Final Fanta psychology: An Investigation into Perceived Gender Stereotypes Within the Final Fantasy Game Series

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ABSTRACT : For many people, video games play a crucial role in everyday life. Video games can have a significant impact on the players, and this impact can manifest in a multitude of different forms. One of the ways an individual can be affected by video games includes the representation, and perception, of gender stereotypes. Within the Final Fantasy game series multiple gender stereotypes are represented. This paper aims to determine if those who identify as part of the LGBTQ+ community view gender stereotypes in Final Fantasy differently from heterosexual cis-gendered people – specifically, whether the gender stereotypes depicted in video games influence individual player's perceptions of specific gender identities. The research undertaken determined that the perceptions of stereotypes differ for each individual player, depending on the Final Fantasy game. This paper concludes by explaining how those who identify as members of the LGBTQ+ community do in fact view gender stereotypes differently, perceiving them as more harmful than their heterosexual, cis-gendered counterparts.

KEYWORDS : *Video games, gender stereotypes, LGBTQ+, Final Fantasy, narrative agency, ludic identity, gender representation*

I.   INTRODUCTION

Gender stereotypes have always been prevalent within the video game industry. Whether they are used to develop a storyline, such as the common "damsel in distress" scenario, or generally designing female characters to wear less clothing [1]. Stereotypes within video games may also be used to emphasize a character's physical attributes, or to provide a sense of sex appeal within the game. It is rare to come across a mainstream video game that does not adhere to stereotypes surrounding gender to some capacity [2].

Cis-gendered, heterosexual individuals are widely represented in the products of the video game industry, while the representation of members of the LGBTQIA+ community are largely absent in mainstream video games [3]. There has been limited research work in this field, with only a few studies considering gender stereotyping and gender subtypes throughout the Final Fantasy video game series [4].

The purpose of this project was to examine how players of different gender identities perceive different Final Fantasy game characters, and how the players relate to specific characters. The overwhelming presence of gender stereotyping within video games and the lack of research surrounding individuals' relationships to specific characters, based on their gender identities and gender subtypes, demonstrate the importance of investigating these aspects of the gaming industry.

This following literature review examines the existing scholarship on gender stereotypes within a broader theoretical framework, extending beyond the limited scope of video game studies to encompass interdisciplinary perspectives on gender representation across various media and cultural contexts.

1.1 Gender Stereotypes

Gender stereotypes lead to the perpetuation of inequality between men and women. Most researchers argue that these differences are not biological but are societal [5, 6]. The differences are developed in childhood formed by the ways in which children are raised and educated. For example, parents and teachers can implicitly pass on to children both appropriate and inappropriate behaviors by making comments about images of people engaging in gender-stereotypical activities [5]. Gender stereotypes often rely on implicit behavior and subconscious thought [7].

Historically, gender stereotypes have also had a negative societal impact by prioritizing men in the workplace over women and devaluing those who function outside of gender stereotypes. A good example of this prioritization of men is clearly indicated when analyzing recommendation letters and grant applications [5, 8].

In 1995, zero percent of CEOs at Fortune 500 company were women, thirty years later in 2025, 11% of Fortune 500 CEOs are women [9]. Interestingly, among media corporations this figure drops to only 8% and the number of female CEOs of video games companies is currently around 4% [10, 11]. The data also shows that LGBTQ+ and non-binary individuals are even more underrepresented than women at the upper ranks of America's largest corporations [12].

Multiple studies have investigated changes in gender stereotypes over time. Past studies have utilized word embedding computational models to analyze large-scale historical natural language data over the course of the 20th century (2020). These studies have indicated that gender stereotyping is still prevalent but found that the fortitude of the biases was decreasing over time [13, 14]. Other temporal studies analyzed the likelihood whether a person with gender unspecified had a set of male-typed and female-typed characteristics. Although these studies again found adherence to gender stereotypes over time, a significant increase in female gender role stereotyping was noted [15]. This increase was more significant when considering gender stereotypes in video games [16].

Previous gender stereotyping research has studied how age affects the perception of roles and the change in opinions regarding prescriptive stereotypes across each age group. The data collected indicated that young children and the elderly are stereotyped based on gender far less than subjects of working age. Research findings showed that often found that stereotypes of male roles focused on things the men should not be doing, whereas female stereotypes were indicators of what things women should be doing [17].

Cross-cultural studies have repeatedly shown that gender stereotypes vary significantly across societies. While some cultures emphasize traditional roles (such as men being providers and women being caregivers) others display more egalitarian views. For example, research comparing Western countries and Asian nations revealed differences in how assertiveness and nurturing are associated with gender [5, 6, 13, 14, 15]. These cultural contexts can play a crucial role in how gender roles are internalized and expressed.

These conclusions from the literature reveal a fundamental asymmetry in how gender stereotypes operate, reflecting deeper societal power structures and the differential ways masculinity and femininity are policed. The distinction between prescriptive and proscriptive stereotypes is crucial for understanding this pattern. Prescriptive stereotypes refer to how a particular gender should behave, and proscriptive stereotypes define how a gender should not behave [18].

Of relevance to the research described in this paper is the comparison of gender stereotypes among differing groups of sexual orientations. Past research has investigated whether gay men and lesbians maintain the same gender stereotypes as straight individuals. These studies found that straight individuals had stronger gender stereotypes than gay men and lesbians. Additionally, the studies concluded that lesbians were often rated as more masculine than gay men and gay men were often rated as more feminine than lesbians [7, 21].

Other studies found that heterosexual men and women were more similar to their congruent gender stereotypes, whereas homosexual and bisexual individuals were more similar to their non-congruent gender stereotypes. However, the research does not indicate a direct reversal of gender stereotypes in homosexual and bisexual individuals, just a non-congruence. The results indicate that heterosexuality propagates gender stereotypes more than homosexuality [22, 23].

The established literature in this field strongly indicates the durability of gender stereotypes and the implicit harm that they cause to society and individuals. The research described in this paper investigates gender stereotypes of LGBTQ+ individuals and hetero-cisgendered individuals playing Final Fantasy video games. Of relevance to this research is how gender stereotypes are prevalent in the areas of sports and media.

1.2 Gender Stereotypes in Sports and Esports

Traditional sports and video games, despite their apparent differences in physicality and medium, share remarkable structural and cultural parallels that have become increasingly evident as gaming has evolved into a mainstream competitive arena [24]. Both domains serve as organized systems of rule-based competition where participants engage in skill-based challenges, strategic decision-making, and performance optimization. The fundamental human drives that attract individuals to traditional athletics (the pursuit of mastery, competitive achievement, and social recognition) manifest equally in digital gaming environments, suggesting deeper psychological and social functions that transcend the specific medium of play [25].

Empirical research demonstrates that girls and women historically receive significantly less encouragement from family members and educators to participate in sporting activities compared to their male counterparts [27]. These contemporary patterns are rooted in historical gender role segregation that emerged during significant societal transitions during the 19th century. This ideological framework established distinct gender-oriented domains wherein men were associated with competitive, external activities while women were relegated to domestic roles emphasizing submissiveness and domesticity [28]. Research demonstrates that these historical patterns continue to influence contemporary sports, esport, and video game participation through differential encouragement mechanisms [29].

The Olympic Games provide an interesting case study of gender involvement in traditional sporting competitions over the years. Dating back to 776 BC the Olympic Games are held every four years and since the earliest records provide evidence of women participating in the games [30]. However, even as recently as 50 years ago, female participation in the Olympic games was less than 20%. Recently the International Olympics Committee (IOC) has implemented multiple gender inclusion strategies and in recent years have achieved an approximate 50% representation of women and men in the games [31].

The full gender parity of recent Olympic Games appears to be a success story, but gender equality goes beyond just numbers. Multiple researchers have investigated and reported on the deeply rooted gender stereotypes that persist in these sporting competitions [32]. Olympic media coverage continues to reflect gendered biases, with female athletes receiving disproportionately less coverage and experiencing different narrative framing that often emphasizes appearance, relationships, and emotional responses rather than athletic achievement [33]. Prize money disparities, unequal resource allocation for women's events, and underrepresentation in coaching and administrative positions further demonstrate that numerical parity in participation has not translated into comprehensive gender equality across the Olympic ecosystem [34].

Athletes from the LGBTQ+ community didn't appear in the Olympics openly until 1988 in Seoul [35]. Research has shown that LGBTQ+ and non-binary people who participated in the Olympics are scared to open up about their gender or sexuality as they believe the world might see them in a different way [36].

The past two decades have witnessed the rise of esports, transforming what was once a niche subculture into a global industry that rivals many traditional sports in both scale and influence. Esports, defined as organized, competitive video gaming, now attracts tens of millions of live viewers to its largest events, with tournaments broadcast on major networks such as ESPN and prize pools reaching multimillion-dollar figures [37]. The professionalization of esports has also led to the emergence of franchised leagues, regional teams, and career pathways for players, coaches, and support staff, further solidifying its status as a legitimate sporting domain [38].

Despite the digital and ostensibly meritocratic nature of esports, gender stereotyping and misogyny remain pervasive and deeply entrenched within the industry. Recent qualitative research highlights that women in esports routinely encounter explicit exclusion and discriminatory practices, with team selection and casting opportunities often denied purely on the basis of gender rather than merit or skill [39]. Interviews with female esports participants reveal that such exclusion is frequently justified by entrenched stereotypes, including the perception that women are less capable or committed than their male counterparts. This is compounded by a hypermasculine culture that dominates many esports communities, where the presence of women is sometimes viewed as a threat to established norms and comfort zones for male players [40].

Gender-based harassment and toxicity are further amplified by the interactive nature of esports platforms, such as Twitch, where female players and streamers are subjected to derogatory comments and sexual objectification at significantly higher rates than men [41]. These experiences of harassment not only undermine women's enjoyment and participation but also contribute to feelings of isolation and exclusion, mirroring patterns observed in other male-dominated fields like STEM. The impact of negative stereotypes extends beyond social exclusion, experimental studies have shown that exposure to stereotype threat can directly impair female gamers' performance reinforcing harmful preconceptions and perpetuating the gender gap in competitive play [39, 42].

1.3 Gender Stereotypes in Video Games

Most forms of media have the power to deepen stereotypes existing in society and instead of supporting inclusive society promote reticence [43]. In particular, the representation of gender within contemporary video games often perpetuates a reductive and crude portrayal of sexuality, objectifying female characters [3, 44]. This depiction of gender in video games is closely linked to broader media and esports narratives surrounding gender.

Analysis of hundreds of video games released over the past forty years indicate that sexualization has diminished since an observed height in the 1990s. Male-oriented genres (e.g. fighting and first-person shooters) have more sexualized characters than role-playing games. Despite an increase in games featuring playable female characters, games still depict female characters more often in secondary roles and sexualize them more than primary characters [1, 2, 45, 46].

Research evidence suggests that these portrayals significantly influence individuals' perceptions of societal gender roles [47]. The portrayal of video game characters is especially important because researchers have found that children often consider video characters to be role models [48]. Data has also been collected on the influence that the use of gender stereotypes within video games has on late adolescents' views of gender. The studies demonstrated that male stereotypes were generally viewed more positively than female stereotypes by players of both genders [16, 19, 48]. Further investigations into the short-term effects of exposure to sexualized female video game characters on gender stereotyping on adolescents indicated that male video game players had more negative views towards female characters than females players did [19]

Other previous evaluations of the gender stereotypes present in video games have focused on the use of these stereotypes as an effective marketing tool. Video game cover art and advertisements featuring sexualized female characters achieved the highest sales among teen- and mature-rated titles. Research has repeatedly shown that gender stereotypes (specifically, the objectification of women and the depiction of men as aggressive) are frequently employed in video game marketing to reinforce hypermasculine cultural norms [1, 3, 16, 19, 20, 47, 48]. This use of stereotypical imagery in video game marketing serves as a signal to potential buyers that the game aligns with established expectations of masculinity within the gaming space [16, 47, 48].

Prior studies have repeatedly shown that the vast majority of video game characters were male [1, 3, 16, 20]. However, in recent years the video game industry has seen the emergence of strong female characters in video games (this is often called the 'Lara phenomenon' named after the iconic protagonist Lara Croft from the Tomb Raider video game series). Video game characters such as Lara Croft represents a departure from traditional portrayals of women in games, embodying competence, physical prowess, and agency typically reserved for male characters [49].

However, even though these powerful female representations can serve as empowering role models, especially for female players, by making the image of a strong woman more accessible and ordinary - these empowering portrayals coexist with ongoing issues of sexualization and objectification, reflecting broader tensions in gender representation within the medium [16, 46, 49].

Gender stereotyping in Role-Playing Games (RPGs) exhibits distinct characteristics compared to other video game genres, largely due to the narrative depth and character-driven focus inherent to RPGs [50]. In many RPGs, gender roles are embedded not only in character design but also in storylines, dialogue, and the distribution of agency among characters [20, 51].

Female characters in RPGs are often relegated to secondary roles, with limited narrative importance and dialogue, and are frequently depicted through hypersexualized designs or as damsels in distress [16, 19, 44, 50, 52]. While these patterns are present across various genres, the immersive and narrative-rich structure of RPGs tends to amplify their impact by making gendered roles more central to the player's experience [50, 52]. While gender stereotyping is a pervasive issue across the video game industry, RPGs' emphasis on narrative and character interaction often results in more pronounced and impactful representations of gender roles [44, 50].

1.4 Gender Stereotypes in the Final Fantasy Video Game Series

The Final Fantasy video game series, developed by Square Enix, stands as one of the most influential and enduring franchises in the history of interactive entertainment. First released in 1987, the series has since expanded to include sixteen mainline entries, numerous spin-offs, and adaptations into other media such as films, anime, and novels [53, 54]. Unlike many long-running video game franchises, Final Fantasy is structured as an anthology: each primary installment presents a self-contained narrative, unique world, and new cast of characters, while recurring motifs (such as certain character names, magical systems, and mythical creatures) create a sense of continuity across the series [54, 55].

Later installments, particularly Final Fantasy VII, revolutionized the medium by introducing cinematic storytelling through computer-generated cutscenes and three-dimensional graphics, influencing the narrative scope and visual style of subsequent video games worldwide [56, 57]. The Final Fantasy Video game series has sold over 200 million copies globally, making it one of the best-selling video game franchises of all time [59].

Gender stereotypes in the Final Fantasy video game series have been both persistent and multifaceted, reflecting broader trends in the gaming industry while also evolving over time [1, 2, 44, 50]. Early entries in the series often relegated female characters to stereotypical roles such as healers, damsels in distress, or supportive figures whose primary narrative function was to aid or motivate male protagonists. These characters were typically depicted as physically weaker, more nurturing, and emotionally dependent, reinforcing traditional gender norms and limiting the breadth of female representation within the games [51, 59, 60].

As the series progressed, Final Fantasy games began to experiment with more diverse and complex female characters (the Lara phenomenon), yet many stereotypes persisted [49]. Female protagonists and party members, while sometimes portrayed as strong and capable, were still often hypersexualized or depicted through a lens that emphasized their beauty and emotional labor over their agency (Figure 1) [50, 52].

While some more recent installments have experimented with ensemble casts and ambiguous narrative authority, these shifts often stop short of fully subverting traditional gender roles, instead distributing influence across the cast without fundamentally challenging the underlying stereotypes. Thus, despite some progress, the Final Fantasy series continues to grapple with the legacy of gender stereotyping in both character design and narrative structure [59, 61, 62].

Figure 1 : Final Fantasy Female Characters From Different Games in the Franchise

II. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This research seeks to investigate gender stereotypes of LGBTQ+ individuals and hetero-cisgendered individuals in Final Fantasy games. As the previous literature review has extensively demonstrated, current research indicates how heteronormativity plays a significant role in upholding gender stereotypes within these video games. In- particular, this paper attempts to understand a number of individual gamers' perceptions of gender stereotypes and gendered characters within Final Fantasy games.

2.1 Research Questions

The authors of this research attempted to address a number of specific research questions :

1. Do those who identify as part of the LGBTQ+ community view gender stereotypes in Final Fantasy video games differently from heterosexual cis-gendered people ?
2. Do the gender stereotypes depicted in these Final Fantasy video games influence individuals' perceptions of specific gender identities ?
3. Do people who suffer from gender dysphoria use Final Fantasy video games as a coping tool ?

2.2 Research Participants

The participants were recruited from the crowd-sourcing platform Mechanical Turk [63, 64]. The only requirement for participating in the study was having played at least one of the Final Fantasy game series on any platform. There was no requirement for how long an individual had played the Final Fantasy game. The only age requirement was that participants had to be 18 and older. The team collected responses from 173 participants.

Of the 173 participants, 170 responded to the age question. Figure 2 depicts a pie chart of the age breakdown of participants, indicating that fifty percent of the participants were in the youngest age range, 85 of the participants were in the 18-29 age category, 53 participants were in the 30-39 age group, 21 were in the 40-49 age group, only 3 were in the 50-59 group, and 4 participants were in the 60+ age group.
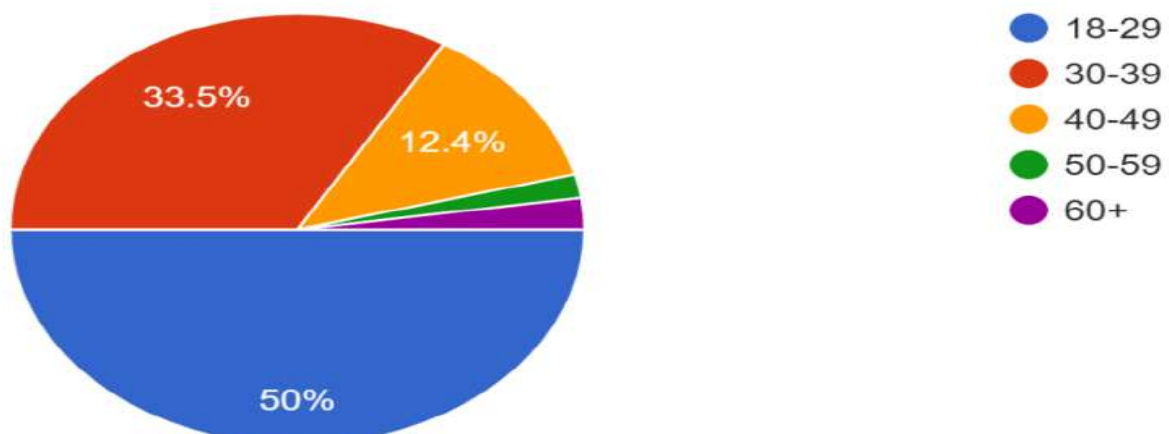

Figure 2 : Participant Ages

Figure 3 illustrates the top five frequency of values based on participant's self-described gender identity. The vast majority of participants were cis-gendered, with 163 of the 173 participants identifying as cis. Of the cis group, 65 identified as women and 98 identified as men. The other ten participants identified as not cis-gendered, with three trans-women, four trans-men, one non-binary individual, and one genderfluid individual. One participant did not disclose their gender identity.

As shown in Figure 4, the two largest groups for sexual identity were heterosexual, consisting of 108 participants, and bi-sexual, consisting of 51 participants. The rest of the participants identified as follows: Four identified as gay, three identified as pan-sexual, two identified as lesbian, one identified as a-sexual, one preferred not to say, and three participants selected other.

The next question for participants dealt with their experience with the Final Fantasy video game series. Figure 5 shows a breakdown of the number of years the participants had been playing final fantasy. The data shows that most participants had been playing the games for between 6 to 10 years, with many participants playing the games for even longer periods. This means that most of the participants had a good understanding of the games, and knowledge of the characters within the games.
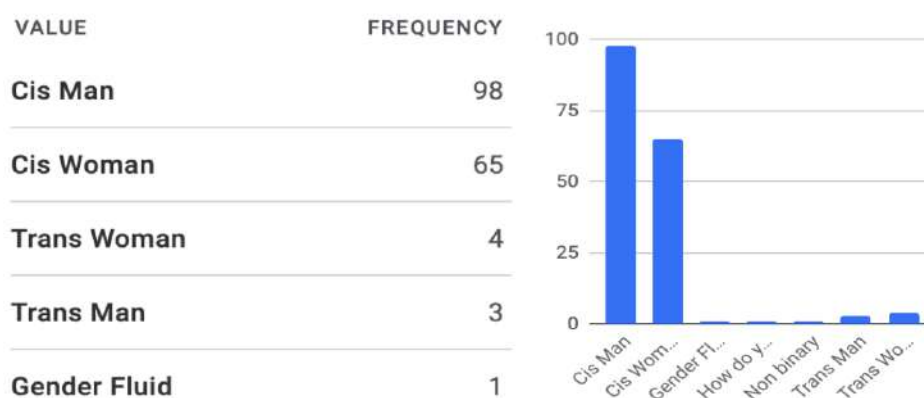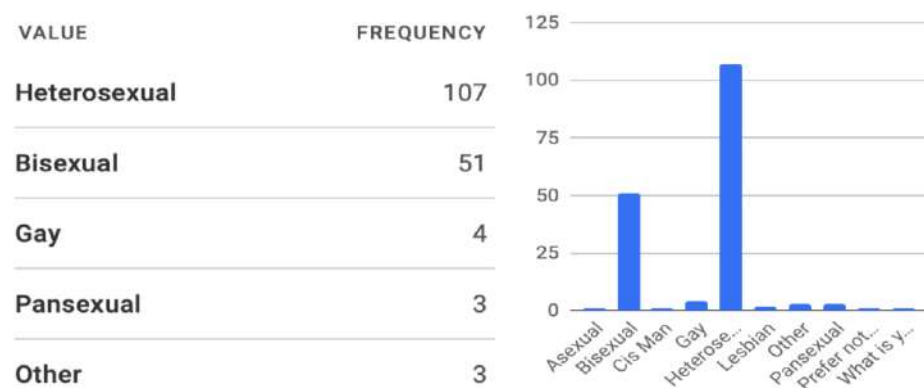
VALUE	FREQUENCY
Cis Man	98
Cis Woman	65
Trans Woman	4
Trans Man	3
Gender Fluid	1

Figure 3 : Participant Gender Identity

VALUE	FREQUENCY
Heterosexual	107
Bisexual	51
Gay	4
Pansexual	3
Other	3

Figure 4 : Participant Sexual Identity

VALUE	FREQUENCY
6-10 Years	79
1-5 Years	73
11-15 Years	12
16-20 Years	4
More than 20 Years	3

Figure 5 : Length of Time Participants Played Games in The Final Fantasy Series

Participants were then asked a general question about how they feel about the characters in the Final Fantasy game series; this was scored from one to ten. Figure 6 shows a table and bar graph that illustrates how much participants 'liked' the characters in the final Fantasy video games. The modal (most selected) score participants picked was 9, and the mean (average) score 8. This clearly indicates that the specific characters the participants are selecting when they play the game are well liked by the players.

VALUE	FREQUENCY
9	54
8	41
7	28
10	22
6	9
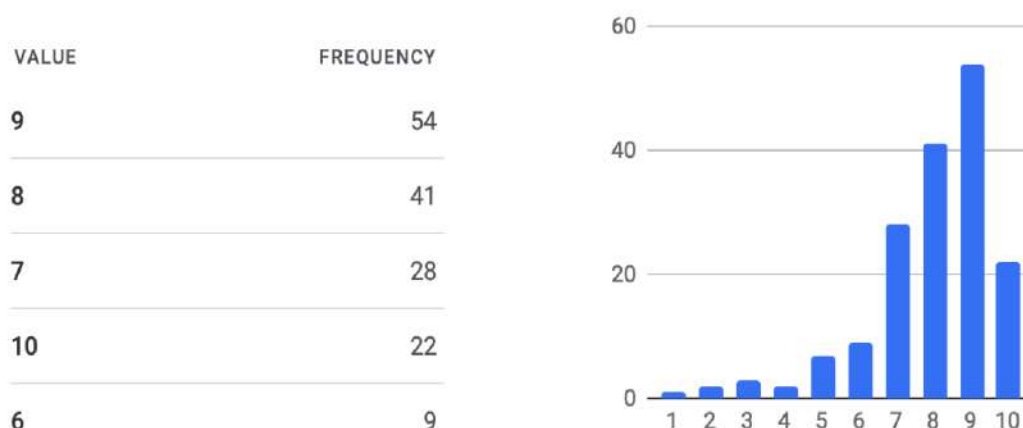
Figure 6 : How Participants Feel About Final Fantasy Video Game Characters

The left-hand table in Figure 7 shows the top five Final Fantasy video games from the series selected by our participants. Final Fantasy III and IV are almost tied for the top place. Final Fantasy III was released in 1990, and Final Fantasy IV was released in 22008. It is interesting to note that all of the top-ranking games are earlier games from the Final Fantasy video game series. Final Fantasy III and IV were most likely ranked the highest because fifty percent of our participants were in the 18-29 years old range, so these games were probably childhood favorites for this age group.

Final Fantasy III	30	Vincent Valentine	27
Final Fantasy IV	29	Amarant Coral	27
Final Fantasy V	27	Snow Villiers	14
Final Fantasy VI	18	Setzer Gabbiani	12
Final Fantasy II	15	Edgar Roni Figaro	12

Figure 7 : Favorite Final Fantasy Video Games and Character Selected by the Participants

Interestingly, when participants were asked to select their favorite characters from the Final Fantasy Video Game series they tended to choose characters from more recent games in the series (right-hand table in Figure 7) :

- Vincent Valentine is from Final Fantasy VII,
- Amarant. Coral is from Final Fantasy IX,
- Snow Villiers is from Final Fantasy XIII (although he also appears briefly in Final Fantasy XII-3 and Lightning Returns : Final Fantasy XIII),
- Setzner Gabbiani is from Final Fantasy VI,
- Edgar Roni Figaro is also from Final Fantasy VI

One possible explanation for this phenomenon is related to how the later installments in the franchise introduced cinematic storytelling through computer-generated cutscenes, enhanced character visuals and animation. This in turn expanded the narrative scope, allowing participants to feel closer to the characters in the later games. [56, 57].

It is also worth noting that all of the favorite character selected by the participants (right-hand table in Figure 7) were male. In the Final Fantasy series, as in many other RPGs, female characters are often relegated to secondary roles, with limited narrative importance and dialogue. Hence, it is not surprising that most of the participants selected male characters, since these are often the main protagonists in RPG genre video game narratives [16, 19, 44, 50, 52].

2.3 Research Procedure

The research described in this paper examined how the Final Fantasy game series represents different individuals and how players may perceive the gender stereotypes found within the series.

In order to grasp a better understanding of the existing research done into video games connecting gender and sexuality, an extensive literature review was conducted by sourcing multiple different research studies on relevant topics. Upon completion of the literature revie, the results from the various studies were analyzed, compared and correlation (sections 1.1 to 1.4 of this paper). Three important research questions, along with a null and alternative hypothesis for each question, were then formulated (section 2.1 of this paper).

Amazon's Mechanical Turk was used to initially contact a large pool of potential participants [63, 64]. Participants from around the globe were contacted and provided they met the age and game playing criteria, they were recruited into the study (section 2.2 of this paper). A large number of Final Fantasy video game players were recruited to take part in the study (n=173). Participants in the study were each paid a small sum of money for their participation.

Initially a set of demographic information regarding their age, gender, and sexuality was collected (section 2.2 of this paper). A detailed, user-friendy questionnaire was then created by the research team that included multiple questions relating to the participant's experience with the Final Fantasy series.

The primary experimental procedure involved the distribution and collection of data via this online questionnaire. The online questionnaire was hosted on a dedicated survey platform and designed to be easily navigable, with clear instructions and a logical flow of questions.

The questionnaire utilized a range of response types. Most of the questions were based on a Likert psychometric rating scale where participants read a statement and then selected a response option (ranging from 'Strongly Disagree' to 'Strongly Agree'). Other types of questions on the questionnaire involved multiple choice options, yes/no answers, selecting a ranking (from 1-10), and open-ended questions.

The experiment was designed so that participants could complete the survey at their convenience, and measures were implemented to prevent multiple submissions from the same individual. Upon completion, responses were automatically recorded in a secure database for subsequent analysis. This online format facilitated efficient data collection and management.

III. RESULTS AND ANALYSIS

Multiple questions relating to the participant's experience with the Final Fantasy series were included within the questionnaire. The following sections show the aggregated results from each question along with a statistical analysis of these results.

3.1 Character Representation

This question aimed to determine how represented individuals feel by the characters available within the Final Fantasy video game series. Participants rated their representation on a scale of one to ten, one being the lowest and ten being the highest.

The results from this question are illustrated in Figure 8. The modal (most selected) score participants picked was 9, and the mean (average) score 8. As can be seen from these results, the participants overwhelmingly felt that, as players, the characters in the Final Fantasy video games, to some extent, represented them as individuals.

Analysis :

A two-sample t-test assuming equal variances was conducted to compare the answers between individuals who are cisgender and heterosexual and those individuals who identify as members of the LGBTQ+ community for the question inquiring how represented these individuals feel by the characters available within the Final Fantasy video game series. The results from the t-test indicated that for the cisgender heterosexual individuals (Group A), (M=8.02, SD=0.14) while (M=7.81, SD=0.25) for individuals that identify as members of the LGBTQ+ community (Group B). There was not a significant difference in how individuals felt between groups; $t(167) = (0.77)$, $p=(0.22)$.
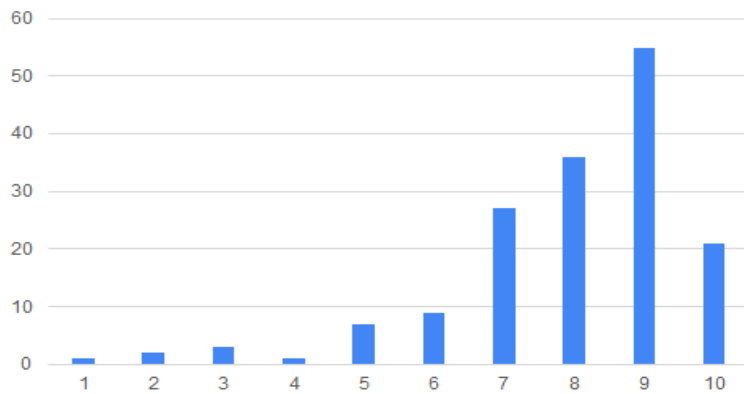
Figure 8 : How Represented Participants Feel by the Characters within Final Fantasy Video Games (1-10)

3.2 The Extent of Gender Stereotypes

This question aimed to determine the extent of the use of gender stereotypes within the Final Fantasy video game series. Participants rated the extent of the use of gender stereotypes on a scale of one to ten, one being the lowest and ten being the highest.

The results from this question are illustrated in Figure 9. The modal (most selected) score participants picked was 8, and the mean (average) score was also 8. As can be seen from these results, the participants overwhelmingly felt that gender stereotypes are very prevalent among the characters within the Final Fantasy game series. This highlights the discussion within the literature review above, that despite some progress, the Final Fantasy video game series continues to grapple with the legacy of gender stereotyping in both character design and narrative structure [59, 61, 62].
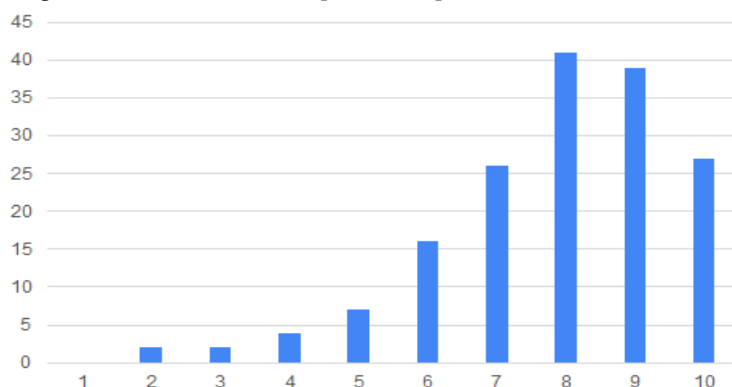

Figure 9 : The Extent of Gender Stereotypes within Final Fantasy Video Games (1-10)

Analysis :

A two-sample t-test assuming equal variances was conducted to compare the answers between individuals who are cisgender and heterosexual and those individuals who identify as members of the LGBTQ+ community for the question inquiring the extent to which gender stereotypes are employed in the Final Fantasy video game series. Participants rated how employed gender stereotypes are on a scale of one to ten, one being the lowest and ten being the highest. The results from the t-test indicated that for Group A, (M=7.90, SD=1.59) while (M=7.49, SD=7.94) for Group B. There was not a significant difference in how individuals felt between groups; $t(164) = (-0.15)$, $p=(0.44)$.

3.3 The Effect of Gender Stereotypes

This question aimed to determine to what extent participants are affected by the use of gender stereotypes within the Final Fantasy video game series. Participants were initially asked whether they felt affected by the gender stereotypes in Final Fantasy. An overwhelming number of participants responded that they were affected by the gender stereotypes to some extent (90%) :

- 119 participants said Yes, they were definitely affected
- 32 participants said they were partially affected
- 18 participants said No, they were not affected
- 5 participants did not answer his question

The participants who felt that they were affected, to some extent, by of gender stereotypes then rated this effect on a scale of one to ten, one being the lowest and ten being the highest.

The results from this question are illustrated in Figure 10. The modal (most selected) score participants picked was 9, and the mean (average) score was 7.5. As can be seen from these results, the participants overwhelmingly felt that exposure to the gender stereotypes within the Final Fantasy game series had a significant effect on the individual participants.

The established literature in this field strongly indicates the durability of gender stereotypes and the implicit harm that they cause to society and individuals [3, 5, 15]. The research has repeatedly shown that most forms of media (including video games) have the power to deepen stereotypes existing in society change the values of the viewer [20, 43, 44]. The results here tend to confirm these findings, and also show a high level of self-awareness of the problem among the participants.

Analysis :

A two-sample t-test assuming equal variances was conducted to compare the answers between individuals who are cisgender and heterosexual and those individuals who identify as members of the LGBTQ+ community for the question inquiring the severity of how affected individuals feel by perceived gender stereotypes within the Final Fantasy video game series on a scale of one to ten. The results from the t-test indicated that for Group A, (M=7.45, SD=0.23) while (M=7.54, SD=0.27) for Group B. There was not a significant difference in how individuals felt between groups; t(159) = (-0.26), p=(0.40).
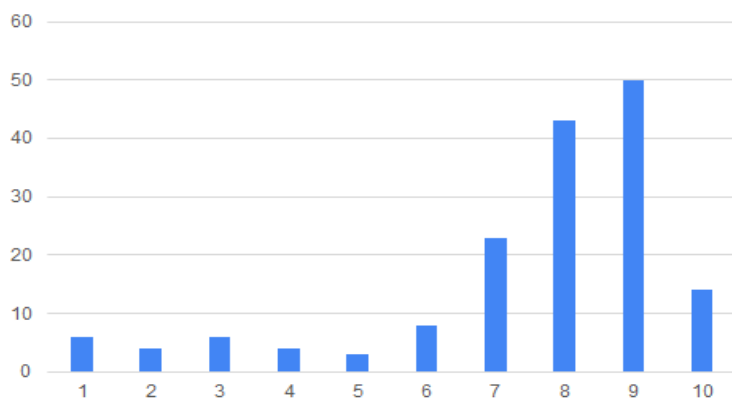

Figure 10 : The Effect of Gender Stereotypes within Final Fantasy Video Games (1-10)

3.4 Gender Portrayal

This question aimed to determine how accurately individuals felt their gender is portrayed within the Final Fantasy video game series. This question used a Likert psychometric rating scale where participants read a statement and then selected a response option (ranging from 'Strongly Disagree' to 'Strongly Agree').

Participants were specifically asked whether they felt that the manner in which their gender was portrayed in the Final Fantasy game series was accurate. An overwhelming number of participants (82%) either agreed or strongly agreed that the gender representations were accurate.

The results from this question are illustrated in Figure 11. The modal (most selected) response from the participants was 'Agree' (59%), and the second most popular was 'Strongly Agree' (23%). As can be seen from these results, the participants overwhelmingly felt that their gender was portrayed in the Final Fantasy game series accurately. This is an interesting result, as the previous question means that participants can recognize gender stereotypes inherent within the games, but still feel that their individual genders are accurately represented.

Analysis :

A two-sample t-test assuming equal variances was conducted to compare the answers between individuals who are cisgender and heterosexual and those individuals who identify as members of the LGBTQ+ community for the question inquiring whether their gender is accurately portrayed within the Final Fantasy video game series. A numerical interpretation of the Likert scale was used to measure the participants feedback, with 1 being 'Strongly Disagree' and 5 being 'Strongly Agree'. The results from the t-test indicated that for Group A, (M=4.02, SD=0.07) while (M=4.01, SD=0.08) for Group B. There was not a significant difference in how individuals felt between groups; t(167) = (0.05), p=(0.48).
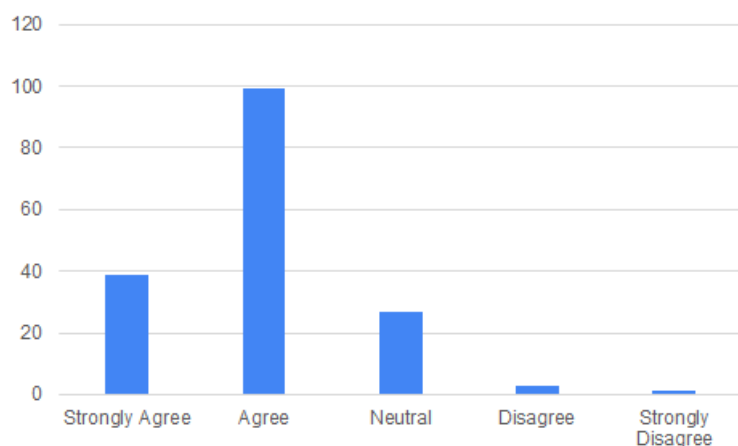
Figure 11 : Accuracy of Gender Portrayal in the Final Fantasy Video Game Series

3.5 Recognizing Misogyny

This question aimed to determine whether participants had noticed misogynistic portrayals of female characters within the Final Fantasy video game series. This question used a Likert psychometric rating scale where participants read a statement and then selected a response option (ranging from 'Strongly Disagree' to 'Strongly Agree').

Participants were specifically asked whether had noticed misogynistic portrayals of female characters within the Final Fantasy video game series. An overwhelming number of participants (68%) either agreed or strongly agreed that they had seen misogynistic portrayals of female characters.

The results from this question are illustrated in Figure 12. The modal (most selected) response from the participants was 'Agree' (43%), and the second most popular were 'Strongly Agree' and Neutral which both ranked the same (24%). As can be seen from these results, the participants had overwhelmingly noticed misogynistic portrayals of female characters within the Final Fantasy video game series.

This result agrees with the literature which identifies that the representation of gender within contemporary video games often perpetuates a reductive and crude portrayal of sexuality, objectifying female characters [3, 44]. Thus, despite some progress, the Final Fantasy series continues to grapple with the legacy of gender stereotyping and misogynistic representations of female characters. [59, 61, 62].

Analysis :

A two-sample t-test assuming equal variances was conducted to compare the answers between individuals who are cisgender and heterosexual and those individuals who identify as members of the LGBTQ+ community for the question inquiring whether participants have noticed misogynistic portrayals of female characters within the Final Fantasy video game series. A numerical interpretation of the Likert scale was used to measure the participants feedback, with 1 being 'Strongly Disagree' and 5 being 'Strongly Agree'. The results from the t-test indicated that for Group A, (M=3.76, SD=1.05) while (M=3.91, SD=0.76) for Group B. There was not a significant difference in how individuals felt between groups; $t(164) = (-0.96)$, $p=(0.17)$.
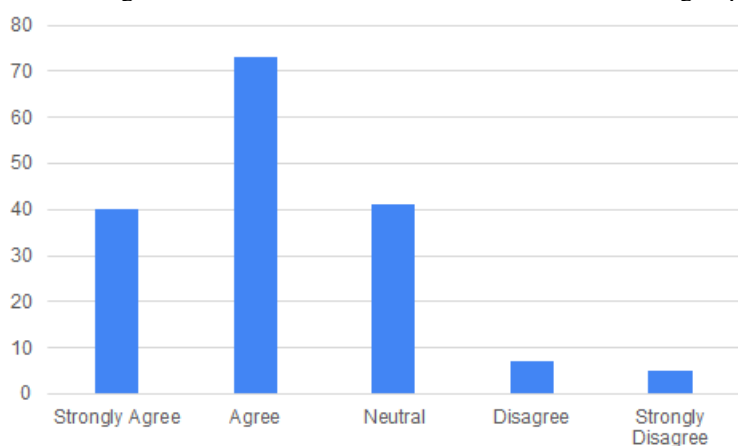

Figure 12 : Female Character Misogyny

3.6 Comparing Male and Female Character Portrayals

These two questions aimed to determine whether participants had noticed between the portrayals of male and female characters within the Final Fantasy video game series. These questions used a Likert psychometric rating scale where participants read a statement and then selected a response option (ranging from 'Strongly Disagree' to 'Strongly Agree').

Participants were specifically asked whether they believed male and female characters are realistically portrayed within the Final Fantasy video game series. An overwhelming number of participants either agreed or strongly agreed that they believed that male (76%) and female characters (70%) are realistically portrayed within the Final Fantasy video game series.

The results from this question are illustrated in Figure 13. The modal (most selected) response from the participants was 'Agree' (55% male, 45% female), and the second most popular was 'Strongly Agree' (21% male, 25% female). As can be seen from these results, the participants overwhelmingly believed both male and female characters are realistically portrayed within the Final Fantasy video game series.

This is another interesting result, as it correlates with, and corroborates the portrayal question from section 3.4. Again, the implication is that the participants can recognize gender stereotypes inherent within the games, but still feel that individual genders are accurately represented.

Analysis :

A two-sample t-test assuming equal variances was conducted to compare the answers between individuals who are cisgender and heterosexual and those individuals who identify as members of the LGBTQ+ community for the question inquiring how accurately individuals feel the male gender is portrayed within the Final Fantasy video game series. A numerical interpretation of the Likert scale was used to measure the participants feedback, with 1 being 'Strongly Disagree' and 5 being 'Strongly Agree'. The results from the t-test indicated that for Group A, (M=3.82, SD=0.09) while (M=4.00, SD=0.08) for Group B. There was not a significant difference in how individuals felt between groups; $t(167) = (-1.34)$, $p=(0.09)$.

A two-sample t-test assuming equal variances was conducted to compare the answers between individuals who are cisgender and heterosexual and those individuals who identify as members of the LGBTQ+ community for the question inquiring how accurately individuals feel the female gender is portrayed within the Final Fantasy video game series. A numerical interpretation of the Likert scale was used to measure the participants feedback, with 1 being 'Strongly Disagree' and 5 being 'Strongly Agree'. The results from the t-test indicated that for Group A, (M=3.85, SD=0.09) while (M=3.99, SD=0.09) for Group B. There was not a significant difference in how individuals felt between groups; $t(167) = (-1.00)$, $p=(0.15)$.
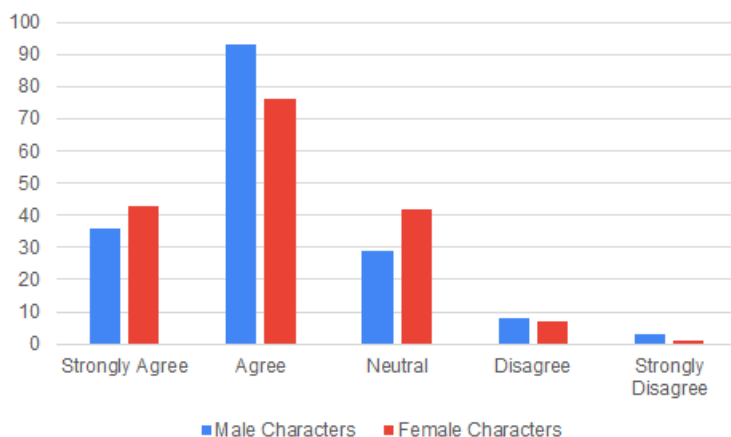

Figure 13 : How Accurately Male and Female Gender is Portrayed in the Final Fantasy Games

3.7 Comparing Male and Female Character Strengths

These two questions aimed to determine whether participants had noticed any differences between the relative strengths of male and female characters within the Final Fantasy video game series. These questions used a Likert psychometric rating scale where participants read a statement and then selected a response option (ranging from 'Strongly Disagree' to 'Strongly Agree').

Participants were specifically asked whether they believed male characters are depicted as stronger than female characters and then whether they believed female characters are depicted as stronger than male characters within the Final Fantasy video game series.

An overwhelming number of participants either agreed or strongly agreed that they believed that male characters are depicted as stronger than female characters (76%). In contrast, an overwhelming number of participants either disagreed or strongly disagreed that they believed that female characters are depicted as stronger than male characters (63%).

The results from this question are illustrated in Figure 14. As can be seen from these results, the participants, overwhelmingly believed male characters are depicted as stronger than female characters within the Final Fantasy video game series. The modal (most selected) response from the participants was 'Agree' (49%), and the second most popular was 'Strongly Agree' (24%).

Figure 13 also shows that the participants confirmed this by responding that they overwhelmingly disbelieved that female characters are depicted as stronger than male characters within the Final Fantasy video game series. The modal (most selected) response from the participants was 'Disagree' (42%), and the second most popular was 'Neutral' (29%).

As was noted in the literature review above, female characters in RPGs are often relegated to secondary roles, with limited narrative importance, and are frequently depicted through hypersexualized designs or as damsels in distress [16, 19, 44, 50, 52]. The results from these two questions highlight that RPGs' emphasis on narrative and character interaction often results in more pronounced and impactful representations of gender roles [44, 50].

A number of games within the final Fantasy franchise have often relegated female characters to stereotypical roles such as healers, damsels in distress, or supportive figures whose primary narrative function was to aid or motivate male protagonists. These characters were typically depicted as physically weaker, more nurturing, and emotionally dependent, reinforcing traditional gender norms and limiting the breadth of female representation within the games [51, 59, 60]. So it not surprising that the majority of the participants report that they believe the male characters to be stronger than the female characters.

As previously stated, despite some progress, it is obvious that the Final Fantasy series continues to grapple with the legacy of gender stereotyping in both character design and narrative structure [59, 61, 62].
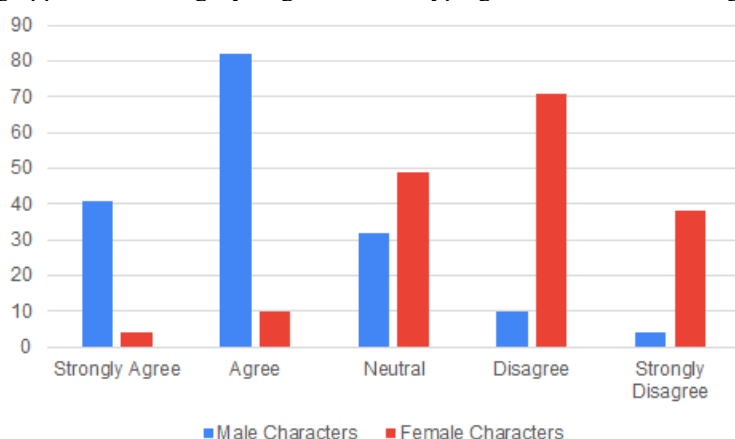

Figure 14 : Comparing Perceived strengths of Male and Female Characters in the Final Fantasy Games

Analysis :

A two-sample t-test assuming equal variances was conducted to compare the answers between individuals who are cisgender and heterosexual and those individuals who identify as members of the LGBTQ+ community for the question inquiring how much stronger the individual views male characters compared to female characters within the Final Fantasy video game series. A numerical interpretation of the Likert scale was used to measure the participants feedback, with 1 being 'Strongly Disagree' and 5 being 'Strongly Agree'. The results from the t-test indicated that for Group A, (M=3.87, SD=0.10) while (M=3.85, SD=0.10) for Group B. There was not a significant difference in how individuals felt between groups; t(167) = (0.17), p=(0.43).

A two-sample t-test assuming equal variances was conducted to compare the answers between individuals who are cisgender and heterosexual and those individuals who identify as members of the LGBTQ+ community for the question inquiring how much stronger the individual views female characters compared to male characters within the Final Fantasy video game series. A numerical interpretation of the Likert scale was used to measure the participants feedback, with 1 being 'Strongly Disagree' and 5 being 'Strongly Agree'. The results from the t-test indicated that for Group A, (M=3.70, SD=0.10) while (M=3.82, SD=0.10) for Group B. There was not a significant difference in how individuals felt between groups; t(167) = (-0.83), p=(0.21).

3.8 Impact of Gender Specific Items

This question aimed to determine how accurately individuals felt that the gender specific carriable items found in Final Fantasy games are a product of harmful gender stereotyping (Figure 15).This question used a Likert psychometric rating scale where participants read a statement and then selected a response option (ranging from 'Strongly Disagree' to 'Strongly Agree').

Participants were specifically asked whether they found the gender specific carriable items found in Final Fantasy were a product of harmful gender stereotyping. An overwhelming number of participants (70%) either agreed or strongly agreed that the carriable items were a product of harmful gender stereotyping.

The results from this question are illustrated in Figure 16. The modal (most selected) response from the participants was 'Agree' (48%), and the second most popular was 'Strongly Agree' (22%).

As can be seen from these results, the participants overwhelmingly felt that the gender specific carriable items found in the Final Fantasy video game series are a product of harmful gender stereotyping. This correlated well with the results of previous questions (section 3.2 and section 3.5) showing that participants can readily identify the gender stereotype issues with the games.

This result agrees with the literature which identifies that the representation of gender within contemporary video games often goes beyond crude portrayal of female characters and also involves the surrounding objects and artifacts. [3, 44, 61, 62].

Figure 15 : An Example of Gendered Weapons - Tidus and Yuna from Final Fantasy X
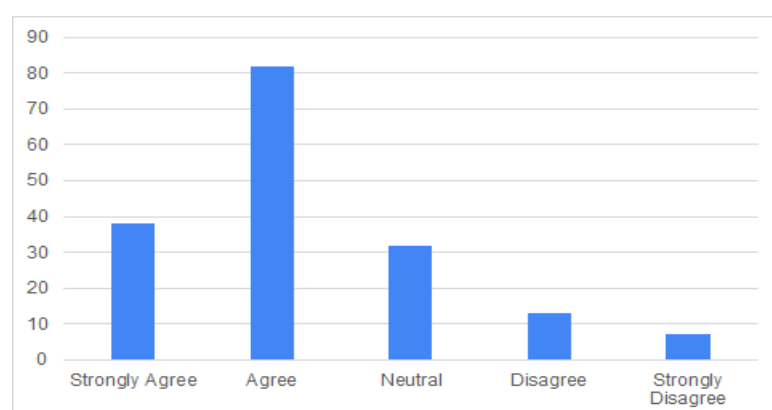

Figure 16 : Stereotyping of Gender Specific Items in the Final Fantasy Games

Analysis :

A two-sample t-test assuming equal variances was conducted to compare the answers between individuals who are cisgender and heterosexual and those individuals who identify as members of the LGBTQ+ community for the question inquiring how much stronger the individual considers gender stereotypes specifically relating to gender specific carriable items within the Final Fantasy video game series. A numerical interpretation of the Likert scale was used to measure the participants feedback, with 1 being 'Strongly Disagree' and 5 being 'Strongly Agree'. The results from the t-test indicated that for Group A, (M=3.67, SD=0.10) while (M=3.90, SD=0.12) for Group B. There was not a significant difference in how individuals felt between groups; $t(170) = (-1.42)$, $p=(0.08)$.

3.9 Deviation from Gender Specific Norms

This question aimed to determine if participants felt that the Final Fantasy video games deviate at all from societal gender norms. This question used a Likert psychometric rating scale where participants read a statement and then selected a response option (ranging from 'Strongly Disagree' to 'Strongly Agree').

Participants were specifically asked whether Final Fantasy video games tend to deviate from societal gender norms. An overwhelming number of participants (73%) either agreed or strongly agreed that Final Fantasy video games often deviated from societal gender norms.

The results from this question are illustrated in Figure 17. The modal (most selected) response from the participants was 'Agree' (51%), and the second most popular was 'Strongly Agree' (22%).
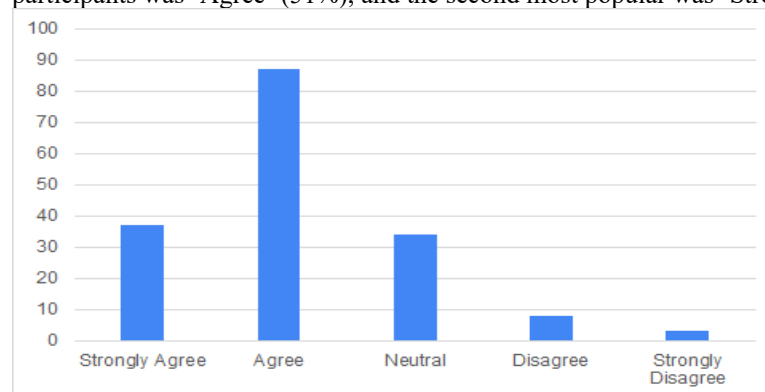

Figure 17 : Deviation from Gender Specific Norms in the Final Fantasy Games

As can be seen from these results, the participants overwhelmingly felt that Final Fantasy video games tend to deviate from societal gender norms. This is an unexpected result but correlates with the results of previous questions (sections 3.1, section 3.4 and section 3.6) showing that participants feel comfortable with the representation of genders with the final Fantasy games. Again, the implication is that the participants can recognize gender stereotypes inherent within the games but still feel that individual genders are accurately represented and deviate from gender specific norms.

Analysis :

A two-sample t-test assuming equal variances was conducted to compare the answers between individuals who are cisgender and heterosexual and those individuals who identify as members of the LGBTQ+ community for the question inquiring whether the Final Fantasy video game series deviates from gender norms. A numerical interpretation of the Likert scale was used to measure the participants feedback, with 1 being 'Strongly Disagree' and 5 being 'Strongly Agree'. The results from the t-test indicated that for Group A, (M=3.84, SD=0.95) while (M=3.91, SD=0.74) for Group B. There was not a significant difference in how individuals felt between groups; $t(167) = (-0.51)$, $p=(0.30)$.

3.10 Inclusiveness of Gender Portrayal

This question aimed to determine the participants' views on the inclusiveness of the gender portrayals in Final Fantasy video games. This question used a Likert psychometric rating scale where participants read a statement and then selected a response option (ranging from 'Strongly Disagree' to 'Strongly Agree').

Participants were specifically asked whether the varying manners in which gender is portrayed throughout the Final Fantasy video game series feels inclusive. An overwhelming number of participants (74%) either agreed or strongly agreed that Final Fantasy video games felt inclusive.

The results from this question are illustrated in Figure 18. The modal (most selected) response from the participants was 'Agree' (51%), and the second most popular was 'Strongly Agree' (23%).

As can be seen from these results, the participants overwhelmingly felt that the gender portrayals int he Final Fantasy video games are inclusive. As with the previous question on the representation of gender (section 3.9) this result correlates with the results of previous questions (sections 3.1, section 3.4 and section 3.6) showing that participants feel comfortable with the representation of genders with the final Fantasy games.

Analysis :

A two-sample t-test assuming equal variances was conducted to compare the answers between individuals who are cisgender and heterosexual and those individuals who identify as members of the LGBTQ+ community for the question inquiring as to how inclusive the individual perceives the portrayal of various genders within the Final Fantasy video. game series. A numerical interpretation of the Likert scale was used to measure the participants feedback, with 1 being 'Strongly Disagree' and 5 being 'Strongly Agree'. The results from the t-test indicated that for Group A, (M=3.87, SD=0.08) while (M=3.97, SD=0.10) for Group B. There was not a significant difference in how individuals felt between groups; $t(169) = (-0.75)$, $p=(0.23)$.
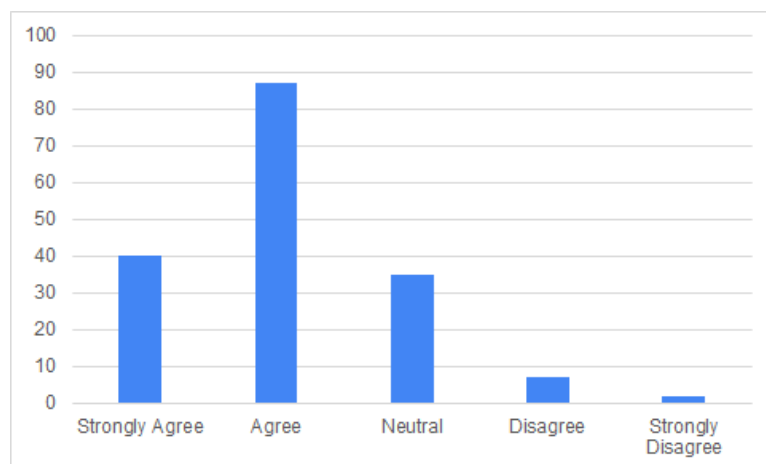
Figure 18 : Inclusiveness of Gender Portrayals in the Final Fantasy Games

3.11 Congruent Gender Portrayal

This question aimed to determine the participants' views on whether Final Fantasy video game characters display gender congruent stereotypes. This question used a Likert psychometric rating scale where participants read a statement and then selected a response option (ranging from 'Strongly Disagree' to 'Strongly Agree').

Participants were specifically asked whether Final Fantasy video game characters display gender congruent stereotypes. An overwhelming number of participants (74%) either agreed or strongly agreed that Final Fantasy video games felt inclusive.

The results from this question are illustrated in Figure 19. The modal (most selected) response from the participants was 'Agree' (51%), and the second most popular was 'Strongly Agree' (24%).

As can be seen from these results, the participants overwhelmingly felt that the gender portrayals in the Final Fantasy video games are inclusive. As with the previous two questions on the representation of gender (section 3.9 and section 3.10) this result correlates with the results of previous questions (sections 3.1, section 3.4 and section 3.6) showing that participants feel comfortable with the representation of genders with the final Fantasy games.
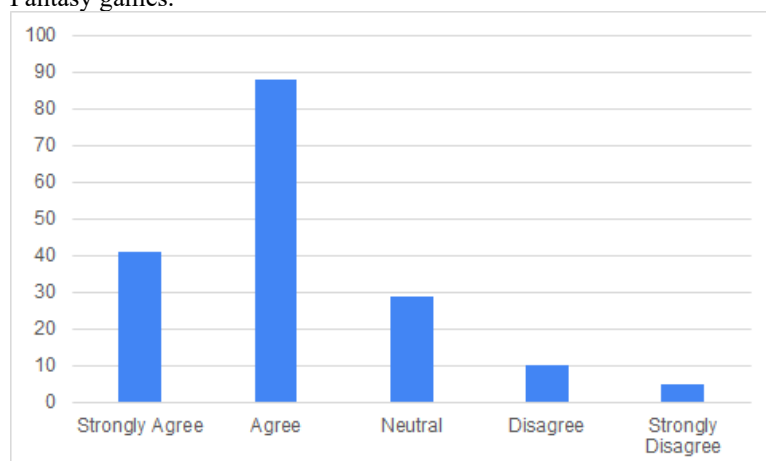

Figure 19 : Inclusiveness of Gender Portrayals in the Final Fantasy Games

Analysis :

A two-sample t-test assuming equal variances was conducted to compare the answers between individuals who are cisgender and heterosexual and those individuals who identify as members of the LGBTQ+ community for the question inquiring whether the individual believes characters within the Final Fantasy video game series display gender congruent stereotypes.

A numerical interpretation of the Likert scale was used to measure the participants feedback, with 1 being 'Strongly Disagree' and 5 being 'Strongly Agree'. The results from the t-test indicated that for Group A, (M=3.88, SD=0.09) while (M=3.86, SD=0.11) for Group B. There was not a significant difference in how individuals felt between groups; t(171) = (0.14), p=(0.45).

3.12 Character Selection

This question aimed to determine if the participants selected the characters they play in the Final Fantasy video game based on gender. This question used a Likert psychometric rating scale where participants read a statement and then selected a response option (ranging from 'Strongly Disagree' to 'Strongly Agree').

Participants were specifically asked whether they choose characters based on personality, not gender. A greater number of participants (65%) either agreed or strongly agreed that they choose characters based on personality when playing the Final Fantasy video games.

The results from this question are illustrated in Figure 20. The modal (most selected) response from the participants was 'Agree' (39%), and the second most popular was 'Strongly Agree' (26%).

This result correlates with other previous answers where participants seem satisfied with gender representations within the games and hence use the personality of the game character as a primary factor in character selection.

However, it should be noted that the responses to this question were not a as definite; the 'Strongly Agree" and 'Agree' answers were 10% lower than other questions on gender representation.

As can be seen from these results, most participants choose characters based on personality, not gender when playing the Final Fantasy video games [48, 65, 66].

Past data collection on this topic has demonstrated that players' choices of specific characters in role-playing games (RPGs) are often shaped by a complex interplay of personal traits, psychological motivations, and game design features. Previous research has shown that players primarily select characters that align with their preferred play style (such as offense, defense, or support), their desire for narrative immersion, or even social motivations like teamwork or leadership [52, 65].

However, the research has also shown that gender correspondingly plays a notable role: research indicates that players' gender can influence both the choice of character gender and the types of roles they select [65, 66]. Overall, character selection in RPGs is a multifaceted decision shaped by individual psychology, social context, and the affordances of the game system itself.
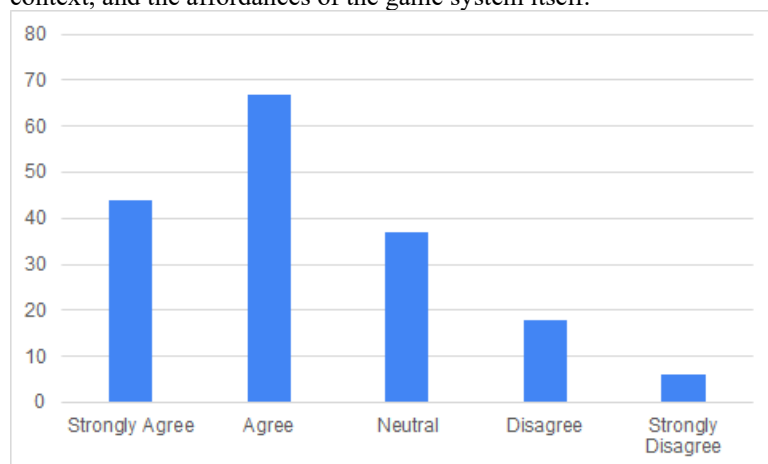

Figure 20 : Character Choice Based on Gender in the Final Fantasy Games

Analysis :

A two-sample t-test assuming equal variances was conducted to compare the answers between individuals who are cisgender and heterosexual and those individuals who identify as members of the LGBTQ+ community for the question inquiring whether participants choose characters based on personality, not gender, within the Final Fantasy game series. A numerical interpretation of the Likert scale was used to measure the participants feedback, with 1 being 'Strongly Disagree' and 5 being 'Strongly Agree'. The results from the t-test indicated that for Group A, (M=3.73, SD=1.12) while (M=3.74, SD=0.98) for Group B. There was not a significant difference in how individuals felt between groups; t(170) = (0.02), p=(0.49).

3.13 Character Choice Limitations

This question aimed to determine if the participants felt limited by the character choice in the Final Fantasy video game based on gender. This question used a Likert psychometric rating scale where participants read a statement and then selected a response option (ranging from 'Strongly Disagree' to 'Strongly Agree').

Participants were specifically asked whether they felt limited by the character options in the Final Fantasy video game series. An overwhelming number of participants (72%) either agreed or strongly agreed that they felt limited by the character options in the Final Fantasy video games.

The results from this question are illustrated in Figure 21. The modal (most selected) response from the participants was 'Agree' (50%), and the second most popular was 'Strongly Agree' (22%).

This result correlates with other previous answers (section 3.1 and section 3.5) where participants appreciate the problems with gender representation in the games, expressing this through a dissatisfaction with the character options available [52, 65, 66]
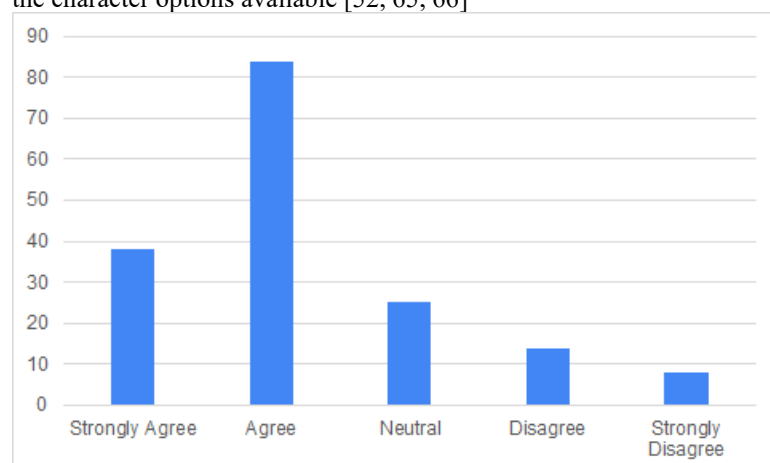

Figure 21 : Participants Felt Limited by the Character Options in the Final Fantasy Video Games.

Analysis :

A two-sample t-test assuming equal variances was conducted to compare the answers between individuals who are cisgender and heterosexual and those individuals who identify as members of the LGBTQ+ community for the question inquiring how limited individuals felt by the character options within the Final Fantasy video game series. A numerical interpretation of the Likert scale was used to measure the participants feedback, with 1 being 'Strongly Disagree' and 5 being 'Strongly Agree'. The results from the t-test indicated that for Group A, (M=3.70, SD=0.11) while (M=3.88, SD=0.11) for Group B. There was not a significant difference in how individuals felt between groups; $t(167) = (-1.10)$, $p=(0.14)$.

3.14 Queer Representation

This question aimed to determine whether the participants felt there needed to be more queer representation within the Final Fantasy video game series. This question used a Likert psychometric rating scale where participants read a statement and then selected a response option (ranging from 'Strongly Disagree' to 'Strongly Agree').

Participants were specifically asked if they wished Final Fantasy had more queer representation in the video game series. An overwhelming number of participants (73%) either agreed or strongly agreed that they felt limited by the character options in the Final Fantasy video games.

The results from this question are illustrated in Figure 22. The modal (most selected) response from the participants was 'Agree' (51%), and the second most popular was 'Strongly Agree' (22%).

As can be seen from these results, the participants overwhelmingly felt that the Final Fantasy video game series needed more queer representation. This result again correlates well with the results of previous questions (section 3.2, section 3.5, and section 3.8) showing that participants can readily identify the lack of diverse sexuality represented in the games.

Queer representation in RPGs has evolved significantly over the past several decades, moving from near-invisibility to a more prominent, though still contested, presence [23, 67]. Studies show that RPGs now feature the highest rates of LGBTQ representation, with a notable rise in the depiction of bisexual and transgender characters since the late 1990s [68]. This trend is partly attributed to the narrative flexibility of RPGs, which allows for more nuanced explorations of identity and relationships [23, 67].

As shown in the literature review, many scholars have argued that RPGs serve as powerful spaces for identity-building, community formation, and world-building, enabling players to experiment with gender, sexuality, and embodiment in ways that can foster self-acceptance and social change [67, 68, 69].
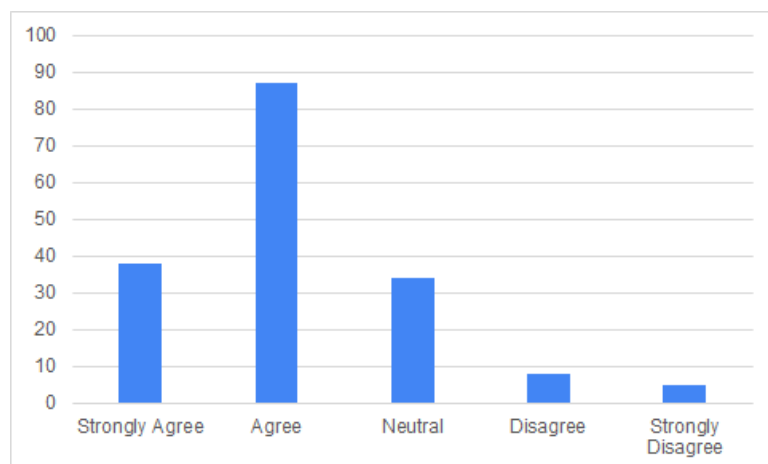
Figure 22 : Participants Wanted More Queer Representation in the Final Fantasy Video Games.

Analysis :

A two-sample t-test assuming equal variances was conducted to compare the answers between individuals who are cisgender and heterosexual and those individuals who identify as members of the LGBTQ+ community for the question inquiring if individuals had a desire for more queer representation within the Final Fantasy video game series. A numerical interpretation of the Likert scale was used to measure the participants feedback, with 1 being 'Strongly Disagree' and 5 being 'Strongly Agree'. The results from the t-test indicated that for Group A, (M=3.71, SD=0.10) while (M=4.04, SD=0.09) for Group B. There was a significant difference in how individuals felt between groups; $t(170) = (-2.37)$, $p=(0.01)$.

3.15 Negative Impact of Gender Stereotypes

This question aimed to determine whether the participants felt that the gender stereotypes within the Final Fantasy video game series had a negative impact. This question used a Likert psychometric rating scale where participants read a statement and then selected a response option (ranging from 'Strongly Disagree' to 'Strongly Agree').

Participants were specifically asked whether they thought the gender stereotypes in the Final Fantasy video games series have a negative effect. The majority of participants (58%) either agreed or strongly agreed that they felt that the gender stereotypes within the Final Fantasy video game series had a negative impact.

The results from this question are illustrated in Figure 23. The modal (most selected) response from the participants was 'Agree' (42%), and the second most popular was 'Neutral' (21%).

As can be seen from these results, the majority of participants felt that the gender stereotypes within the Final Fantasy video game series had a negative impact.

Again, this result correlates well with the results of previous questions (section 3.2, sections 3.3, section 3.5, and section 3.8) showing that participants can readily identify the negative impact of gender stereotypes. This result confirms the findings from the literature which identifies that the representation of gender stereotypes within contemporary video games is widespread [3, 44, 61].

Analysis :

A two-sample t-test assuming equal variances was conducted to compare the answers between individuals who are cisgender and heterosexual and those individuals who identify as members of the LGBTQ+ community for the question inquiring whether or not individuals believe that the gender stereotypes within the Final Fantasy video game series have a negative effect. A numerical interpretation of the Likert scale was used to measure the participants feedback, with 1 being 'Strongly Disagree' and 5 being 'Strongly Agree'. The results from the t-test indicated that for Group A, (M=3.35, SD=0.12) while (M=3.67, SD=0.12) for Group B. There was a significant difference in how individuals felt between groups; $t(171) = (-1.85)$, $p=(0.03)$.
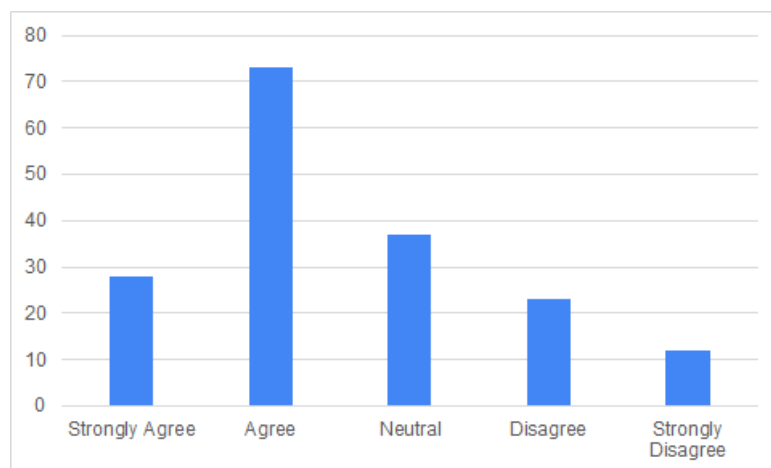
Figure 23 : The Negative Impact of Gender Stereotypes in the Final Fantasy Video Games.

3.16 Character Selection (Repeat Play)

This question aimed to determine whether the participants always played the same character, or character type, in the Final Fantasy video game series. If the participants changed their character, they were asked what factors influenced this choice. This question used a set of multiple-choice options.

Participants were asked whether they always played the same character, or character type, in the Final Fantasy video game series. Around a third of the participants (32%) played the same character in every game. Those participants who changed characters were asked what made them pick a specific character.
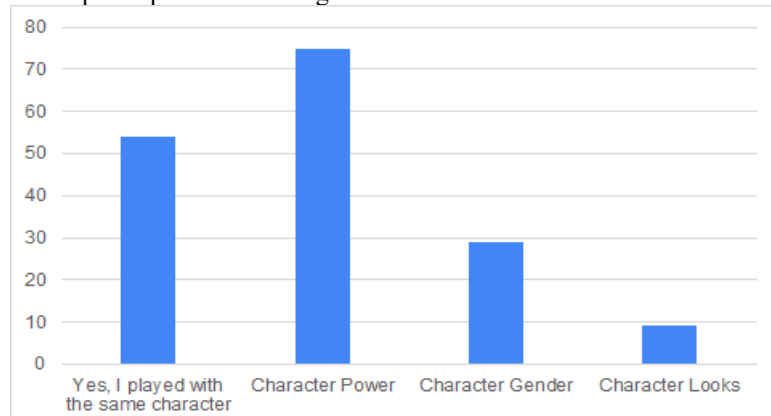

Figure 24 : Factors Affecting Character Choice (Repeat Play) in the Final Fantasy Video Games.

The results from this question are illustrated in Figure 24. The overwhelming majority of those participants who changed their character (66%) said they based their selection on the power of the character. The second most important factor in character selection was gender (26%), and only a small number of participants (8%) used the character's looks as a deciding factor.

As expected, this result agrees well with the previous question on primary character selection (section 3.12). This also correlates with the previous research on RPG character selection which has repeatedly shown that players choose characters primarily based on personality, not gender [48,52, 65, 66]. However, the response to this question also backs up the data from section 3.12, demonstrating again that gender plays a important role in character selection in the Final Fantasy video game series [65, 66].

3.17 Non Player Characters (NPC) Selection

This question aims to determine what factors are considered by the participants when they have to purchase, or hire, an NPC to join their party in the Final Fantasy video game series. This question used a set of multiple-choice options.

The results from this question are illustrated in Figure 25. Participants were asked if they had to buy, or hire, a character in the game to join their party, what things they would look for in that character. The overwhelming majority the participants (73%) said they looked for power and agility in the NPC character. The second most important factor in NPC selection was looks and appearance (20%), and only a small number of participants (7%) used the NPC's gender as a deciding factor.
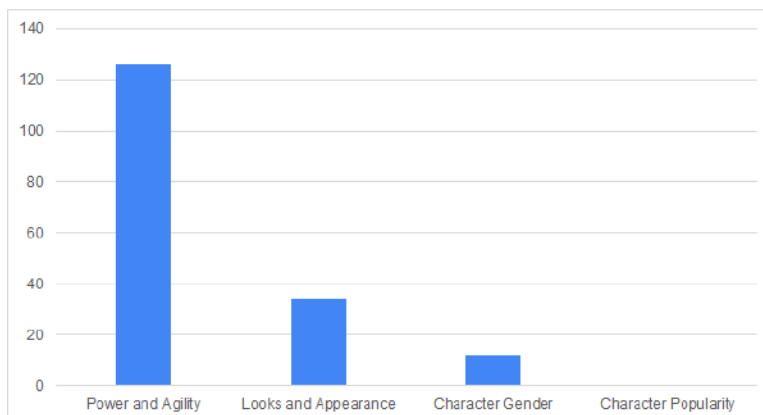
Figure 25 : Factors Affecting NPC Choice in the Final Fantasy Video Games.

This result agrees well with the previous questions on primary character selection (section 3.12 and section 3.16), which again correlates with the previous research on RPG character selection which has repeatedly shown that players choose characters primarily based on personality, not gender [48,52, 65, 66]. However, there is a larger discrepancy in the response to this question, where more participants selected NPC's on power, than use power to select their own character. Players often associate their sense of self with their characters in RPGs through processes of self-expression, identity exploration, and the construction of virtual identities, this obviously occurs to a lesser extent with the selection of NPCs [48, 52, 65, 66].

IV. DISCUSSION

The study presented in this paper set out to examine how players of different gender identities perceive gender stereotypes in the Final Fantasy game series, with particular focus on differences between LGBTQ+ and heterosexual cis-gendered individuals [23, 67]. Previous research has repeatedly indicated that LGBTQ+ participants consistently perceive gender stereotypes in video games as more harmful and more pervasive than their heterosexual, cis-gendered counterparts [47, 68, 69, 70].

The data collected during this study revealed that the perception of gender stereotypes is not uniform across all facets of RPGs but varies depending on the narrative context and character design of each game. This observation echoes previous research work in this field which has repeatedly demonstrated that the impact of gender representation in games is mediated by the specific roles and agency afforded to characters within the game world [1, 45, 46, 52, 71].

The results described in this paper further support the previous literature on the influence of media stereotypes on self-concept and behavior. Research has shown that repeated exposure to stereotyped characters can shape players' attitudes towards gender roles both inside and outside a video game [19, 45, 61].

The findings in this paper suggest that players who have fewer opportunities for identification in mainstream games (LGBTQ+ or other minorities) are particularly impacted by the presence or absence of inclusive and nuanced characters [47, 67, 72]. This is consistent with the argument advanced by multiple researchers that representation matters not only for visibility but for the psychological well-being and sense of belonging of marginalized players [51, 68, 69, 72].

A key theme emerging from the results presented in this paper is the nuanced way in which LGBTQ+ players interpret and respond to gendered character tropes. While heterosexual, cis-gendered participants were more likely to view stereotypical representations as benign or even as harmless narrative devices, LGBTQ+ participants drew attention to the implicit harm such representations can cause, including reinforcing societal prejudices and limiting the scope of identification for marginalized players [23, 47, 72].

The paper also correlates with the literature on prescriptive and proscriptive stereotypes [17] which suggest that stereotypes in media not only reflect but actively shape social expectations regarding gender-appropriate behavior [18, 73]. Male stereotypes often focus on prohibitions because masculinity is conceptualized as something that must be constantly defended and maintained. The prescriptive nature of female stereotypes serves to maintain women in supportive, subordinate roles by defining their value through what they contribute to others [17, 18].

Within video game play, these stereotypes constantly influence player behavior, decision making, and play styles within the game environment [19, 20]. The data collected in this study highlights the perception among marginalized players that these stereotypes are more damaging. This is consistent with research indicating that non-dominant groups are more attuned to the negative impacts of prescriptive norms [19, 23, 47].

Overall, this study's results highlight the enduring nature of gender stereotypes in video games, despite some progress in character diversity and complexity [46, 49]. The findings intersect with research on gender

stereotypes in other media (with esports being of particular interest) [37, 39, 40]. As noted in the literature review, while sexualization and reductive portrayals of women have decreased since the 1990s [2], female characters in Final Fantasy video games (and similar franchises) are still more likely to be cast in secondary or supporting roles and often embody nurturing or emotional traits in line with traditional gender scripts [3, 16, 51, 55, 59]. Participants in this study easily identified these patterns and recognized the need to advocate for broader, more intersectional forms of representation in video games.

In summary, the results of this study have reinforced the conclusions of prior scholarship, that gender stereotypes in video games remain prevalent and are perceived as more harmful by those who are most likely to be marginalized by them. The Final Fantasy video game series, while occasionally offering moments of subversion and complexity, still largely adheres to traditional gender scripts that can limit the sense of agency and identification for LGBTQ+ and female players. These findings underscore the need for continued critical engagement with game narratives and character design, as well as for more inclusive representation that reflects the diversity of the gaming community.

V. CONCLUSIONS

This study has demonstrated that perceptions of gender stereotypes within the Final Fantasy video game series are shaped significantly by the gender identity and sexual orientation of the player.

The statistical analysis shows that different groups of participants have many relatively similar responses to most of the questions presented. However, the analysis also revealed that LGBTQ+ participants are more likely than their heterosexual, cis-gendered counterparts to perceive gender stereotypes in these games as both prevalent and harmful. This heightened awareness among LGBTQ+ players echoes the broader literature on media representation, which highlights how marginalized groups are more attuned to the implicit and explicit biases embedded in cultural products [23, 47, 72]. The underrepresentation of LGBTQ+ and non-binary individuals in both the gaming industry and in-game narratives, as discussed by previous scholars, further compounds the impact of these stereotypes [72, 74, 75]

The statistical analysis on the data also allowed a conclusion to be drawn that individuals within Group B believe significantly more than individuals in Group A that the gender-related stereotypes present within the Final Fantasy video game series have a negative effect. This conclusion reinforces the prevalent view in the literature that those who identify as members of the LGBTQ+ community do in fact view gender stereotypes differently, perceiving them as more harmful than their heterosexual, cis-gender counterparts.

An analysis was undertaken of how the gender stereotypes employed within the Final Fantasy video game series may affect individuals' perceptions of specific gender identities. This analysis attempted to discover whether there would be a significant difference in belief between Group A and Group B. The statistical analysis highlights that there is no significant difference in belief between Group A and Group B, with both groups having relatively similar opinions on the effect of present gender stereotypes within the Final Fantasy video game series.

Our analysis also confirms that gender stereotypes in video games, while somewhat diminished in overt sexualization since the 1990s [2], remain deeply embedded in character roles and narrative structures. Female characters are still more likely to be cast in secondary or nurturing roles, while male characters are depicted as dominant or agentic, reinforcing prescriptive and proscriptive stereotypes identified in prior research [3, 16, 51, 55, 59]. These patterns are not unique to video games but reflect broader social dynamics observed in esports, media, and corporate leadership, where women and LGBTQ+ individuals continue to face barriers to full representation and inclusion [5, 9, 11, 12].

The study also aimed to reveal whether or not individuals who suffer from gender dysphoria may use Final Fantasy video games as an outlet to express their gender identity by playing with a character who more closely aligns with the individual's gender identity. Statistical analysis proved that there is no significant difference between the groups' opinions and both groups lean more towards selecting a character based on the character's personality, or power, rather than their gender [48, 52, 65, 66].

The research highlighted one specific instance where there was a significant difference in responses between groups was in relation to a question inquiring whether or not individuals wish the Final Fantasy video game series had more queer representation than it currently does. Group B scored higher than Group A when asked if they wished that the Final Fantasy video game series had more queer representation than it currently does, indicating that queer representation is more important for LGBTQ+ participants than for cisgender heterosexual individuals [23, 67, 68, 69].

Importantly, this study has highlighted the significant impact that these stereotypes can have on player experience and self-perception. Consistent with research on media influence and role models, the presence of restrictive or negative stereotypes in games can limit identification, agency, and enjoyment, particularly for those who do not see themselves reflected in the characters or narratives[16, 19, 47, 48]. The persistent lack of nuanced, intersectional representation underscores the need for ongoing critical engagement with game design and storytelling, as well as a broader commitment to diversity and inclusion within the games industry.

In summary, this research reinforces the conclusion that gender stereotypes in video games are not only a matter of narrative or aesthetic choice but have tangible effects on how players perceive themselves and others. Addressing these issues requires both greater awareness among creators and a sustained effort to challenge and expand the boundaries of representation in gaming culture.

VI. FURTHER WORK

A possible first step in any future work would be to expand on the survey questions that were statistically significant between the two groups; cis-het individuals and LGBTQ+ individuals. The team found significant differences when investigating if gender stereotypes have a negative effect. Which indicates that more queer representation is needed within the Final Fantasy video games series. Researchers could expand on what specifically the perceived negative effects of gender stereotypes are and what specific representation LGBTQ+ individuals are seeking in the Final Fantasy game series.

Other future research topics could include how perceived gender stereotypes affect the body image in cis-gendered players versus non cis gendered players. If players were to provide a depiction or description of characters they would like to be included. Then researchers could analyze whether or not similarities and correlations exist between the proposed characters. This could potentially give some important insights into what LGBTQ+ representation could look like for the video gaming industry as a whole.

The biggest limitation of the current study was the demographics of the participants. The majority of participants were cis-gendered heterosexual men. Additionally, the LGBTQ+ group mainly comprised of bisexual individuals. Further research should include a more diverse group LGBTQ+ individuals or add separate groups to investigate the differences between the groups in the LGBTQ+ community.

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