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EXPLORING GENDER STEREOTYPES AMONG FILIPINA GAMERS OF MOBILE LEGENDS: A PHENOMENOLOGICAL STUDY

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ABSTRACT

In the present time, not only men but also women feel a lot of pressure to have skills and strengths that would fit into society's standards in the online gaming world. This study aims to investigate how Filipina gamers experience gender stereotyping and how they cope with the negative stereotypes they have encountered while playing Mobile Legends (ML). The study consisted of sixteen (16) Filipina participants coming from different places in the Philippines. A qualitative method was used through a hermeneutic phenomenological approach to better understand the common gender stereotypes experienced by Filipina ML players and their ways of coping. Based on the findings, the Filipina gamers of ML are being stereotyped as weak and incompetent because of their gender identity. They are also being underestimated and discriminated against as they are exploited as support hero characters, and lesbianism is being attributed to them due to their presence in the male-dominated game community. In terms of coping mechanisms, Filipina ML players tend to ignore these negative comments, dedication, and enthusiasm to play well, and their time of playing is limited. Future studies may consider the experiences of female players in other online gaming platforms and game categories to achieve varied results.

Keywords: Gender stereotypes; Mobile legends; Filipina gamers; Esports; Philippines.

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INTRODUCTION

Stereotypes are the generalized assessments of people towards a person's characteristics. It is a faulty assessment of a person that can induce negative expectations and views of oneself that can affect one's performance in any aspect of life (Hentschel et al., 2019). Gender stereotyping can constrain both men's and women's inherent skills and abilities, as well as their professional and educational experiences and optimal life opportunities. Women's stereotypes are the direct consequence of deeply embedded attitudes, moral standards, and prejudices against women. Those who have been used to justify and sustain historical gender power inequities as well as misogynistic views that suppress women's development (Roszbach, 2016). Thus, throughout history, general societal standards for females have indeed been ascertained. In the last few decades, society has steadily raised its expectations of women. Feminists are aware that their actions and words will be scrutinized and judged by everyone around them.

As a result, many women place a high value on their physical attributes, attempting to prove their ability, gain self-worth, and find happiness through them. Hence, society's perception of female ability is challenged in the gaming industry. Particularly in Mobile Legends it is a game that can be played at any time and even from any geographic region in the digital world as long as a person has internet connectivity. There are many online games available these days, most of which are Mobile Legends: Bang Bang, Shanghai

Moonton Technology, a game production company located in Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia, created and published this. The game has announced that it has received over 500 million downloads and 75 million active players since its initial release in 2016 (Mawalia, 2020). Mobile Legends, abbreviated as ML, is a game created and published by Moonton. Mobile Legends is among the most popular online games, with individuals from all nations, races, and genders playing it. Ever since its release in 2016, the latter game has grown in fame and popularity around the world, particularly in Southeast Asia. It reached an all-time high with one billion downloads and 100 million monthly gamers. To provide a specific example, the Philippines has 100 million registered Mobile Legends users and 25 million monthly active users (Rossel, 2021).

In the United Kingdom, people who are aged 16 and above have found that 43% of female respondents are playing mobile games (Clement, 2021). Meanwhile, according to Statista Research Department (2022), 73% of women in the Philippines are playing mobile games. Furthermore, 75% of respondents in a March 2020 survey conducted by Rakuten Insight in the Philippines indicated that they now have to play online games. According to the survey, role-playing games are the most popular genre among Filipino online gamers. This really shows that Filipino people are more engaged in playing mobile games than other women of different races. Although the gaming world is known to be dominated by men, much of the research is focused on men, highlighting the male-dominated truth of the matter in the gaming industry. One man is said to rule the gaming world. Hence, stereotypical attitudes toward women in gaming are also particularly alarming. Some women have reported unwanted threats, abusive behavior, and perhaps even harassment from several other gamers, particularly men. In the gaming world, there is always a large wall comparing women's abilities to those of men. According to Williams et al. (2009), 40 percent of the games examined in his study had no female characters, owing to the perception that female gamers are less skilled than males. As a result, females are generally viewed as inert and perhaps dependent on men, and therefore, they are probably considered less competent (Ivory et al., 2014), which has been supported by research showing that male game characters interact in command structures and with achievement-based responsibilities more frequently than females (Thompson & Zerbinos, 1995).

Women in Games is a non-profit association dedicated to achieving gender equality and fairness within the gaming and esports industries. However, according to them, the gaming industry seems to be "one of the most gender imbalanced of all technology industries" because women are significantly underrepresented as executive managers of game makers and account for only 5% of competitive e-gamers. As a possible consequence, despite the fact that there are many female gamers, no women are represented in the Philippine esports in the Mobile Legends league. However, the Philippines is known for having the most active gamers and the most played games. Within the Philippines alone, there are over 100 million registered users and 25 million monthly active users. Mobile Legends is perhaps the biggest phenomenon in the Philippines and has been one of the largest mobile esports games since around 2021 (Game High PH, 2021). Regardless of the fact that the Philippines has the highest number of active users, female gamers continue to be underrepresented in e-sports. In Mobile Legends, well-known esports teams include Blacklist International, BREN Esports, ECHO Loud Aura, Next Play Evos Philippines, and several others. However, some of the teams competing for a spot in national competitions are made up entirely of men, and none of them have female players.

Moreover, gender stereotypes toward females in the gaming industry must be given focus. Especially considering the fact that men remain dominant in the gaming world, the field should also be open to female players regardless of gender perception. Since the digital sports and esports industries in the Philippines are expanding, it's indeed significant to mention that the industry still favors one gender, which is men. When it comes to online games such as Mobile Legends, women are less likely to be on the same team as men in the Philippines. It is, therefore, interesting to emphasize that the conversation about gender and esports is built on broader cultural and research debates about gender, game features, and

technology. Hence, women should not be stereotyped as weak and dependent on men, despite the fact that both men and women can play Mobile Legends, and stereotyping should be avoided. The focus of this research is on finding one's place in the world of gaming while also accepting society's perceptions. This appears to imply that the female online gaming experience may differ significantly from that of men. As a result, it is critical to fully comprehend females' personal experiences, as well as the potential impact of such online social interactions, not only on the future play but also on their life experiences.

The purpose of this research is to investigate gender stereotypes in the gaming world, particularly among women. Additionally, even though the gaming world is dominated by men, there is a need to recognize those who can play well. The researchers of this study discovered a gap in which some related studies are foreign, and there is a lack of local studies conducted in the Philippines. As a result, the goal of this study is to conduct research on gender stereotyping in the gaming world and how it affects Filipina gamers. The findings of this study have a significant role as this can benefit society, considering that gender stereotyping among Filipina gamers has been rampant nowadays. Discrimination and disrespect for women who play online games have just proved that disempowering aspects continue to exist. The study was conducted to encourage everyone to be neutral regarding their perception of gamers, particularly those from the Philippines. Thus, hopefully, it will help online players realize that they have increased diversity to welcome an array of choices and opportunities inside the gaming world. Also, to end this kind of stigma, fight ingrained stereotypes, and change world view.

Research Questions

Specifically, the present study aimed to answer the following questions:

1. What gender stereotypes do Filipina gamers experience when playing Mobile Legends?
2. How do Filipina gamers manage to cope with these stereotypes in relation to their gender as players of Mobile Legends?

LITERATURE REVIEW

Gender stereotype is an oversimplified representation of expectations regarding traits or features or roles that women and men either possess or should possess or actually play. Once gender stereotypes constrain women's capacity to improve their individual capabilities, it can be detrimental. Gender stereotypes, according to Hentschel et al. (2019), are conceptions about what men and women should be like, and there is usually a lot of agreement regarding them. In the study of Kaye and Pennington (2016), evidence suggests that females are frequently perceived as silent or reliant on males, and they are perceived as less than skilled. The study demonstrates stereotype threat consequences in the age of technology gaming, notably for women in online games who may face this sort of threat in their own "actual world" gaming experiences. In addition, according to Mojica (2022), the study's findings indicate that women in the game industry are notably under pressure to prove themselves to other gamers as a result of perceiving women as weak and reliant on men.

Mobile Legends: Bang Bang

Moonton Technology, a Chinese developer, created Mobile Legend Co., Ltd., as well as Shanghai Mulong Network and Technology, released on July 14, 2016 (Adriyana, 2022). Mobile Legend Bang Bang is a phone-only game in which two opposing teams must defend the tower in order to prevent it from being taken over by the opponent. Furthermore, mobile legends are extremely popular and in high demand among a wide range of demographics, from teenagers to adults. The latter game is extremely popular in Asia, with up to ten million accounts having downloaded it from the Google Play Store. This game features more distinctive heroes, such as Fanny, who incorporates one of the popular anime characters. A certain game has a player constraint of a total of ten players, with five players in a team. Thus, every player can only select one hero from a variety of choices. In other words, players cannot take on the roles of all heroes. In one round, the

game lasts approximately ten minutes. On that map, there are three major lines: the middle, top, and bottom lines. Thus, every lane has a turret guard that programmatically attacks opponent units.

According to Mawalia's (2020) research, Mobile Legend has managed to attract gamers' attention due to its avatar, message exhibit, as well as sale and purchase of online characters all in one application. The progression of online games from desktop computers to mobile phones allows players to experience games almost anywhere and at any time. Individuals could perhaps regularly spend up to 6 hours per day desperately searching for internet connectivity. Furthermore, Mobile Legends has one advantage over its PC competitors because it is on the mobile platform. The Philippines is one of the top countries for Mobile Legends: Bang Bang (MLBB) popularity. According to Ernest Hernandez in the sports.mb.com article, Jingjie Lin, manager of Moonton E-Sports, publicly acknowledged that the Philippines is among the top playing countries. He expects to expand incentives for Filipinos by going to host more tournaments and offline events.

The most popular online game in Asia, particularly in the Philippines, is Mobile Legend. It is being played by men and women of all ages and socioeconomic backgrounds. However, because both genders compete in playing mobile games, stereotypes and gender bias against women and Filipina gamers have emerged. Female gamers, according to Haiqal and Yusoff (2021), are not suited to playing more extreme and masculine types of games, such as Mobile Legend, which is perceived to be a game designed solely for men. They also demonstrate that, unlike their male counterparts, women are not less competitive due to their gender identity. Female gamers have also been distinguished as less skilled, calm, and reliant on men (Kaye & Pennington, 2016). Female gamers' self-esteem has been lowered as a result of the stereotypes that have been applied to them.

Moreover, Thapa (2018) argued that after decades of living in a male-dominated society where women are most oppressed in the gaming world, mobile legends had encouraged female gamers to seek to be valued in the gaming world because many women have indeed been verbally attacked for not being "real" gamers. Becoming active in the gaming world and maintaining one's position is another characteristic of the "new woman." They are recognized and respected, so they are provided with the opportunity to prove themselves without defending their sex. Several female gamers have progressed to the 'Mythic' stage in 'Mobile Legends.' Those who have thousands of followers who tune in to gain knowledge from them live on social media. Although most women are barred from fighting on battlefields, other women have found their rightful place by joining in the fight with men.

Gender Stereotyping

Gender stereotyping in the contemporary world is currently one of the significant matters of study in different fields of disciplines. Research investigating female gaming has begun to arise regardless of how gaming is normally popular with males. Over the centuries, the number of women playing online games has been growing, and nowadays, females are filling half of the gaming population (ESA, ISFE). According to McLean and Griffiths (2018), women usually play casual games for a short period of time, whereas men use their time only to play mobile games. Previous research has shown that stereotypes from online games can exacerbate existing gender stereotypes and conceptions about men and women. Males are described as aggressive and dominant, putting them in a more powerful position than women. Contradictory to this, women are titled as being conformable and amiable, and they are usually in a lower power/authority position (Dill et al., 2007). Through a similar way of thinking, Gender Schema Theory reveals that stereotypes and sexual content in the media are classified as obedient and less quick-witted compared to men (Downs & Smith, 2010).

A gender stereotype is a presumption regarding the characteristics or traits that must be possessed by a woman or a man. Hence, gender stereotypes are deleterious because they restrict a woman or man's capabilities in developing their individual abilities. It has been widely believed that gender stereotypes are

how males and females typically act as well as how males and females should act (Fiske & Steven, 1993). For instance, according to past research, women are assumed to be sensitive and nurturing, and being dominant is not a thing. On the contrary, men are known to be competitive, independent, and weak. Being weak is not in their vocabulary. However, being authoritative and fragile, which are displeasing negative traits, are still tolerated by men and women independently (Prentice & Carranza, 2002; Rudman & Mescher, 2012).

Furthermore, with gender stereotyping in gaming becoming more unequal in recent years, there remains the continuation of the stereotype that gaming is a "guy-thing" (Lavandier, 2018). In spite of the fact that online games are intended for everyone, women are still driven to the sidelines because of the male gamer stereotype that females play less virtuoso than males. Female engagement in gaming has gradually heightened in recent years, but this generation in the gaming sector is still subjugated by men, and women are still known as asthenic and have low talent when it comes to online games. According to Duggan (2014), 92% of the population that uses the internet thinks that the online setting leads to easy harassment. As a result, female gamers frequently report what they have gone through as a result of harassment and negative behavior while playing (Cote, 2017; Gray, 2017; Ivory et al., 2014). Although a woman playing Mobile Legends or almost any other digital game is common, some men regard women as weak and less skilled. As a result, women in the field of esports are increasingly under pressure to justify themselves. Discrimination, whether deliberately or accidentally, continues to plague the country's esports scene.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

Eagly and Wood (1999, 2012) proposed the Social Role Theory, which states that individuals' behavior, attitudes, and goals are highly influenced by the social roles that correspond to their gender. According to this idea, societal norms and expectations define separate roles for men and women, assigning specific actions and characteristics to each gender. These roles then shape people's self-perceptions and decisions, influencing their career pathways and achievement results. In support of this, according to Hyde (2005), societal roles and expectations play a significant role in exaggerating perceived gender differences. In her research, Hyde (2005) provides evidence indicating that men and women are more similar than they are different in terms of many psychological qualities and capabilities. She examines how societal responsibilities and expectations can accentuate perceived gender inequalities, adding to stereotype reinforcement. This is consistent with the theory of social role theory, which claims that societal expectations and roles contribute to the formation and reinforcement of gender-specific behaviors and attitudes. Thus, gender stereotypes, which are firmly embedded in cultural norms and beliefs, have a considerable impact on one's actions, perspectives, and desires. These assumptions frequently lead to gender differences in a variety of fields, especially regarding employment options and accomplishments. The purpose of this theoretical framework is to investigate the cognitive nature, socio-cultural, and behavioral processes that demonstrate how gender stereotypes impact individuals' choices concerning careers and ensuing performance. The Social Role Theory, which gives a glimpse at how societal standards regarding gender roles influence individuals' attitudes toward their own skills and career paths, is central to this theory.

Based on this theory, the objective is to determine why gender stereotyping is still occurring even in the midst of technological advancement. It does not only exist in the school and workplace; parents of young children and newborns unintentionally promote gender stereotypes by fostering a 'gendered world' by means of toys, sports, language acquisition, and surroundings. Teachers treat boys' and girls' behavior in distinct ways, and depictions in children's stories are frequently stereotyped (Fawcett Report, 2019). But also in the gaming world, where some female gamers are experiencing gender stereotyping from other players, The prevalent technology myth states that "men design systems and women use them; men build bridges and women cross them" (Oldenziel 2001). Toxicity and online harassment: female gamers are frequently subjected to online harassment and gender-based toxicity, which discourages their participation

and engagement. Stereotypes regarding women's gaming abilities and legitimacy are used to justify exclusion and hatred. Women have for years asserted a prevalent 'toxic' culture of antagonism, violence, sexual harassment, and rape or death threats directed towards women in online gaming (Das, 2021). Also, in accordance with social role theory, changes in societal roles can lead to changes in perceptions and behaviors. Efforts in the gaming sector to challenge gender stereotypes, boost inclusivity, and empower people of all genders can transform perceptions and build more varied and inviting gaming communities. Thus, Social Role Theory provides a useful lens for examining gender stereotypes in the gaming environment. Studies, game creators, and activists can endeavor to create a more inclusive and fair gaming environment by studying how social expectations and roles influence these stereotypes.

Moreover, when investigating gender stereotyping in the gaming world, social role theory is an important theoretical framework to consider. When applied to the gaming world, social role theory can help us understand how traditional gender norms and expectations impact individuals' gaming experiences and perspectives. On the basis of gendered expectations in gaming and social role theory, societies formerly assigned distinct responsibilities and behaviors to men and women. This can emerge in gaming by associating specific game genres or roles with one gender more than the other. For example, action and shooter games may be associated with men, but simulation or puzzle games may be associated with women. Gender stereotypes can be perpetuated by game developers, marketers, and players who are influenced by gendered expectations.

METHODOLOGY

This study employed a qualitative method using hermeneutic phenomenology (Groenewald, 2004) as an approach to explore the lived experiences of Filipina gamers when playing Mobile Legends. The researchers conducted interviews with Filipina Mobile Legends players. Thus, researchers sought to understand the reasonable explanations for gender stereotyping as well as the numerous problems these individuals encountered and how they dealt with them.

Participants and Context

The study attempted to analyze and understand the experiences of Filipina gamers, their experiences of gender stereotyping in the gaming world, and how they address these mistreatments when they are playing. This study consists of sixteen (16) female gamer participants of any age range from different parts of the Philippines who have previously participated in Mobile Legends. The participants were identified through the purposive sampling method, and informed consent was sought prior to data gathering. Additionally, semi-structured individual interviews were used to obtain the primary data (Cohen, 2013). Furthermore, virtual interviews were conducted to gather data through various social media platforms such as Facebook Messenger and Google Meet. The communication and sharing of experiences in a virtual interview are constructed mostly by the online presence of the researchers and respondents.

Data Collection and Analysis

Considering the fact that the current study used a qualitative research design, the researchers developed a qualitative survey questionnaire to determine the experiences of Filipina gamers about gender stereotyping in playing mobile legends and how they manage to cope amidst gender stereotyping. Semi-structured individual interviews were used to collect the needed data, which included open-ended questions framed from the two research questions.

For data analysis, the data gathered from interviews was tabulated, coded, themed, and categorized using thematic analysis. Thematic analysis is a method of identifying patterns or themes in qualitative data (Braun & Clarke, 2006). Analysis was guided by the six phases of thematic analysis: (1) familiarization with data; (2) generation of initial codes; (3) searching for themes; (4) reviewing themes; (5) defining themes; and (6) analysis and writing up (Braun & Clarke, 2006). An open coding approach was utilized during the

initial generation of codes in stage 2, allowing for the development and modification of codes as the coding process progressed. Additionally, Saldaña's (2021) coding technique was utilized as a resource in identifying the themes and sub-themes. The said technique provides a comprehensive guide and practical examples of coding and analyzing qualitative data. It offers detailed instructions on various coding techniques, including open coding, axial coding, and selective coding, which are essential for conducting thematic analysis effectively. By utilizing this coding manual, the study was ensured with a systematic and rigorous approach to coding and theme development.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

Stereotypes Experienced by Filipina Gamers in Mobile Legends (ML)

The study questions are analyzed in this section in accordance with the results, which intend to show the gender stereotyping among Filipina Mobile Legends gamers and the themes that emerged from the participants' responses while playing the game. As revealed, the common stereotypes are considering them as weak and incompetent players, they are being exploited as support hero characters in the game, and they are associated with being lesbians.

Filipina ML Players as Weak and Incompetent Players

The majority of the Filipina participants are considered "weak and incompetent" in the mobile legends world. Despite the fact that the game is for everyone, they are made to feel unwelcome by the other players, particularly the men who play the game. Even when female gamers give their all in the game, they receive negative feedback from other players. Weak and incompetent are what they always and commonly get from the players they encounter. Furthermore, the gaming world, especially in Mobile Legends, is known to be a game that is dominated by men. That is why women often experience being labeled as incapable of the skills that men have in the game. Also, some negative thoughts they receive are that the Mobile Legends game is only for boys and not for girls. Thus, some female gamers have reported feeling disrespected in-game because they are perceived as weak and reliant on men. That is why they always receive negative thoughts from their allies or opponents in the game. This is evident in the following excerpts:

Being weak when it comes to playing is a common stereotype for female gamers like me. (FG2)

As a woman of my age, we are seen by society as the weak individual who needs support from others; we are in this era where women are deprived of liberty and equality. Playing Mobile Legends for more than a year, I can attest that players, knowing my gender, stereotype me for being weak and unable to level their skills; the fact that we females nowadays can dominate them in terms of playing mobile games is just a game, no one has the power to predict who will win and who will lose (FG13).

One of the common stereotypes is that mobile legends they said it is only for boys or men, and obviously, they can be seen mostly played by men; that is why they are saying that mobile legends are only for men and that if you are a woman, you cannot compete (FG5).

Stereotypical attitudes toward women in gaming are also specifically alarming. Some females have mentioned receiving undesirable threats, abusive behavior, and possibly even harassment from a number of other gamers, especially men. In the gaming world, there is continually a massive wall evaluating women's capabilities against those of men. According to Williams et al. (2009), forty percent of the games examined in his study had no female characters, owing to the understanding that female gamers are less expert than males. As a result, girls are normally seen as motionless and perhaps dependent on male gamers, and therefore, they are in all likelihood considered much less competent. Women should not be stereotyped as weak and dependent on men, despite the fact that both men and women can play Mobile Legends, and stereotyping should be avoided. The focus of this research is on finding one's place in the world of gaming while also accepting society's perceptions. This appears to imply that the female online

gaming experience may differ significantly from that of men. As a result, it is critical to fully comprehend females' personal experiences as well as the potential impact of such online social interactions not only on future play but also on their life experiences.

Moreover, women, according to McLean and Griffiths (2018), normally play casual games for a short period of time, whereas men only play mobile games. Previous studies have shown that online game stereotypes can exacerbate existing gender stereotypes and conceptions of men and women. Males are described as aggressive and dominant, putting them in a position of greater power than women. Women, on the other hand, are stereotyped as conformable and friendly, and they are typically in positions of lower power/authority. Both genders compete in playing the mobile game. Stereotypes and gender bias against women and Filipina gamers have emerged. Female gamers, according to Haiqal and Yusoff (2021), are not suited to playing more extreme and masculine types of games, such as Mobile Legend, which is perceived to be a game designed solely for men. According to Kaye and Pennington (2016), female gamers' self-esteem has been lowered as a result of the stereotypes that have been applied to them.

Some people find playing Mobile Legends entertaining and a stress reliever, but some women experience being discriminated against in the gameplay without other players considering their feelings only to state their opinions. The reason why some of the female gamers of Mobile Legends experience being discriminated against and downgraded by the other players, especially men, is because of their skills and competence in the gameplay. It is evident that men are dominant in the gaming world. That is why they tend to set standards and put a label on the girls as weak and judge their skills and competence in the game. In addition, it sometimes led the men to call out women to quit playing mobile legends because of their skills. This is evident in the following excerpt:

I think the most common stereotype was discrimination against women's performance while playing mobile games. There are times when I feel down and embarrassed because of what they say, but I always remind myself to have fun. It is just a game, and nothing matters, and I am not the kind or type of woman who is easily affected by what they say (FG9).

Some players underestimate us because of our skill types (FG10).

The common stereotype that we female gamers mostly receive is downgrading; they underestimate our skills just because of the fact that we are girls and we are only a burden every match (FG11).

There was a time when some of my teammates told me that I should quit playing ML because I knew nothing (FG11).

According to Jagayat and Choma (2021), most women in online gaming communities have faced cyber-aggression. These women have experienced gender-based discrimination when gaming along with men, which is almost the same experience expressed by the participants of this study. Those encounters vary from being verbally attacked to needing someone to take the time to explain to them. Hence, this finding also connects with the argument of Fox and Tang (2014) that "sexism toward women" has been dominant and pervasive. Furthermore, according to Gardner (2021), as shown in a report from esports named Evil Geniuses, almost the majority of all women in gaming have already personally encountered gender discrimination three times more than male gamers. Due to the general complexities of the situation, several female gamers conceal their identities, hide their profile information as well as characters to appear unbiased or manly, and hesitate to use their microphones while playing.

Filipina ML Players are Exploited as Support Hero Characters

Some Filipina gamers have encountered people who dismiss their abilities because they are experts in the game. Because of that, they are making rants and opinions with the other players, especially women, who are new to the game and new to the heroes they are playing. Aside from the stereotype that women are

being called "weak" in the mobile legend world, they are also experiencing being labeled by the other players, especially men, as only "support" in the game. Women are afraid to make mistakes in the hero they are not experts in playing. That is why if they do not do well and if other players do not see skillful play in the hero that they are using, they tend to say that women should only play a support hero in the game. This is evident in the following excerpts:

When my enemy is skillful and expert in playing mobile legends, I feel like they laugh at my ability (FG2).

They are calling me dumb because I do not play well with the hero that I use in the game. And also, they are telling me that I should only play and use a support hero (FG8).

Some of the players dictated that the next time I played, I should be only supported so that I would not be a burden in the gameplay (FG16).

Female gamers, according to Haiqal and Yusoff (2021), are not suited to playing more extreme and masculine types of games, such as Mobile Legend, which is perceived to be a game designed solely for men. They also demonstrate that, unlike their male counterparts, women are less competitive due to their gender identity. Female gamers have also been distinguished as less skilled, calm, and reliant on men. In the study of Kaye and Pennington (2016), evidence suggests that females are frequently perceived as silent or reliant on males, and they are perceived as less than skilled. The study demonstrates stereotype threat consequences in the age of technology gaming, notably for women in online games who may face this sort of threat in their own "actual world" gaming experiences. In addition, according to Mojica (2022), the study's findings indicate that women in the game industry are notably under pressure to prove themselves to other gamers as a result of their perceiving women as weak and reliant on men.

Filipina ML Players are Tagged as Lesbians

It is evident that most of the players of Mobile Legends are men. That is why women are sometimes considered as lesbians, which is defined as pertaining to gay women or female homosexuality. This is evident in the following excerpt:

The first reason here is the double standard. Men are more capable in terms of the things that can be viewed as complicated things, such as playing ML. Let's say a woman is playing the said game, and the people around you would view her as a bisexual or lesbian just because you're doing the things that they thought only men could do (FG14).

Coping Strategies of Filipina Gamers in Mobile Legends

The study questions are discussed in this section based on the results, which aim to the coping strategies of Filipina Mobile Legends gamers and the themes that are prominently revealed in the female participants' results. Common themes that emerged are ignoring the negative comments, having the dedication and enthusiasm to play well, and limiting their time in playing ML.

Ignoring Negative Comments

One of the reasons why some female gamers of Mobile Legends continue playing the game despite the negative feedback they get is because of the coping mechanisms that help them. One of these coping mechanisms is ignoring the negative thoughts that they encounter and trying to focus on making themselves better for the future game that is about to come. Although some female gamers encounter negative stereotyping in mobile legends, others remain unaffected and unconcerned by the negative things thrown at them. Neglecting negative stereotypes is the way they cope and instill in their minds that they will let people say negative things to them because of the fact that people who say bad words to them do not personally. This is evident in the following excerpts:

I just ignore them and continue playing, focusing on the game so that I can prove to them wrong that I also have the skills and can keep up with them, but sometimes I talk back to them, making them more upset (FG11).

I just ignore that because I don't need their attention and what they are saying to me, I am just playing ML. That is why I tend to ignore them because I don't need their opinion for the reason that I play because I am bored, not for them (FG5).

I just let them since I don't even know them that well; also, they are not my classmates and don't know me personally (FG7).

According to Kishimoto et al. (2021), several women who play Mobile Legends are often treated unfairly because being a woman makes them not good at playing; they do not even know how to operate or even how to use their heroes. However, female gamers get to ignore those bullies or negative feedback as they just want to play and they have been enjoying playing the game. Some female gamers think that even though they are not that good at playing mobile legends, as other players call them, they genuinely think that it doesn't define who they are and how much they can give in the game. This is not to say that women are not welcome in the gaming world. Thus, according to Cote (2017), instead, female gamers frequently encountered offensive comments, negative stereotypes, and unwelcome treats. Women involved in the gaming industry believe that ignoring gender stereotypes is one way to deal with them. Ignoring them and not interacting with them as much as possible is the best way to avoid such problems. A few female gamers have encountered a male gamer who reacted horribly to a mistake she made while playing. As a result, they are exceptional at dealing with such issues calmly and developing new strategies.

One of the things that women do to overcome the criticism that has been thrown at them by the players in the game is to retaliate. To cope with the negative feedback they encounter, they also fight back with the negative thoughts they receive and send them to those who have said the negative words to them. In mobile legends, if someone makes a violation, the other person has the right to report any problem that the opponent experienced. One of the coping ways is to report and mute the person who spreads negativity against women in the game. This is evident in the following excerpts:

Sometimes, if I am not doing something, I relisten to the negative words and retaliate what they have said to me; for example, if they call me dumb, I always give it back to them (FG1).

I constantly remind myself that it is just a game. Sometimes, I also do what my opponent or allies do to me, which is trash-talking, and it probably helps too (FG9).

I manage these by reporting someone through the game help system, muting someone, and persevering so that I would not place last and make them realize how wrong they are (FG6).

Dedication and Enthusiasm to Play Well

Although it places a lot of pressure on women to play a game dominated by men and often referred to as weak, they maintain a positive attitude and devote themselves to the game in order to demonstrate to other players that they are capable of much more than they believe. Through enjoying and focusing on the game, female gamers cope with the negative stereotypes they encounter in gameplay. By enjoying and focusing on the game, the aim is also to prove their capabilities in the game so that not only men can excel in the game but also women. This is evident in the following excerpts:

When my enemies are skillful and very strong players, I am more dedicated to playing them; even though they are saying some bad words, I don't mind it; I just focus on my game (FG2).

I try not to focus on them, and the situation would make it complicated. Hence, I just continue the game, and I know I excel in the game (FG4).

I just don't listen to their rants and judgment and enjoy the play (FG15).

Just enjoy, and let it be your strength to prove to them that you're also capable just like them (FG14).

According to Duggan (2014), the online gaming environment allows for easy harassment. Women, in particular, are frequently subjected to harassment and other negative behaviors while playing mobile legends. In spite of the fact that the gaming world is dominated by men, the game is open to women. But it's not that easy for them to be female players because some of the women are experiencing bad treatment. Even though many women aren't good at playing, there are some who can and should be considered pro gamers in Mobile Legends. They are the ones who speak up and fight for other female players who are not professionals. Many women are still striving to be pros in order to avoid harassment and negative feedback about them, as well as to prove something to everyone and face their fears. Being discriminated against and other negative behavior is one of every female gamer's fears. Although a woman playing Mobile Legends is normal, there are still men who see females as weak and less skillful. For that, women in the field of esports always feel that there is added pressure to prove themselves.

Limiting their time in Playing ML

Another way of coping with the negative stereotypes in Mobile Legends is limiting the time they spend playing ML. One of the participants said that it is effective to cope if a person limits their time to exposing themselves in the game and spends more time on physical activity such as outdoor activities. This is evident in the following excerpts:

I can manage by limiting the time or less per day, but as of now, since I am in an online class. I need to put limitations on playing mobile legends; then, I am encouraging outdoor activities with my friends, like meeting outside and making bonds with them. I am always thinking in positive only, positive aspects positive ways (FG3).

I have control and know my limitations in playing Mobile Legends to avoid these negative stereotypes about my health. So, what I do is work on my classes online, which I give much priority (FG10).

It can be gleaned from the participants' responses that they find time to redirect their focus to meeting with their friends and delve more into doing their online classes instead. Hence, their optimism of delineating their attention to academic work would help them lessen their addiction to playing ML.

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The present study explores and investigates the gender stereotyping happening in the Mobile Legends world, affecting Filipina gamers. Based on the findings, it was found that although mobile legends games are considered open for everyone, whatever gender or age, there is still negative feedback pertaining to the gameplay of female gamers. The common stereotypes attributed to the Filipina gamers of Mobile Legends are that they are weak and incompetent players due to their femininity. They are also being underestimated and discriminated against by their skilled and competent adversaries and exploited to support hero characters in playing the said game, which eventually affects their self-esteem. They are also called lesbians because of their participation in playing this kind of game, which is perceived as a game solely created for men and dominated by men. In terms of their coping strategies, Filipina gamers of Mobile Legends tend to ignore these stereotypes by ignoring these negative comments, and they have expressed their dedication to play by usually spending and focusing it more on something important that can help them grow. They also retaliate against those people who criticize them to prove that they are not inferior, and they become more enthusiastic about playing the said game because of their skilled adversaries. Despite being mistreated and subjected to stereotypes such as weak and incompetent players, Filipina Mobile Legend players become more dedicated to playing to prove that they are more than what is labeled to them. Finally, while the present study was conducted to investigate the experience of Filipina gamers of mobile legends,

it has its own limitations. First, the context of the study only involved sixteen participants in the Philippines. Hence, future studies may consider a larger number of participants. Future studies may consider the experiences of female players on other online gaming platforms and game categories to achieve varied results. Also, players from the LGBTQ+ may also be considered for investigation on the stereotypes they have experienced when playing ML.

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