INTRODUCTION

Women face difficulties in how they self-identify in today’s society. Those who choose to self-identify with a second, stereotypically male label such as being an athlete, will embrace the second identity but will rarely identify as both at the same time (Barnett, 2017). Professional women athletes tend to exhibit an apologetic identity when addressing the public. This apologetic behavior includes assuming traditional gender scripts where they may be classified as maternal, sexy, or child-like (Barnett, 2017). Research has shown that while women athletes will reflect an identity of an athlete, they will put being a woman first and being an athlete second (Festle, 1996).

Another traditionally male label is that of a “gamer” which is most often associated with the image of a white male (Chess, Evans, Baines, 2017). While this term has been defined many different ways, for the use of this study, the term “gamer” is defined by the individual, following Hall’s (1966) idea that identity allows for a self-definition instead of a static definition applied to the identity from the outside. Similarly to women’s identities as athletes, women who choose to identity as “gamers” will self-identify as either a gamer, or a woman, but not both, even though men and women play video games in similar numbers (Morgenroth, Paaben, Stratemeyer, 2017).

Additionally, studies also found that women who play video games in large numbers internalize a more fluid understanding of gender and associate more as a gamer than a woman (Davivant & Schott, 2013).

Research has found that apologetic behavior affects the self-identification of women as athletes in that women utilize this behavior in order to maintain being a woman first and an athlete second when demonstrating a public image. Women self-identifying as “gamers” also experience the same divide where they focus on either the identity of a gamer or a woman (Shaw, 2012). However, there is a lack of literature on how apologetic behavior applies to females’ decisions to self-identify as “gamers” and if female “gamers” feel the need to present themselves as a woman first and a gamer second. The following research question looks to fill this gap in literature.

RESEARCH QUESTION

Is there an association between apologetic behavior and whether or not females self-identify as “gamers”?

METHOD

SAMPLE

The participants in this study consisted of four female college students from mid-west universities from the ages of 18 to 23 years old. These participants are all female college students who play video games and or self-identify as “gamers”, a label that is self-defined by the individual. These female “gamers” are all full time students and play on average seven hours of video games a week. The interview did not ask the participants demographic questions other than age, sex, and school affiliation. The sample size for these interviews is quite small as the time to conduct the interviews was limited. While there was a difference in age and school affiliation, the female students all shared a commonality of playing video games in their free time.

PROCEDURE

This qualitative study included interviews in person and over the video communication service. Discord. The participants were asked on a voluntary basis to meet for 30 minutes in order to discuss a series of questions regarding femininity and self-identification. The interview is comprised of a total of 17 questions, the first 10 about femininity and self-description, and the last seven about labeling oneself as a gamer. Many of these questions were adapted from the 2008 qualitative study where 14 college female athletes were interviewed on their perspectives on the female/athlete paradox (Ross, 2008).

INTERVIEW QUESTIONS


REFERENCES


RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Selective Femininity

Apologetic behavior focuses on reassuring the public that a female’s self-identity as a woman comes first and any other identity, specifically a stereotypically male identity, comes second. When asked if they would describe themselves as feminine, none of the participants gave a confidence level and instead gave responses such as “In some ways” or “kind of”. The only time all participants believed they should present themselves as feminine was in a formal setting, such as “going to a dance or going to the theatre.” All participants displayed a type of selective femininity, where they chose specific situations, such as formal dances and outings, to adhere to female gender stereotypes and identity as more feminine. In more public settings and among friends, the participants strayed away from typical feminine actions or descriptions.

ACCOMMODATION

Among friends or in small settings, all participants felt comfortable disclosing that they either identified as a gamers or played video games in some capacity. However, when disclosing this information to other unknown typically male gamers, either in person or online, they were less comfortable self-identifying as a gamer. One participant in particular stated, “I’m only comfortable saying ‘I’m a gamer to my friends. If I’m online or playing with other guys I don’t know, I don’t say a lot. I feel like you get treated differently because you’re a girl playing video games, like they don’t listen to you, or take you seriously.” The participants felt the need to adjust their speech and accommodate themselves to the situation. In this case, the situation involved communication with more stereotypical male “gamers”.

CONCLUSION

Overall, the results of the study found that apologetic behavior does not affect whether or not females self-identify as “gamers”. Instead, based on the participants responses, they felt the least comfortable disclosing their self-identity as a “gamer” to those described as “intense gamers”, typically hyper-competitive male gamers who play video games for long hours. While every participant did adhere to some semblance of gender stereotypes, such as feeling pressured to “dress up, put make-up on and look pretty” for formal situations, in everyday public situations they were comfortable self-identifying as a “gamer”. This leads me to believe that a female’s decision to self-identify as a “gamer” is dependent more on Communication Accommodation Theory, where they feel they don’t fit with the stereotypical image of a “gamer” and change their behavior and speech when talking with “real gamers.” However, due to research limitations, strong conclusions can not yet be made. First, the small sample size does not allow making generalizations from the data. Second, this study focused on a limited age range and only accounted for students. With the results of this study and the help of future studies, researchers can continue to better understand the impact that stereotypes and accommodation have on self-identity.