



Navigating Toxicity: Gender Discrimination and Player Experiences in Valorant's Gaming Community

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Abstract: This study investigates the prevalence of gender discrimination and toxicity within the Valorant gaming community. Through a combination of literature review and a college survey, the research explores the experiences of both male and female players, examining the types of harassment encountered, the impact on individuals, and potential strategies for addressing these issues as well as its potential to deter participation in gaming. The preliminary findings suggest that gender-based harassment remains a significant problem in online gaming, despite efforts to promote inclusivity. By examining existing research and conducting a survey among college students, we seek to understand the experiences of both male and female players, and to explore the impact of these issues on the gaming community, a broader understanding of the Valorant game's reputation and its impact on potential players across different gaming communities.

key words: Online gaming, Gender, Sexism, Game Culture, Online Harassment, Sexual Harassment, Video Game, Valorant, Women in Gaming, Toxic men, FPS, Valorant.

INTRODUCTION

2.1 Harassment of women in Online Gaming Communities

2.1.1 Understanding Toxicity

A generic Google search for the word "toxic" reveals definitions that include "poisonous" or "lethal to humans." More recently, "toxic behaviour" is defined as insidious conduct that results in physical or mental harm to others. Outside the gaming community, toxicity is characterized as "rude, disrespectful, or unreasonable language that is likely to make someone leave a discussion" (Holmes, 2024). In online gaming, toxicity refers to harmful or negative behaviours exhibited by players, often directed at others, including verbal abuse, insults, threats, harassment, and unwanted sexual advances. This type of behaviour creates a hostile and unwelcoming environment for players, particularly for those who belong to marginalized groups or are minorities.

2.1.2 Forms of Harassment on women

Gender-based insults, sexual harassment, and verbal abuse are commonplace for female gamers. Disparaging remarks, unwanted sexual advances, threats of violence, and receiving criticism for subpar work based only on one's gender are some instances of these harassment. Voice chat or in-game messaging often becomes the medium for these attacks, with gender becoming the focus rather than gaming skills. Video games are often said to give their players an escape from the real world (both literally through exploring virtual worlds and figuratively through leaving their problems behind), yet many female gamers face the same kind of sexism and harassment while playing video games as they do in real life, if not more. Over 76% of female gamers have experienced gendered harassment, which includes behaviours such as belittling, sexualization, stereotyping, trolling, harassing, barring access, and presuming inadequacy (Passmore & Mandryk, 2020). Because of the nature of many video games that use in-game real-time voice communication, women that face these behaviours are not only dealing with harassment, but a reduction in the ability to play well due to the need to rely on their teammates who are perpetuating harassment.

Madison Turner argues that while trolling and trash talk are often viewed as essential elements of competitive gaming, the excessive vulgarity directed at women goes beyond playful banter. Sexism within the gaming community is frequently dismissed as harmless

trolling, trivializing women's experiences and labelling them as overly dramatic or sensitive. Turner's research documents uncensored examples of verbal attacks on women, revealing that they are disproportionately subjected to sexist interactions compared to men (Turner, 2020).

In one documented instance, once a player's identity as female was revealed, she became the target of escalating verbal harassment. The attacks increased in vulgarity as other male players joined in, competing to find more creative ways to berate her. The harassment included inappropriate and invasive questions such as, "How much do you weigh? What size is your bra? What size tampons? You haven't answered us ... what size pussy do you wear?" These incidents highlight how men not only engage in sexist behaviour but also encourage others to participate (Turner, 2020).

Similarly, in J.D.Dijkink's research, participants reported experiencing or witnessing harassment online. Female participants, in particular, found the topic sensitive and sought reassurance of confidentiality. Given the difficulty of monitoring digital communication platforms, and the potential severity of harassment, including stalking and death threats, the study revealed an alarming number of harassment cases within the study population, which consisted of individuals aged 18-34. Even in communities like World of Warcraft, which is considered less toxic compared to other games, participants experienced harassment, especially in comparison to games like League of Legends, notorious for being one of the most toxic gaming environments (Dijkink, 2023).

NEED OF THE STUDY.

Valorant, A popular online first-person shooter game, has witnessed a surge in popularity among both male and female players. Shaw's study explores the demographics of gaming and challenges the stereotype of the typical gamer, noting the increasing diversity, particularly the rise in female gamers across different gaming platforms.(Shaw, A.,2012)Toxicity in online gaming, including harassment and discrimination, remains a widespread issue. This negative environment has serious consequences, such as pushing women away from gaming and reinforcing the underrepresentation of women in both gaming and the gaming industry.(One woman project ,2018). A hostile and exclusive gaming atmosphere is only made worse by the fact that more than 75% of female gamers report having encountered some kind of gender-based harassment.(2020, Passmore)Female gamers' enjoyment and involvement in online groups are ultimately restricted by these negative experiences, which further exacerbate feelings of alienation and loneliness.

The purpose of this study article is to examine how common gender discrimination and toxicity are among the Valorant community. Through a review of previous studies and a survey of college students, we aim to comprehend the experiences of both male and female gamers as well as the effects of these problems on the gaming community. This will provide a more comprehensive understanding of the game's reputation and its influence on prospective players in various gaming communities.

This research paper aims to investigate the prevalence of gender discrimination and toxicity in the Valorant community. By examining existing research and conducting a survey among college students, we seek to understand the experiences of both male and female players, and to explore the impact of these issues on the gaming community, a broader understanding of the game's reputation and its impact on potential players across different gaming communities.

3.1 About Valorant

Riot Games is the developer and publisher of the free-to-play hero-based tactical shooter Valorant. One team attack and the other defends in this 5v5 multiplayer first-person shooter (FPS). Search and Destroy, the primary game mode, is quite similar to CS:GO. The assaulting side's purpose is to lay a bomb (known as a spike) and have it detonated, while the defensive team attempts to avoid it. The opposing squad wins if a squad is eliminated before any other winning condition is satisfied, regardless of whether the spike is placed or not.

Each of the twenty-five rounds in a match lasts one hundred seconds. The match is won overall by the first team to win 13 rounds. At the beginning of each game, you will have 30 seconds to buy weapons and equipment. You will not be able to respawn until the next round if you die in a round. You can play this primary game style in both ranked and unrated matches.

At the beginning of each game, players choose an "Agent" in addition to buying weaponry. Each Agent has special skills that add a layer of strategy to the game, such as building barriers or healing colleagues. One of the most played first-person shooter games nowadays, Valorant has attracted players from all around the world with its fast-paced, strategic gameplay. The intensity of the game is increased by the necessity of teamwork and instantaneous communication in both ranked and unrated matchups. Additionally, Valorant has a secondary mode called Spike Rush that gives all players equal weapons and skills and delivers a faster, best-of-seven-rounds experience.

However, Valorant is a hotspot for gender discrimination and harassment, especially toward female players, because of its competitive nature and emphasis on vocal communication. The problem is made worse by the existence of toxic masculinity and gender stereotypes in these settings, which raise significant concerns about how these dynamics affect how the game and its community are seen.



Figure 1: Valorant Gaming Console UI - 1



Figure 2: Valorant Gaming Console UI - 2

Research Through Innovation

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This research employs a mixed-methods approach, combining literature review and survey research. Existing studies on gender discrimination and toxicity in online gaming were reviewed to establish the current state of knowledge and identify key themes. Research papers that followed the inclusion criteria were deemed eligible for this analysis. Here the inclusion criteria included: (i) the research paper available in database SCOPUS, Springer, Taylor & Francis and / or Google scholar., (ii) the research papers were using the keywords: Online gaming, Gender, Sexism, Game Culture, Online Harassment, Sexual Harassment, Video Game, Valorant, Women in Gaming, Toxic.(iv) the medium of language of research paper is instructed in English. The papers which did not have all inclusion criteria or had any exclusion criteria were rejected. Here the exclusion criteria were: (i) non-availability of full text (ii) irrelevance to the research field.

This research adopts a mixed-methods approach, integrating a literature review and a survey to explore gender discrimination and toxicity in online gaming, particularly focusing on Valorant and broader gaming communities.

3.1 Population and Sample

A population of 36 participants were included for the survey which was conducted by online forms and in-depth interviews.

<i>Criteria</i>	<i>Count</i>	<i>Comment</i>
Total Number of Survey Response	21	Respondents out of a selected population of 36
Participants out of Survey chosen for Interview	10	10 of these respondents played online games including Valorant
Interviewed Participants who were Valorant Gamers	5	
Interviewed Participants who were Non-Valorant Gamers	5	

Out of 21 Survey responses, 5 survey responses were relevant to this research.

Additionally, a survey was conducted among college students to gather first-hand accounts of experiences within the Valorant community, perceptions of the game Valorant by players that has played Valorant and gamers that play other games but not Valorant. A link was posted to an online survey administered in English, and participants were asked about their gaming habits, experiences with harassment, and perceptions of the gaming community. No compensation was offered for participation. The survey targeted both Valorant players and those who play other games, allowing for a comparison of experiences across different gaming communities.

3.2 Data and Sources of Data

3.2.1 Survey Research

To gather first-hand data, a survey was conducted among college students in India, aiming to capture experiences within the Valorant community and perceptions of the game from non-Valorant players. The survey was administered online in English, with voluntary participation and no compensation offered.

Participants were divided into two groups:

1. Valorant players.
2. Gamers who play other games but have not played Valorant.

The survey collected data on gaming habits, experiences with harassment, and perceptions of gaming communities. By including non-Valorant gamers, the study aimed to analyze whether negative gender stereotypes associated with the game deter certain individuals, particularly women, from engaging with Valorant. This comparative analysis allowed for a broader understanding of the game's reputation and its impact on potential players across different gaming communities.

3.2.2 Survey Questions

“ Gender Discrimination and Toxic Masculinity in Valorant : A Case Study

Investigating Gender Discrimination and Toxic Behavior in Valorant

This survey aims to explore the experiences of players, particularly women, in the online gaming community of Valorant. We are interested in understanding the prevalence of gender-based stereotypes, discrimination, and toxic behavior within the game. By participating in this survey, you will contribute to a growing body of research on the intersection of gender and online gaming. Your responses will help us identify areas where improvements can be made to create a more inclusive and welcoming gaming environment for all.

Please note that your responses will be kept confidential. Thank you for your participation!

- 1) Name
- 2) Contact No.
- 3) How old are you?
- 4) What gender would you identify yourself as?
- 5) Do u play online games? If yes, what are the games you play?
- 6) For how long have you been gaming? (a) Never (b) Beginner (c) 2-5 years (d) 5+ years
- 7) Have you encountered gendered stereotypes online (gaming)? Yes, or No?
- 8) If so, what are gendered stereotypes you have encountered online (gaming)?
- 9) Have these stereotypes affected your views (about the game, etc) in any way?
- 10) Have you ever played Valorant? Yes, or No?
- 11) How often do you play Valorant?(a) Rarely(b) Often(c) Frequently(d) Never
- 12) Have you encountered gendered stereotypes in and/or about valorates or No
- 13) If so, what are gendered stereotypes you have encountered about Valorant in online and gaming?
- 14) How have these stereotypes influenced your overall perception of the game?
- 15) Have you ever had or seen negative experiences surrounding any gender in Valorant?(a) never played Valorant, (b) heard about negative experience about Valorant, (c) name calling and insults,(d) inappropriate sexual messages,(e) men leaving the game when finding out the player is a woman,(f) gatekeeping,(h) patronizing or dismissive comments,(i) judgment about their skills,(j) unsolicited advice,(k) Other-
- 16) Do you feel like there is a difference in being a man/woman online (game) compared to real life? If so, how?

3.2.3 In-Depth Interviews

Following the survey, in-depth interviews were conducted with selected participants from both target groups (Valorant players and non-Valorant gamers). The interviews focused on exploring gaming experiences in greater detail, particularly with regard to gender-related harassment and toxic behaviour in gaming communities.

Participants were asked open-ended questions about:

- Their personal experiences with harassment in games.
- Their perceptions of toxic behavior in online gaming, especially from female players.
- Their views on gender dynamics in gaming communities.

The interviews provided qualitative insights into how gender-related issues influence the gaming experiences of players across different communities. The responses were documented and analyzed to deepen the understanding of the broader themes of gender discrimination and toxicity in online gaming, as highlighted in the survey and literature review.

3.2.4 Literature Review

The literature review aimed to examine existing research on gender discrimination, online harassment, and toxicity in online gaming. To ensure a comprehensive and focused analysis, the following criteria were applied:

- **Inclusion Criteria:**
 1. Research papers available in databases such as SCOPUS, Springer, Taylor & Francis, and/or Google Scholar.
 2. Papers containing the following keywords: *Online gaming, Gender, Sexism, Game Culture, Online Harassment, Sexual Harassment, Video Game, Valorant, Women in Gaming, Toxic, FPS, Valorant.*
 3. Papers written in English.
- **Exclusion Criteria:**
 1. Non-availability of full text.
 2. Irrelevance to the research focus.

From an initial pool of 20 identified papers, 13 were deemed relevant to the research after applying the inclusion and exclusion criteria. These papers were reviewed to synthesize current knowledge and identify key themes related to gender discrimination and toxicity in online gaming.

3.2.5 Interview Questions

- 1) How old are you?
- 2) What gender would you identify yourself as?
- 3) Do u play online games (no mobile games, Pc games, video games etc).what are the games you play?
- 4) For how long have you been gaming?
- 5) Have you ever played Valorant?
- 6) How often do you play Valorant?
- 7) What is your average rank in Valorant?

- 8) Have the stereotypes you've encountered about Valorant online influenced your overall perception of the game?

3.2.6 General Gender Questions

- 1) What do you think of the concept of gender in current day society?
- 2) What do you think it means to be a man?
- a) Think of values, principles, ways of acting, behaviour, etc.
- 3) What do you think it means to be a woman?
- a) Think of values, principles, ways of acting, behaviour, etc.

3.2.7 Specific Gaming Questions

- 4) What kind of gender stereotypes are you aware of in online games?
- a) Have you encountered these stereotypes online?
- b) What experiences did you have with these stereotypes?
- i) Were your hypotheses verified?
- ii) In what way do they validate the stereotype?
- iii) Are they behaved?
- iv) Why do you suppose their actions are what they are?
- c) How do these misconceptions manifest themselves in the real world apart from video games?
- d) Have these misconceptions had any impact on your opinions?
- 5) Do you feel like there is a difference in being a man/woman online compared to real life? If so, how?
- 6) Do you feel like you must alter the way you express yourself to others depending on another person's gender?
- 7) Have you ever had or seen negative experiences surrounding any gender in Valorant?

If they have experienced discrimination in Valorant:

- 1) How has discrimination or toxic conduct affected your choice to play Valorant?
- 2) Have you ever thought of leaving Valorant because of bad experiences?
- 3) What steps, in your opinion, could be taken to lessen discriminatory practices and toxic behaviour at Valorant?

Additional questions

1. Do you feel that Valorant is a welcoming and inclusive environment for all players, regardless of gender?
2. Have you ever observed any differences in the treatment of male and female players in Valorant?
3. Are there any specific game mechanics or design elements that you believe contribute to toxic behaviour or discrimination?

3.2.8 Limitations

Despite the comprehensive approach employed in this research, several limitations should be acknowledged:

4. *Sample Size and Diversity:* The results may not be as widely applicable as they may be due to the study's major focus on college students. The experiences of students may not be representative of the broader gaming community, which include individuals from diverse age groups, ethnic backgrounds, and geographical locations. Furthermore, the strength of the conclusions derived may vary depending on the sample size.
5. *Selection Bias:* Due to the voluntary nature of both the survey and thorough interviews, selection bias may have occurred. The results could be compromised since those who choose to participate might have more strong opinions or more vivid experiences with gender discrimination and toxicity in gaming.
6. *Limited Scope of Literature Review:* The literature review was limited to papers available in specific databases (SCOPUS, Springer, Taylor & Francis, and Google Scholar) and written in English. This restriction may have excluded relevant studies published in other languages or available in different databases, leading to an incomplete picture of the existing research.
7. *Self-Reported Data:* Numerous biases, including memory recall bias and social desirability bias, can affect the self-reporting that was used in the survey and interview data. Participants may overreport or underreport their experiences, particularly when discussing delicate subjects like harassment and discrimination.
8. *Focus on Valorant:* The study focuses a lot of attention on the Valorant community even though its overall goal is to investigate gender discrimination and toxicity in online gaming. The findings might not apply as well to other gaming communities with distinct cultures, norms, and dynamics because of this concentration. It's possible that players' experiences in Valorant don't adequately convey the complexity of gender issues in the gaming industry as a whole.

Recognizing these limitations puts the findings in context and emphasizes the need for more study that takes these limitations into account.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The interview was conducted with 10 people, chosen from the survey responses of 21. The key findings included below from the interviews:

1. *Gendered Harassment:* Female players have encountered gendered harassment in Valorant, which includes derogatory comments, condescending attitudes, and exclusionary behavior. They have said that Male players have been seen to express disbelief that women can excel in the game or suggest that "these games are for guys." Such remarks reflect the broader stereotypes that women face in competitive gaming spaces, especially within FPS (First-Person Shooter) genres. However, some players mentioned that the frequency of these incidents varies by server, with certain regions showing higher levels of toxicity.

2. **Server-Specific Toxicity:** The research highlights significant differences between servers. For example, the Mumbai server is particularly toxic, not only in terms of gender harassment but also involving verbal abuse between players based on their regional backgrounds (North vs. South Indians). In contrast, players on the Singapore server report more peaceful gameplay, with minimal harassment when women speak. This variance in server culture plays a role in shaping players' experiences and perception of the game.
3. **Anonymity and Toxic Behavior:** The anonymity provided by online platforms intensifies toxic behavior in Valorant. Both male and female players reported that hiding behind usernames allows individuals to engage in negative and aggressive interactions without fear of consequences. This normalization of toxicity is often jarring for the beginners and takes time getting used to. Many players playing Valorant have come to a conclusion that toxicity can't be helped and accept it as it is, mute themselves and others for a peaceful game.
4. **Coping Strategies:** Female players employ various strategies to mitigate harassment, such as using male usernames or avoiding voice chat altogether to conceal their identity in general like almost the rest of the players in the game. Many players, regardless of gender, choose to mute their microphones to avoid toxic encounters altogether. While this can help players protect themselves, it also limits in-game communication and impacts their ability to collaborate effectively in a cooperative game. Women play both with their own friend groups and online with others, don't necessarily avoid playing competitively with others.
5. **Toxicity Beyond Gender:** The research found that Valorant's toxic environment is not exclusive to gender harassment. Both male and female players experience toxic behavior, with players often being bashed for poor skills. The toxic culture is systemic, and while women face gender-based harassment, many players, in general, find the game's environment unwelcoming. Players have normalized this toxicity, leading to a community that dismisses or ignores harmful behavior, which hinders efforts to change the culture.
6. **Impact on Female Participation:** Some women are often discouraged from fully engaging in the game due to the fear of harassment in voice chat, limiting their ability to improve and participate in the competitive environment. But generally, it's not true, from our research findings most women are open to playing Valorant and are mostly deterred by media like YouTube, twitch, gossip from friends, etc due to stereotype threat. This experience reinforces stereotypes that women are not serious gamers in competitive spaces. Those women who do engage must expend additional effort to protect themselves from verbal abuse, put more effort to not appear unskilled, making the gaming experience more stressful and sometimes less enjoyable. However, once women overcome these stereotype threats and participate in the game, many find that harassment occurs less frequently than they feared.

CONCLUSION

According to the research, toxic conduct and gender discrimination are serious problems in Valorant that affect both player experiences and the game's general reputation. Although the game itself is well-liked and respected for its competitive character and mechanics, its community is sometimes viewed as unfriendly, especially by female players. The results imply that although overt harassment might not be common in every battle, it happens often enough to influence the gaming environment, particularly for women who are commonly the targets of derogatory stereotypes and discriminatory conduct.

5.1 Effects of Harassment on Women:

Persistent harassment of women in online gaming can have a number of detrimental effects on them both inside and outside of the virtual world. The effects on mental health are among the most notable since ongoing exposure to toxic conduct exacerbates stress, anxiety, and even depression. Because the gaming community is frequently seen as harsh and exclusive, it can cause women to feel alone, which discourages them from participating and drives them out of the community entirely. Women in these settings are frequently harassed just for being there, and this abuse can carry over into real life, affecting their self-esteem, social relationships, and even their desire to pursue careers in gaming. Women may carry the emotional toll of harassment into their daily lives, leading to stress and self-doubt about their abilities compared to male players (Fox & Tang, 2017).

The impact of harassment extends beyond virtual boundaries, affecting women's participation in the broader gaming industry, including competitive eSports, game development, and community engagement. Women frequently withdraw from gaming communities or avoid certain games altogether to protect themselves from negative experiences, limiting their representation in the gaming world (Fox & Tang, 2017). This withdrawal also stems from gender-based discrimination being most common in environments where women communicate through voice chat or take on roles that require initiative and aggression within games like Valorant (Nguyen & Park, 2023). This gender disparity in participation and performance is further fuelled by stereotype threat, which impacts women's gameplay performance and confines them to more restrictive roles.

5.2 Reasons Behind Harassment

1. **Toxic Masculinity:** In gaming communities, toxic masculinity is one of the main causes of harassment. Because men have traditionally dominated the gaming industry, aggressive, competitive, and overly masculine traits are frequently praised in this society. Female gamers are frequently viewed as outsiders or intruders in this space, and harassment becomes a way for some men to assert dominance or gate keep these communities. Recent research has explored factors that may be associated with this experience of video game sexism (Fox and Tang 2014). The findings indicated that social dominance orientation and conformity to some types of masculine norms (desire for power over women and the need for heterosexual self-presentation) predicted higher levels of sexist beliefs. Madison Turner discusses how competitive gaming, like traditional sports, is often seen as a platform for players, especially men, to display their prowess. Trash talk and banter between opponents are typical within this environment, reflecting broader trends in sports discourse where men are found to engage in trash talking significantly more than women (Kniffin & Palacio, 2018). Turner's research also highlights that women are generally less competitively motivated than men,

often focusing on self-improvement rather than outdoing others. In team-based games like Valorant, competition between teammates is common due to the reliance on collective success and visible scoring systems. A unique aspect of Valorant is its dependence on voice communication, which increases the likelihood of verbal insults and aggression. Turner notes that the presence of female teammates, whose identities are revealed through voice chat, often escalates such incidents. To find recurring communication themes and ideologies, these verbal conversations were recorded and subjected to qualitative analysis (Turner, 2020).

2. *Gender Stereotypes:* Another important factor in the continuation of harassment is gender stereotypes. Stereotypes that women are less adept at gaming or don't belong in the gaming community frequently result in aggressive behaviour and sexist presumptions. The stereotype of the "gamer girl" also plays a significant role in perpetuating harassment. This stereotype positions women as novelties or impostors in the gaming world, leading to sexist assumptions and hostile behaviour. Even women who have had favourable online experiences, according to Turner (2020), complain about how their gender is emphasized, which perpetuates the idea that gaming is a male realm. This stereotype contributes to the alienation of women in the gaming community and divides male and female gamers. The relationship between sex role stereotyping and the social environment in online gaming has been further investigated by recent studies. Holz Ivory et al. (2014) suggest that sex role stereotyping by other players creates an alienating environment for female gamers. Many women report experiencing stereotype threat in both online and offline settings, with some feeling the need to develop strategies to manage male behaviours rather than challenge them directly. This trend reflects the broader issue of misogyny in online gaming, where even though explicit sexism may be less frequent, subtle forms of objectification, sexualization, and labelling remain prevalent. The intricacy of gender-based discrimination in current contexts is highlighted by these nuanced kinds of misogyny, which are frequently hidden behind anonymity and online terminology (Lemani, 2024).

3. *Male-Dominated Games:* Like many first-person shooter games, Valorant, Call of Duty, and Counter-Strike are frequently perceived as a male-dominated environment, which may deter women from playing. But according to McDaniel's (2021) research, although many women find first-person shooter games to be empowering, they are also just as likely to encounter harassment and discrimination in these settings. The competitive nature of these games, which heavily relies on voice communication, further increases the likelihood of verbal harassment. This verbal abuse often escalates when female players reveal their identities through voice chat, with toxic players using the opportunity to assert dominance. The perception of these games as "male domains" can also discourage women from participating, reinforcing gender disparities in gaming. (Turner, 2020)

5.3 Coping Strategies Adopted by Female Gamers

Coping strategies adopted by women in these environments vary. One popular strategy is "gender masking," in which women avoid voice chat, use gender-neutral usernames, or even pose as men in order to escape harassment (Fox & Tang, 2017). Although this tactic is useful for preventing harassment, it also contributes to women's continued lack of visibility in gaming and the idea that these areas are controlled by men. To prevent toxic encounters, some women also opt to muting or turning off voice intercoms while playing, although this just treats the symptoms and not the underlying reasons of harassment. Furthermore, because aggressors may turn to other disruptive tactics, such team-killing, to damage their victim's gaming experience, muting toxic gamers might occasionally intensify harassment (Turner, 2020).

Some women seek solace in inclusive or female-only gaming groups, where they can interact in a safe space free from harassment. These groups provide secure areas where women can play, exchange stories, and bond with people who are aware of the difficulties they encounter. Turner talks on how some women choose to play single-player games or leave hazardous environments before harassment even starts, avoiding social engagement with other players completely (Turner, 2020).

Many women show tenacity and persist in pushing for change in the gaming community in spite of the obstacles. These women call out toxic conduct, expose abusive players, and advocate for more respect and inclusivity in gaming. They disrupt the current quo and help create a more inviting environment for all players by speaking out against harassment (Fox & Tang, 2017).

In order to deal with gendered harassment, female Valorant players also employ a range of coping mechanisms, including sticking to private matches, avoiding voice chat, and utilizing male usernames. We also found that generally almost all Valorant players mute their mike due to the toxic culture in Valorant. These coping strategies, however, have a price: they make it harder for them to enjoy the game and fully engage in the community. A cycle of prejudice is sustained by the game's normalization of toxic behavior, which promotes an atmosphere in which harassment is accepted and occasionally disregarded.

Addressing the toxic behavior that has permeated Valorant's community is essential to enhancing the gaming experience for all players. Stronger reporting and moderation procedures are necessary for this, but so is a culture change that opposes harassment's acceptance and promotes inclusivity. Without these adjustments, Valorant's reputation as a hostile and toxic environment is likely to endure, deterring women and other underrepresented groups from partaking fully in the game.

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