matter: "For many women, the "ceiling" in the game is playing with a high-ranking guy who wants you to run around the map¹³ and assist him". However, the participants reported that such preference is merely social, and female gamers can choose their character to play as based on individual preferences.

Although it might be seen as individual choice, care is often associated with femininity (Butler 2004, 2007 [1990]; Budgeon, 2014), and the instances described earlier by the

¹¹ Having a romantic relationship through online platforms; short for "electronic dating".

¹² During the FPS match, the agents take health damage from opponents; certain characters can use their abilities to replenish that health, helping teammates survive longer and continue playing.

¹³ In-game location where a match takes place.

participants are a clear example of reinforcement of gender norms in the FPS environment. The tendency for women to be guided into more supportive in-game roles shows that gendered expectations are imposed not only externally, but also through peer interactions. Thus, selecting “caring” agents becomes a performance of femininity (Butler 2004, 2007 [1990]; Budgeon, 2014), and contesting such standards is not well appreciated by the community either. IP 4, primarily playing more aggressive roles, often hears that “this is not [her] place; [her] place is in the kitchen” instead. IP 6 and 7, when occasionally choosing proactive agents in the game, also report receiving “surprised reactions” when performing well; yet, IP 7 adds that the compliments she receives are normally “backhanded” - “you play really well for a woman”.

Interestingly, the very fact of someone not using the voice chat can be a predictor of one’s gender identity, as was highlighted by the several interviewees. Thus, both visibility and concealment of female gender affects the type of interactions that one potentially faces regardless. Participants reported receiving sexual comments, flirting, and even “threats of sexual violence”, when speaking in voice chat. In cases of complete silence from the player, this sometimes produces negative signs that a female teammate is present but unwilling to provide in-game information or “callouts”, which are essential for coordinating team strategy. As one respondent notes, “they will further blame this person - who might not be a woman after all - for every lost round”. Both instances correspond to Zhou and Peterson (2004) findings about excessive attention towards women in online gaming communities. In this sense, gender acts as a trigger for sexualization, objectification or victimization which in turn reinforces the outcast status for female players. Mixed views were sparked by this discussion, with some of the participants holding positive expectations by noting that the female player base grows in the FPS and they can expect subsequent tolerance towards them in the future, and with others being more pessimistic about fast change.

Another unexpected theme that was raised during the interviews was the dynamics between the female players. Six participants expressed hope for female solidarity during matches, noting that their shared experience of facing harassment appears to be the common ground on which they should unite and support each other. However, female-to-female conflicts were also addressed by seven of the interviewees, which occur in the forms of criticism, toxic competition, and insults. Participants consistently described these instances as rare, yet emotionally stronger, since “criticism from women feels worse than from men”. They attributed this feeling to a broken expectation of mutual understanding, when encountering another woman competing for male approval. For instance, IP 2 described a situation where another player began criticizing her gameplay, and the female romantic partner joined the critique by verbally attacking and insulting the participant. She perceived this interaction as a female player “seeking validation from her boyfriend”, and described it as particularly upsetting. The finding strongly corresponds to a concept of multiple femininities (Schippers, 2007), which suggests that women may reproduce hierarchical gender relations by distancing themselves from other women.

Capturing Actual Experiences

While previous sections described primarily the beliefs and norms that surrounded female experiences, all of the interviews presented various positive and negative interactions and their interpretations. As briefly mentioned in the previous sections, the negative interactions are accompanied by various forms of cyber-aggression (Jagayat & Choma, 2021), and the interviewees described a wide range of them, with the most common form of hostility being “gender-based harassment”, as interpreted by the majority of respondents. Based on every interview responses, the research summarizes that the common in-game interactions follow such scenario:

1. A female player tries to read the lobby before and right after the match starts and listens to the tone of other teammates, observes their behavior in order to assess the risk of her presence in the lobby;
2. Based on the nature of the environment, she makes a decision whether to speak, if the lobby feels safe, or to stay silent with occasional usage of text chat in other cases;
3. If cyber-aggression occurs, a player responds by muting¹⁴ the toxic player(s), ignoring them, or responding to them back;
4. After the match ends, a player might not take the interaction personally or might feel frustrated and stressed, depending on the extent of cyber-aggression and individual emotional state. If the latter happens, a player can recover fast or take a prolonged period of not playing the game as a coping strategy, lasting from several minutes to years.

This subsection of the findings looks specifically at other forms of negative interactions that my participants experiences, their coping strategies, and cooperative behaviors that they either received or produced.

Starting with the different forms of cyber-aggression that were not addressed in the research so far, IP 1 shared a story of unwanted attention and advances from a minor. Once, while chatting with her in a voice chat, a reportedly 12-year-old boy started hitting on her when she was 20 or 21. This instance adds to Demir et al.’s (2024) discussion of stereotypical behavior observed in teenage boys within the gaming environment, and suggests that performances of hegemonic masculinity are present from a young age. Moreover, it can be hypothesized that the normalization of women’s low social place in the FPS potentially leads to masculinity overriding other social hierarchies such as age differences.

Another unexpected insight was given by IP 2, when she shared that certain in-game actions that imitated sexual movements were considered harassment by her. Analytically, this demonstrates that cyber-aggression goes beyond verbal modes of interactions, and it can take behavioral digital form. The FPS itself does not contain any kinds of sexual movements, but it allows characters’ proximity and animation, and these means were possibly used in this case. Although the actors of such processes were not explicitly stated by the participant, her case of presumably a male player imitating sexual acts with her might point to sexualization of women’s presence in the game. The instance also points to a performance of hegemonic masculinity with

¹⁴ In the studied FPS, there is an in-game option to manually mute each teammate and opponent - thus, not hearing or not seeing their speech in the voice or text chat.

such digital sexual assertion over a woman (Butler, 2004, 2007 [1990]; Connell & Messerschmidt, 2005). Adding to the discussion, IP 3 noticed that men “like to infantilize women in games” and often ask about their age, assuming their views as “the younger, the better”. Together, these instances can indicate that men value women as objects of attraction due to their performance of more subordinate positions, which corresponds to the overall picture of hegemonic femininity (Butler 2004, 2007 [1990]; Schippers, 2007). Yet, if a woman does not return men’s feelings, as observed by IP 8, they “suddenly change... their attitude and start treating her badly instead”, or treat with retaliatory hostility.

Participants also described cases of verbal aggression unrelated to gender being common, but the incidents were framed as “typical toxicity of every competitive digital environment”. However, IP 3 noted that many insults commonly used in the Russian-speaking gaming environment are linguistically gendered in the feminine form. Similar instance was observed in OP 6’s match, where her teammate used gendered language (“девчушка”, or “little girl”) as insults toward another male player. More severe situations included unwanted sexual attention and intentional sabotage of matches, where characters’ abilities were used to kill their own teammate, regardless of the gender. In cases where gender mattered after losing the game, IP 6 reported stalking of her identity outside the game - the user found her Telegram account and started messaging her threats and sending her location to her.

Beyond individual incidents, the participants described psychological impacts of repeated negative behavior towards them. Two of them reported leaving the game for a long period of time (up to a year) to “recover mentally”, more commonly they expressed that gender-based remarks created additional pressure during matches, as they felt that their performance would be judged as representative of female players in general. In such situations, negative comments led to stress, nervousness, or difficulties concentrating during the match - after such games, many participants reported the need to learn how to distance themselves from the in-game interactions quickly, eventually nurturing ignorance towards the conflicts that included toxic communication with male teammates.

Another unique coping strategy was suggested by IP 10 - she adheres to the principle: “I treat others the way they treat me”, meaning if people start criticizing her, she starts firing back. She noted that she doesn’t need anyone to stand up for her, because she herself “starts lashing out in response”, which indicates a performance of alternative femininities (Schippers, 2007; Budgeon, 2014). Similarly, IP 9 often imitates a man’s voice at the start of the game to avoid questions, teasing, or unwanted attention, while IP 7 likes to respond by directing sexist remarks back at men, telling them, for example, “Go to war” or “Go fix my car”, which can also be interpreted as an act of alternative femininity.

Despite the prevalence of hostile experiences, the most positive interactions were reported to be games containing supportive teammates who defended female players during conflicts. One of the most frequently mentioned situations involved interventions of other players into the conflict and subsequent support of the respondents. They described such moments as “meaningful, small ways” that ultimately improved the overall gaming experience

for the rest of the match. OP 5's gaming session demonstrated such a case of cooperative behavior, as in her lobby the teammates were actively communicating, coordinating the gameplay, and using positive reinforcement. In addition, many participants highlighted playing with friends as the trusted means to avoid toxicity altogether. Such environments seem to be the most favorable to the female part of the FPS community. Similar experiences happened during female-to-female interactions, with four respondents even noticing the change in the atmosphere when encountering another woman in their team: they described the effects as "more relaxed communication", "more strategic teamwork", and definitely "less fear of harassment". The presence of two and more female players usually creates a micro safe-spaces inside matches, as discussed by Scidone et al. (2024).

Discussion

Table 4: Reported Dimensions of Women's Experiences in Kazakhstani Setting

Dimension of experience	Description	Patterns presented in the research
Social norms in gaming culture	Generally accepted behaviors and communication styles in games	• Players are primarily evaluated based on individual skill and performance; • The FPS is perceived to be male-dominated and constructed by unequal power dynamics; • Cyber-aggression is normalized; • Players prefer to play with known people; • Rank influences gender-based inequalities and cyber-aggression; • Gender norms vary from culture to culture.
Gender role	Gender visibility: Situations where players recognize another teammate as a female through various means	• Usage of voice chat; • Silence in voice chat; • Agent selection; • Cautious playstyle with the support of other teammates.
	Gender stereotypes: Beliefs about female players' abilities, roles, and behavior in games	• Women are perceived as less skilled; • High-rank women are suspected of boosting; • Women belong in supportive positions; • Belief that women should be passive and agreeable; • Women's success is perceived as exceptional; • Women are subjects to objectification and sexualization; • Women are expected to support each other.
Capturing Experiences	Forms of cyber-aggression: Specific hostile behaviors	• Gender-based verbal harassment (insults,

	directed toward female players	linguistically gendered insults and criticism); ● Backhanded compliments; ● Sexual harassment and threats of sexual violence; ● Behavioral harassment; ● Stalking and cross-platform harassment; ● Infantilization; ● Retaliatory hostility; ● Non-gendered hostility; ● Gameplay sabotage; ● Social exclusion and blame; ● Intra-gender harassment.
	Coping strategies: Ways women respond to hostile environments	● Avoidance of negative interactions; ● Reading the lobby before match; ● Selective social play with safety networks; ● Immediate in-game responses (muting, ignorance); ● Confrontational strategies of active resistance; ● Identity masking; ● Emotional regulation; ● Withdrawal and breaks from the FPS; ● Using other players' support to defend themselves; ● Boosting.
	Cooperative behavior: Supportive or cooperative behavior between players	● Peer intervention during conflicts; ● Playing with trusted networks; ● Female solidarity.

Taken everything together, Table 4 summarizes the experiences that my participants acknowledged during their interviews and that were also speculated during the online participant observations. Compared to the literary discussions of what each dimension of experiences included, my findings reveal additional information on the topics of social norms in gaming culture, gender visibility, gender stereotypes, forms of cyber-aggression, coping strategies, and cooperative behavior. The large amount of unique reported experiences show that the gender dynamics in the FPS environment are worth studying, since they disclose numerous phenomena that are currently under-researched.

It is evident that gender functions as one of the most prominent markers of perceived competence within the FPS community. This finding corresponds to the previous research which shows women experience stronger scrutiny of their performance and are often expected to justify their presence in the community (Demir et al., 2024; Zhou & Peterson, 2024). The various statements from the participants that they feel upset when performing badly is a sign of internalization of such beliefs. Simultaneously, skills gained by the female part of the community can operate as a form of symbolic resistance - outperforming male participants not only lifted the self-confidence of the participants, but also rarely made male gamers thoughtful of their previous discussions regarding the women's abilities to play the game.

Another important finding concerns the mechanisms through which gender becomes visible in matches. Despite the theoretical belief of nicknames and in-game cosmetics being the main predictors of one's gender, the findings reveal the complexity behind assessing the players' gender identity. Although the participants identified voice communication as an inevitable way of disclosing their gender, other ways, such as lack of communication or character selection, cannot be ignored in this discussion. Language itself becomes the primary medium for the reproduction of gender hierarchies within the team - and not only directly, but also by using femininities to insult a person regardless of their actual gender.

Participants described multiple strategies for navigating the openly agreed hostile environment by limiting voice chat usage, delegating communication to their duo, or playing primarily with a trusted company. These instances correspond to Scidone et al.'s findings (2024) on coping mechanisms among women. However, it is worth noting that the concealment of gender does not necessarily guarantee the absence of negative interactions. The paradox shows the structural nature of gender dynamics within competitive gaming environments, where women must balance visibility, credibility, and safety in order to enjoy the gaming sessions on equal footing with men.

Unexpectedly complex dynamics of female-to-female interactions suggests the presence of multiple femininities in the FPS community which can be studied in a separate research. From the perspective of Schippers (2007), such dynamics may represent attempts by some women to distance themselves from other female players in order to gain acceptance within a male-dominated field, however they thereby reproduce the same hierarchical structures that marginalize women in gaming spaces. Moreover, they are treated with more consideration by

other female players which can lead to a vicious cycle of marginalization of female presence in the community.

Lastly, the respondents' answers helped in suggesting that gaming norms are not universally uniform but rather shaped through the cultural context. If the CIS community is reportedly perceived as the most toxic one, North American servers can be treated as relatively safer for women to play on. These results can suggest future comparative studies that could help in determining the cultural factors that affect women's comfort while playing the FPS games.

Conclusion

This study, although not representative of the whole Kazakhstani FPS community, sheds a light on the problems many women potentially face during their gaming sessions. It can be evident that these spaces still consist of gender inequalities by their conscious and subconscious rejection of female presence during in-game matches. Female players acknowledge that this rejection exists universally, but outlined the different ways of how it's portrayed when playing with CIS and international community. Alongside this, language plays an important role in reinforcing the existing toxic gender dynamics in the environment. At the same time, the research outlines the various ways for women to cope with the negative encounters, yet the findings suggest that they may not always be efficient to eliminate toxic behaviors.

Overall, this study contributes to the scholarly discussions of digital gaming spaces by presenting the viewpoint of marginalized communities. By centering women's perspectives, this project seeks to go beyond identifying the women's experiences - it makes their voices heard and taken into account.

Future research can potentially focus on exploring cultural dimensions of gaming further by comparing different regions' play styles, interactions, and coping strategies. Additionally, the dynamics between female players can benefit from deeper investigation. It would also be beneficial to conduct a more representative study of Kazakhstani women's experiences not only in the sole FPS game, but across different games and genres, in a form of qualitative research - this might further indicate the severity of some issues that women face. Finally, this project can also help in better policy-making when game designers consider improving the game inclusivity and reducing hostile environments.

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Appendix A

[Recruitment message]

Hi! My name is Zauze Armankzy, and I'm a student at Nazarbayev University, currently working on my capstone project titled "Gender Dynamics of Players in Online Video Games". I'm studying how women in Kazakhstan experience online multiplayer FPS games, specifically [the name of the FPS I am studying]. I look at how they deal with both positive and negative interactions, and how they respond to different interactions in games themselves.

I'm looking for female gamers aged 18-30 who play [the name of the FPS I am studying] (either casually or as streamers/content creators). Participation is voluntary, and your identity will remain confidential. The study involves a short interview or observation session (depending on your preference), and will help raise awareness about women's experiences in online gaming communities.

If you're interested, please fill out this short form: [Google Form link]

[In the recruitment form]

This short form is to determine if you are eligible and interested in participating in a study about women's experiences in online video games. This form is voluntary and all of your data will remain confidential.

1. How old are you? [short answer]
2. How do you identify yourself?
 - Male
 - Female
 - Other
 - Prefer not to answer
3. Are you a citizen of Kazakhstan?
 - Yes
 - No
4. Do you play [the name of the FPS I am studying]?
 - Yes, regularly
 - Yes, sometimes
 - No
5. How would you describe yourself as a gamer?
 - Casual gamer
 - Public-facing gamer
 - Prefer not to answer
6. Would you like to participate in an interview or observation session for this study?
 - Yes, I'm interested in an interview
 - Yes, I'm interested in game observation
 - Both

- No

7. Please leave your contact (Telegram, or Discord tag) so I can reach you for more details.
[short answer]

Appendix B

[Сообщение о наборе участников]

Здравствуйте! Меня зовут Зауре Арманкызы, я студентка Назарбаев Университета и в настоящее время работаю над своим дипломным проектом под названием «Гендерная динамика игроков в онлайн-видеоиграх».

Моя работа посвящена тому, как девушки из Казахстана играют в онлайн-шутеры, особенно в [название FPS, который я изучаю]. Я анализирую, какие положительные и отрицательные взаимодействия они испытывают и как они себя ведут в игровой среде. Я ищу девушек 18-30 лет, которые играют в [название FPS, который я изучаю] (либо в качестве любителей, либо в качестве стримеров/создателей контента). Участие является добровольным, и ваша личность останется конфиденциальной. Исследование включает в себя короткое интервью или наблюдение за игровой сессией (в зависимости от ваших предпочтений) и поможет повысить осведомленность о женском опыте в онлайн-игровых сообществах.

Если вы заинтересованы, пожалуйста, заполните эту короткую форму: [ссылка на Google форму]

[В форме для набора участников]

Эта короткая форма предназначена для определения вашей пригодности и заинтересованности в участии в исследовании о женском опыте в онлайн-видеоиграх. Заполнение формы является добровольным, и все ваши данные останутся конфиденциальными.

1. Сколько вам лет? [краткий ответ]
2. Как вы себя идентифицируете?
 - Мужчина
 - Женщина
 - Другое
 - Предпочитаю не отвечать
3. Вы гражданин(-ка) Казахстана?
 - Да
 - Нет
4. Вы играете в [название FPS, который я изучаю]?
 - Да, часто
 - Да, иногда
 - Нет
5. Как бы вы описали себя как игрока?
 - Обычный игрок
 - Публичный игрок (стример, создатель контента)
 - Предпочитаю не отвечать

6. Хотели бы вы принять участие в интервью или наблюдении для этого исследования?
- Да, хочу принять участие в интервью
 - Да, хочу, чтобы за моей игрой наблюдали
 - Оба варианта
 - Нет
7. Пожалуйста, оставьте ваш контакт (Telegram, Discord тэг), чтобы я могла связаться с вами для уточнения деталей. [краткий ответ]

Appendix C

Interview Guide in English

INTRODUCTORY SECTION

1. How long have you been playing [FPS name]? Do you still play? How often?
 - a. What has influenced how often you play?
2. Do you like this game? Why?
3. Which game modes do you play?
 - a. How important is the competitive aspect of [FPS name] to you? What is your rank?
4. Do you play with people you know or alone? Why? Which do you prefer more? Why?
5. The game offers several ways of communication: voice chat, text chat, voice commands, and pings. What do you use to communicate with other players? What do you find most convenient?
 - a. Why do you (not) use certain communication methods?
 - b. How often do you use voice chat? In what situations do you use it?
6. Which servers do you play on? Do you communicate only in Russian?

GENERAL ATMOSPHERE

7. How would you describe a typical lobby in [FPS name]? Who does it mainly consist of? What is the general atmosphere?
8. What kind of teammates do you usually encounter? How would you describe yourself as a player?
9. How important do you think communication is in the game?
10. Do you think there are any unwritten rules in [FPS name]? What are they?
11. Overall, do you enjoy communicating with other players in [FPS name]? With which players? Why?
 - a. OR could you describe an experience that made you stop using voice chat or not want to start using it at all?
12. Do you feel like you belong to the [FPS name] community? Why? What factors influence this?
13. Are there moments at the beginning of a match that shape the atmosphere of the game? Can you describe them?

GENDER IDENTITY

14. Do you think men and women play [FPS name] differently? What are the key differences? What about communication - does it differ as well?
15. Do other players often notice that you are a woman? What do you think are the signs of your gender? Are you comfortable showing these signs?

16. What do people usually say about your gender?
17. How often do you encounter stereotypical views such as “a woman’s place is in the kitchen” or “girls can’t play”? What do you personally think about these stereotypes?
18. Do you think people treat you differently when you use text chat versus voice chat? How?
19. Have you ever changed the way you speak or behave in the game? Did you notice any changes in how others treated you?
20. Do you think stereotypes like “women can’t play” affect your playstyle, agent choice, or communication with the team?

РАЗНЫЕ ОПЫТЫ В ИГРАХ

21. Can you describe the most positive experience you’ve had in [FPS name]?
 - a. Do such situations happen often?
 - b. Do you often receive support from other players?
 - c. Has anyone ever stood up for you in a match? Who was it? How did you feel afterward?
22. Can you describe the most unpleasant experience you’ve had?
 - a. Do such situations happen often? How do you react?
 - b. What do you think caused that conflict?
 - c. How would you describe this negative experience?
 - d. Did this situation affect your performance in the game?
 - e. Did you try to change the negative attitude toward you?
23. In general, what challenges do you think women face when playing [FPS name]?
 - a. In your experience, does this happen only in [FPS name], or in other online games as well? Why do you think so?
 - b. Have there been situations where men experienced similar treatment? Why?
24. In your experience, who usually initiates negative behavior in matches?
25. Do you think this kind of treatment toward women exists outside of games?

REACTIONS

26. How do you feel after playing [FPS name]?
27. Do these feelings stay with you, or do you recover quickly?
28. What advice would you give to other women who might be affected by negative treatment? What helps you personally?

BROADER IMPLICATIONS

29. Do you think these problems only affect women in Kazakhstan?
30. Do you think attitudes toward women in gaming are changing overall?
31. What do you think could make gaming spaces more comfortable for women?

Appendix D

Interview Guide in Russian

ОЗНАКОМИТЕЛЬНАЯ ЧАСТЬ

1. Как давно вы начали играть в [название FPS]? Продолжаете ли играть сейчас? Как часто?
 - а. Что повлияло на частоту игр?
2. Вам нравится эта игра? Почему?
3. В какие режимы вы играете?
 - а. Насколько вам важен соревновательный элемент в [название FPS]? Какое у вас звание?
4. Вы играете со знакомыми или в одиночку? Почему? А как вы больше предпочитаете? Почему?
5. В игре есть несколько способов коммуникации: голосовой, текстовый чат, голосовые команды и просто пинги. Что вы используете для общения с другими игроками? А что для вас больше удобно?
 - а. Почему вы (не) используете...?
 - б. Как часто вы пользуетесь голосовым чатом? В какие моменты вы им пользуетесь?
6. На каких серверах вы играете? Вы общаетесь только на русском языке?

ОБЩАЯ АТМОСФЕРА

7. Как бы вы описали типичное лобби в [название FPS]? Из кого оно состоит преимущественно? Какая атмосфера в игре?
8. С какими тиммейтами вы в основном сталкиваетесь? Как бы вы описали себя как игрока?
9. Как думаете, насколько важно общение в самой игре?
10. Как вы думаете, есть ли какие-нибудь негласные правила в [название FPS]? Какие?
11. В целом, вам приятно общаться с другими игроками в [название FPS]? С какими? Почему?
 - а. ИЛИ можете пожалуйста рассказать, был ли у вас какой-нибудь опыт, который либо заставил вас прекратить использовать голосовой чат или даже не пытаться начинать подобное общение?
12. Вы ощущаете, что принадлежите к сообществу [название FPS]? Почему? Какие факторы влияют на это?
13. Бывают ли какие-то моменты в самом начале матча, которые задают дальнейшую атмосферу игры? Можете их описать?

ГЕНДЕРНАЯ ИДЕНТИЧНОСТЬ

14. Как вы думаете, мужчины и женщины играют в [название FPS] по-разному? Какие ключевые отличия? А что насчет коммуникации - она тоже разная?
15. Другие игроки часто замечают, что вы женщина? Что может быть по вашему мнению знаками о вашем гендере? Вам комфортно показывать эти знаки?
16. Что обычно вам говорят по поводу вашего пола?
17. Как часто вы сталкиваетесь с (подобным) стереотипным мышлением, что “место женщины на кухне” или “девушки не умеют играть”? Что вы думаете про эти стереотипы сами?
18. Как вы думаете, меняется ли к вам отношение когда вы используете текстовый чат вместо голосового и наоборот? Как?
19. Меняли ли вы когда-либо манеру речи или поведение в игре? Замечали ли вы, что отношение к вам меняется из-за этого?
20. Как вы считаете, влияют ли стереотипы вроде «женщины не умеют играть» на ваш стиль игры? На выбор агентов? На разговоры с командой?

РАЗНЫЕ ОПЫТЫ В ИГРАХ

21. Можете описать самый позитивный опыт, который у вас был в [название FPS]?
 - a. Такие ситуации часто происходят с вами?
 - b. Часто ли вы получаете поддержку от игроков?
 - c. За вас когда-нибудь заступались в матче? Кто это был? Как вы себя ощущали после этого?
22. Можете описать самый неприятный опыт?
 - a. Такие ситуации часто происходят с вами? Как вы реагируете?
 - b. Как вы считаете, что послужило причиной этому конфликту?
 - c. Как бы вы назвали этот негативный опыт?
 - d. Эта ситуация повлияла на вашу собственные способности в игре?
 - e. Вы пытались изменить негативное отношение к вам?
23. В целом, как вы думаете, с какими проблемами сталкиваются девушки играя в [название FPS]?
 - a. На вашем опыте, это происходит только в [название FPS] или в других онлайн играх тоже? Как вы думаете, почему?
 - b. Были ли ситуации, когда такому отношению подвергались и мужчины? почему?
24. На вашем опыте, кто инициирует негативное поведение в матчах?
25. По вашему мнению, такое отношение к девушкам существует вне игр?

РЕАКЦИЯ

26. Что вы чувствуете после игр в [название FPS]?
27. Эти переживания остаются с вами, или вы обычно быстро отходите от них?

28. Какой бы вы дали совет другим девушкам, которые могут переживать из-за негативного к себе отношения? Что помогает вам на практике?

БОЛЕЕ ШИРОКИЕ ПОСЛЕДСТВИЯ

29. Как вы думаете, подобные проблемы происходят только с женщинами в Казахстане?
30. А в целом меняется ли отношение игрового сообщества к присутствию женщин?
31. Как вы думаете, что бы помогло бы сделать игровые пространства более комфортными для женщин?