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When gaming can be non-problematic and healthy

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***Abstract*—**The behaviours exhibited in online gaming today signify a change in meaning. Initially, games were merely entertainment, but now gaming is part of real life, with players becoming deeply involved and connected. This study explores how online games can be positive, adaptive activities rather than potential sources of problematic behaviours. The study applied a qualitative research design, conducting semi-structured, in-depth interviews with fifteen enthusiastic gamers who were characterised as individuals who had played daily for at least one year and spent at least four hours per day gaming. The study was guided by literature on gaming behaviours and dualistic passion models. The data were analysed using interpretative phenomenological analysis, which allowed for a detailed exploration of the participants' subjective experiences. Two superordinate themes were identified through the analysis. The first, meeting and satisfying personal needs, highlights gaming's multifaceted benefits, including entertainment, knowledge expansion, social skill enhancement, communication practice, and problem-solving strategy development. Participants also described gaming as supporting psychological well-being and fostering personal growth. The second, fulfilling fantasy and imagination, comprises role-playing and using cross-gender avatars. These practices allow players to explore different identities and narratives. Key findings are discussed through the framework of Jung's theory of individuation. According to this theory, gamers incorporate archetypal elements, such as the anima-animus, shadow, and persona, into their gaming experiences. This integration promotes happiness and self-actualisation by fostering harmonious passion. The findings of this study contradict the prevailing notion that online gaming is inherently problematic. Contrary to these assumptions, the study posits that online games can function as effective conduits for self-expression. These virtual platforms enable individuals to articulate feminist ideals in a socially acceptable manner. These insights offer theoretical and practical contributions by reframing online gaming as a beneficial activity that fosters positive psychological states and balanced engagement.

Keywords: Individuation, Harmonious passion, Healthy gaming

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I. INTRODUCTION

SMARTPHONES,, virtual worlds, websites, and online games are prominent examples of modern media gaining tremendous significance for most people today. Online games are immersive, extended-play applications that captivate gamers through highly interactive systems, diminishing the chances of abandoning the game's virtual realm. How gamers perceive the meaning of a game distinguishes their evaluations, attitudes, and behaviours towards it in online gaming. On the other hand, online gaming raises concerns, as it has the potential to cause fixation and lead to addiction if played for an extended period.

Problematic gaming, characterised by difficulty regulating online gaming behaviours (King & Delfabbro, 2019), can lead to mental health issues, including psychological distress (Kim et al., 2016; King & Delfabbro, 2016). Conversely, certain gamers can effectively manage their daily tasks and obligations, efficiently allocate time, and enjoy playing games, without causing disruptions. These gamers value gaming for its positive impact on personal development and are commonly referred to as enthusiastic gamers or non-problematic gamers. According to Vallerand et al. (2003), any activity requiring time and energy can be considered a harmonious passion. Based on this perspective, an enthusiastic gamer may exhibit harmonious passion. Supporting this notion, Przybylski et al. (2009) found that harmonious passion correlates with heightened post-play energy after online gaming, including increased feelings of activeness, energy, and excitement. The Dualistic Model of Passion (DMP) framework developed by Vallerand (2003) outlines two types of passion: harmonious and obsessive. Harmonious passion is when a person has a passion for an activity that is in harmony with other aspects of their self and life, leading to adaptive outcomes. When engaged in an activity out of harmonious passion, individuals can fully focus on the task, experiencing heightened concentration and flow. According to Vallerand et al. (2003, 2010, 2015), these gamers display positive video game engagement patterns, which enable them to effectively manage their intense involvement in gaming and reduce conflicts with other obligations.

Conversely, online gaming presents an enticing characteristic that appeals to numerous players: the ability to engage with other gamers. Such interaction permits players to design unique virtual personas, avatars, or characters that depict them within the game's world (Yee, 2006). This adaptability of constructing an online identity empowers gamers to diverge from, or even modify, their actual identity (Huh & Williams, 2010). What is intriguing is the use of opposite-sex identity (DiGiuseppe & Nardi, 2008) as their online identity.

Related to this, Jung's (1988) idea that all individuals possess both masculine and feminine sides offers a framework for discussing the contrasting side that arises in gamers. Anima may take on the form of feeling or mood rather than a female figure when appearing in dreams.

This paper sheds light on interpreting psychoanalytic theory for researching theories through gaming, offering valuable insights into deep psychological understanding, as a new perspective on individual's life journeys. To understand this process, the author examined Jung's psychoanalytic theory framework, which views the Individuation process as the primary objective analysis of the gaming phenomenon. The study explores the beneficial and salubrious aspects of non-problematic behaviours among gaming enthusiasts. This study suggests that online gaming can foster healthy mental well-being and may offer a fresh outlook on gaming behaviours.

II. LITERATURE REVIEW

Non-Problematic Gamers

In their 2015 study, Billieux et al. divided gamers into two groups: Non-problematic and Problematic gamers. The Non-problematic gamers group was further divided into two types: recreation gamers, who show low impulsivity and time spent gaming, and high self-esteem; and social role-players, who have low self-esteem and impulsivity, and are motivated by social change and role-playing.

Demetrovic et al. (2012) identified six dimensions that indicate problematic online gaming behaviours: preoccupation, overuse, immersion, social isolation, interpersonal conflict, and withdrawal. In contrast, nonproblematic players do not exhibit these signs; if they do, they are at very low levels and do not cause problems.

Passion

According to Vallerand (2015), passion is an intense emotion. It refers to a strong inclination towards a particular object, activity, concept, or person valued enough to invest time and energy regularly (Vallerand, 2003).

Dualistic Models of Passion (DMP) is a framework proposed by Vallerand (2010, 2015) to examine differences between high but unproblematic involvement and problematic involvement in gambling. The model proposes a distinction between harmonious and obsessive passion. Harmonious passion results from autonomous internalising a particular activity into one's identity. Individuals with harmonious passion strongly connect with an activity, but this does not interfere with other aspects of their lives. Harmonious passion is associated with mindful engagement, rather than an unregulated drive. Activities are performed with a secure sense of self-esteem, openness, and flexibility.

In contrast, controlled passion refers to the controlled internalisation of an activity into one's identity. This type of internalisation is caused by intra- and/or interpersonal forces associated with the activity, such as feelings of social acceptance or self-esteem, or because the excitement generated by the activity becomes uncontrollable. Obsessive passions can enslave individuals who cannot regulate their involvement in an activity.

When individuals engage in activities due to harmonious passion, they can fully focus on the activity, exhibit high concentration levels, and experience flow. Harmonious passion is aligned with other aspects of the person's self and life, and leads to adaptive outcomes. Engaging in an activity motivated by harmonious passion produces positive affect, high energy levels, and little negative affect. In contrast, engaging in an activity with obsessive passion can lead to an uncontrollable urge to continue the activity, even if it conflicts with aspects of the person's self and life, resulting in maladaptive behaviours.

Passion can develop in two ways. First, when individuals engage in an activity for a reward, and that reward is no longer available at a later time, there is a tendency for the individual to switch to another activity. Second, individuals may explore their environment and engage in new activities, even without rewards or reinforcement (Ryan & Deci, 2000). The factors that influence the development of passion in a person are: (1) Activity Choice: Considering the physical environment, cultural background, and level of parental involvement; (2) Activity Valuation: Considering the social environment and the extent to which the activity satisfies psychological needs; (3) Activity Internalisation: Accepting the activity as important to one's identity, while supporting autonomy and considering social and personal factors.

Individualisation

The concept of individuation is central to Jung's (1988) psychology. It is viewed as a process of self-realisation, where an individual discovers and experiences meaning and purpose in life. This process involves the interaction and synthesis of opposites, such as the conscious and unconscious, personal and collective, psyche and soma, divine and human, and life and death (Schmidt, 2023). Jung believed that individuation is a development in the second half of life. In the first half of life, individuals are primarily focused on expanding their ego and conforming to societal norms, such as establishing their social status.

In contrast, the second half of life focuses on accepting mortality, discovering the meaning of life, and fulfilling one's unique role in the world. Jung's concept of individuation (1988) describes the process by which individuals strive to reach their full potential. Individuation is the process of the self striving towards consciousness. Jung's analytical psychology proposes a personality structure consisting of several essential systems: ego, self-consciousness, archetypes, persona, shadow, anima, and animus.

Anima and Animus

Jung (1988) proposed that every individual possesses both masculine and feminine aspects. Anima and animus are archetypes that represent every man and woman's feminine and masculine characteristics, respectively (Jung, 1987: 106, 107). The anima and animus archetypes play a role in the unconscious, counterbalancing the consciousness of both men and women. These archetypes are a product of the historical experience of men with women and women with men, which has influenced each gender to have characteristics of the opposite sex (Lindzey, 1993: 189-190). The anima and animus can be seen as universal and collective occurrences, representing the unconscious and serving as mediators towards self-awareness. Anima is a concept in psychology that represents the feminine tendencies, both positive and negative, within the male psyche. Positive expressions of anima can include sensitivity, empathy, and the capacity for loving relationships. Anima is the center of compassion, emotion, instinct, and intuition from the male side of the personality. Incorporating these traits into a man's personality allows him to develop his sensitive side, enabling him to be kind, warm, and understanding (Dee, 1991). On the other hand, if a woman recognises her Animus and its impact on her, and confronts reality instead of allowing possession, the Animus can become an inner companion that embodies masculine traits such as initiative, courage, objectivity, and spiritual wisdom. The Animus can facilitate a woman's connection with the evolution of spirituality in her time, making her more receptive to new creative ideas than men (Jung, 1964, p. 285).

It is commonly believed that men exhibit toughness, rational thinking, and aggression, while women are seen as irrational and accepting of the ego. However, recognising that both genders possess various traits, including compassion, sentiment, logic, and competitiveness, is essential. It is commonly believed that men exhibit toughness, rational thinking, and aggression, while women are seen as irrational and accepting of the ego. It is crucial to avoid making sweeping generalisations about either gender. Anima and Animus are the most crucial imago in the adult self. They are the characteristics or qualities of the opposite sex that exist in the human subconscious. The Anima gives men an idealised image of women, while the Animus gives women an idealised image of men. The appearance of the Anima or Animus in one's dreams indicates the integration of personality. According to Jung, this integration is called the individuation process (Ningtyas, 2020).

Gender-Swapping

In online gaming, identity is defined by characters, which serve as visual representations of the player. In Massively Multiplayer Online games (MMOs), players can control an avatar that navigates a 3D virtual world and interacts with other players' avatars (DiGiuseppe & Nardi, 2008). Players can create and modify avatars, allowing for flexibility in identity construction. This includes the ability to deviate from or even

change their real-world identity. Online gender-swapping is a common example of this exercise of freedom and control in virtual worlds. It is important to note that no rules dictate that players must use their real-world gender for their characters. Gender swapping is the act of assuming a gender identity that differs from one's biological sex (Roberts & Parks, 1999). Previous research has examined gender swapping by both men and women (Bruckman, 1996) and specifically by men (Van Gelder, 1991). A study conducted by Hussain and Griffiths (2008) found that 54% of male and 70% of female gamers had experimented with gender swapping. Men often engage in gender swapping for competitive advantage. Because by posing as an attractive woman and interacting with other male players, these swappers seek to earn extra money or weapons and avoid being targeted (and therefore attacked) by fellow gamers.

III. OBJECTIVE OF THE STUDY

This study explores the psychological and behavioural characteristics of non-problematic, enthusiastic gamers, focusing on how harmonious passion for gaming contributes to mental well-being and balanced daily functioning. By integrating the Dualistic Model of Passion and Jung's concept of individuation, this research seeks to provide a deeper understanding of how gaming can serve as a positive, adaptive activity rather than solely a risk for addiction. The findings are expected to offer a fresh theoretical and practical perspective on healthy gaming engagement.

IV. METHODS

Research approach

This exploratory study used qualitative methods to understand how non-problematic gamers experience online gaming as a meaningful, psychologically beneficial activity. Most existing research focuses on the negative consequences of problematic gaming (King & Delfabbro, 2019; Kim et al., 2016), so there is a gap in our understanding of gaming's positive health effects. A qualitative exploratory approach is well-suited for under-researched topics because it enables researchers to investigate phenomena that have not been fully conceptualised yet and capture participants' subjective perspectives in their own words (Cresswell & Poth, 2018; Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). This design facilitates the emergence of rich, nuanced data that can reveal patterns, motivations, and processes that may not be accessible through quantitative methods (Braun & Clarke, 2021). The theoretical frameworks underlying this study, the Dualistic Model of Passion (Vallerand et al., 2003, 2015) and Jung's (1988) concept of individuation, emphasise the significance of internal experiences, including motivation, self-integration, and identity development. These experiences are most effectively explored through open-ended inquiry. A qualitative design provides methodological flexibility, enabling researchers to adjust questions and probe emerging themes as data collection unfolds (Patton, 2015). This approach prioritises depth over breadth, ensuring that participants' voices remain central to interpreting the findings and allowing for a holistic exploration of how gaming can coexist with other life domains. Ultimately, this exploratory design generates valuable insight into healthy gaming engagement and lays the groundwork for future hypothesis-driven quantitative research.

Research design

The researcher selected phenomenology as the design. Phenomenology, as a qualitative research approach, seeks to elucidate the meaning of individuals' lived experiences (Moran & Mooney, 2002). The present study employed hermeneutic phenomenology (Creswell & Poth, 2018) to understand and interpret the lived experiences of online gamers, focusing on their subjective experiences as gaming enthusiasts.

Data analysis

This study used Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA) (Smith & Osborn, 2003) to explore the experiences and interpretations of non-problematic gamers regarding gaming as a meaningful and psychologically beneficial activity. IPA was chosen because it emphasises understanding how individuals interpret their personal and social worlds, focusing on descriptive (participants' accounts) and interpretive (researchers' analyses) levels of meaning. Data analysis followed the systematic, iterative process recommended by Smith, et al. (2009). First, the interview transcripts were read and re-read to achieve immersion in the data. Then, initial notes were made on the participants' narratives' descriptive, linguistic, and conceptual aspects. Then, emergent themes were identified for each case, focusing on capturing both convergence (shared experiences) and divergence (unique perspectives). After establishing individual case themes, patterns across cases were examined to develop superordinate themes reflecting the collective experiences of participants.

The analysis remained grounded in the words of the participants through the frequent use of verbatim excerpts, ensuring that the interpretations remained close to the intended meanings. Several strategies were implemented to enhance the findings' credibility, dependability, and confirmability (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Reflexive journaling was maintained throughout the research process to document the researcher's assumptions, decisions, and evolving interpretations. This helped to mitigate potential biases (Finlay, 2002). Emerging themes were challenged and refined by consulting with fellow researchers familiar with qualitative methods. Member checking was employed by sharing preliminary interpretations with selected participants to verify their accuracy and resonance with their lived experiences. Additionally, an audit trail was kept, including raw data, analytic notes, and coding decisions, to ensure the analysis's transparency and reproducibility. By integrating these procedures, the study sought to balance interpretive depth with methodological rigor, thereby reducing researcher bias and bolstering the trustworthiness of the findings.

Data collection tools

This study primarily used semi-structured, in-depth interviews to collect data, allowing participants to provide detailed accounts of their gaming experiences while maintaining sufficient structure for comparing cases (Kallio et al., 2016). An interview guide was developed based on the study's objectives and relevant literature on gaming behaviours and passion theory. The guide included open-ended questions designed to explore participants' motivations, emotional experiences, self-regulation strategies, and reflections on how gaming influences their personal and social functioning.

Example questions included prompts such as asking participants what motivates them to play games and how they would describe their passion for gaming in their daily lives, a question aimed at identifying whether their passion is harmonious or obsessive (Vallerand, 2015). Participants were also invited to describe how they manage their gaming time alongside work, study, or personal responsibilities, exploring how gaming coexists harmoniously with other life domains (Vallerand et al., 2003). In addition, participants were asked to reflect on how their characters or avatars, as well as their gaming style, represent who they are or who they aspire to be, providing insight into the role of gaming in self-concept and identity construction (Yee, 2006; Huh & Williams, 2010). These questions were intentionally designed to capture both positive, adaptive aspects of gaming (harmonious passion) and potential conflicts or compulsions (obsessive passion), enabling nuanced insights into how gamers experience their engagement as healthy or problematic

Interviews were conducted one-on-one via a secure online video conferencing platform, depending on participant preference and availability. Each interview lasted approximately 90-120 minutes, allowing sufficient time for participants to narrate their experiences while maintaining focus on key topics. All interviews were audio-recorded with participants' informed consent and later transcribed verbatim to ensure authenticity. Field notes were taken during and immediately after each interview to capture contextual details and researcher reflections, which enriched the interpretative process. This approach balanced consistency with flexibility, enabling participants to

introduce unique perspectives and ensuring that the data remained participant-centered, consistent with the interpretative phenomenological analysis (IPA) framework (Smith et al., 2009).

The criteria for selecting participants prioritised active and devoted online gamers who had played daily for at least one year and spent at least four hours gaming daily. Recruitment took place through two channels: communication via WhatsApp messages with a known contact in the gaming community and messaging groups where gamers frequently interact and share experiences, as well as the dissemination of notifications through social media.

Research site

This study was conducted entirely in a virtual setting to align with the natural context of participants' gaming experiences. All interviews were conducted via secure online video conferencing platforms, such as Zoom and G-Meet, which provided a convenient and accessible environment for participants and mirrored the digital spaces in which they typically engage with games. This online approach ensured ecological validity by enabling participants to share their narratives in a familiar context and by allowing participants from diverse geographic locations to be included.

Ethical considerations

This study received ethical approval from the Institutional Review Board of Universitas Indonesia (protocol number 069/FPsi.Komite Etik/PDP.04.00/2021). All participants provided informed consent before participating. They received clear information about the study's purpose and procedures, and their right to discontinue their involvement at any time. Personal identifiers were removed from all transcripts and reports to protect confidentiality, and pseudonyms were used instead. Interviews were conducted via secure, encrypted video conferencing platforms, and audio recordings were stored on password-protected devices accessible only to the research team. Data were handled per ethical research guidelines to ensure privacy, confidentiality, and data security throughout the study.

V. RESULTS

Fifteen male participants in early adulthood were included in this study. They reported actively playing online games for more than 5 years and almost every day during the last 12 months. The average playing duration was 2-5 hours per day, and the longest gaming duration was 9-20 hours.

As gamers who have a harmonious passion, each participant interprets gaming differently. Themes and subthemes were identified from the interview transcript. The analysis revealed two interrelated superordinate themes from the data gathered. The first theme pertains to satisfaction and fulfilment of personal needs. A vast majority of gamers experienced this theme. Online gaming proved to be an enjoyable activity and yielded benefits in the form of psychological solace and personal growth in a positive direction. Secondly, all participants identified fulfilling imagination and fantasy as prevalent themes. It involved role-playing and fantasy experiences through avatars of the opposite gender. These themes, which were associated with passion, were harmonious and allowed them to play games without being problematic.

Table 1: Biographic results of participants

Person	Age	Qualification	Gaming Experience (years)	Gaming Duration (hour/day)	Longest gaming duration (hour)	Games currently playing
1	21	College students	7	3-4	18	Atlantica, Lost Saga
2	21	College students	9	4-5	20	Valorant, Ragnarok Online, Dragon Nest, Mobile Legend
3	22	College students	15	2-3	20	Ragnarok Online
4	22	College students	6	2-3	12	Dota, Point Blank
5	27	Freelance designer	10	2-3	10	Black Desert Online
6	20	College students	7	1-2	10	Dota
7	20	College students	8	4-5	9	Point Blank
8	21	College students	6	2-3	9	Point Blank
9	22	College students	7	4-5	15	Dota, Point Blank
10	21	College students	9	4-5	20	Ragnarok Online, Dragon Nest
11	22	College students	6	4-5	12	Dota, Point Blank
12	38	Employee	18	3-4	20	Ragnarok Online
13	20	College students	7	3-4	12	Dota
14	20	College students	6	2-3	10	Dota, Mobile Legends
15	19	College students	6	3-4	10	Mobile Legend

Meeting and satisfying personal needs

Entertaining activities

"*So, gaming with friends is the only way to relax and enjoy myself. I agree with nine out of ten invitations from friends to play online games together because it is always fun and a real booster for our mood* " (P 7, 23 years old).

All participants indicated that they consciously choose to play online games for entertainment. Playing online games is the primary leisure activity compared to other activities. Engaging with other players while playing online games enhances the overall experience positively. The players experienced a sense of euphoria and enthusiasm when engaging in missions together, displaying a variety of expressions when succeeding or failing in enemy encounters, and enjoying humor while playing online games.

Expanding knowledge and adding social skills

"*I gained valuable social skills by interacting with gamers of diverse nationalities. This experience was particularly helpful when facing difficult situations, such as those caused by feelings of depression or tension among friends. In getting to know many other players, I learned how to communicate and interact with them effectively. Each country's players had unique personality traits, and through these interactions, I understood cultural differences. Also learned strategies for addressing team defeat and handling an opponent who lacks motivation. However, individual differences mean that unique approaches to motivation are required for each team member*" (P 12, 19 years old).

Participants had the opportunity to experiment with different ways of interacting and adapting to game situations through trial and error. In real-life social interactions, individuals may hesitate to use trial and error due to the fear of negative reactions from their environment. However, in online gaming, fellow gamers tend to be more relaxed and open, without judgment.

Playing online games allows gamers to hone their skills in dealing with various team members and completing tasks or missions. Regular engagement with fellow team members allows for a high level of meeting intensity, refining collaborative abilities. Meeting and interacting with diverse characters indirectly encourages the development of teamwork skills and offers ample opportunities to practice navigating differences in communication and expression. Gamers recognise that individuals vary in their approach to communicating strategy ideas. These games provide a platform to refine and practice teamwork skills that may not be easily accessible outside the virtual world.

Fulfilling psychological well-being

"I do not think that subjective evaluations should be included unless explicitly marked as such. When participating in a tournament, I have

experienced a great deal of admiration. It is fascinating to witness individuals in awe, thinking, 'how can you do that?' Nevertheless, I find it uncommon to receive such admiration in everyday life. And, yes, when a problem or unfortunate event occurs, I find solace by playing games. It alleviates my negative emotions" (P 5, 20 years old).

Playing online games fulfilled gamers' needs, enabling them to experience psychological comfort. During gameplay, players garnered considerable commendations from the game's software and other gamers. The attainment of a set number of points and an increase in their character's strength level resulted in an admiration for the game. Simultaneously, fellow gamers provided participants with verbal or written feedback. This was perceived as supportive and valued for imparting a sense of skill and self-worth.

Playing video games provided participants with a means of coping with negative emotions stemming from real-world problems. This form of distraction was deemed the simplest and safest option available. Individuals could readily engage in game activities that allowed them to vent frustration through verbal or written outbursts of anger or express feelings of triumph through celebratory shouting. Gamers did not face negative judgment or punishment despite expressing their feelings because they believed fellow gamers could understand them. Playing online games helped them cope with negative emotions and provided positive feelings. Therefore, they relied on gaming as a way to distract themselves. The various experiences and positive emotions gained in the virtual world can even be deemed a source of happiness for gamers.

Supporting personal character-building

"Games are a significant aspect of my life because they help me develop into a better person. Playing online games allows me to adapt to other people's behaviours and manage my emotions while working with others. Playing this game taught me the virtues of patience, sacrifice for the team's benefit, and the ability to keep my team level-headed. I have engaged in this activity for years and gained a deeper sense of patience" (P 4, 20 years old).

Participants learned to regulate their emotions through interaction with characters while playing games. Additionally, accomplishing tasks in games requires strategic thinking, and striving for completion allows for experimentation with various approaches. Participants recognised this as an integral aspect of lifelong learning something that may not always be present in real-life situations. The various roles that gamers may assume, including leader, follower, support provider, and strategy planner, can contribute to developing their personal character. In addition, playing missions in games fosters a competitive spirit, self-belief, appreciation for challenges, willingness to experiment, and even self-assurance. These gains have been deemed highly advantageous for the individuals themselves. Although there were negative impacts, the participants could utilise the game's positive aspects to their advantage. As a result, all of them indicated that gaming contributed to their personal growth and they would continue to engage in online gaming activities even in their later years.

Fulfilling fantasy and imagination

Role-playing

"*In war games, the warfare in a simulated world and its sequel is augmented by futuristic weapons, which do not exist in reality, along with their corresponding simulations. These experiences cannot be replicated in the real world. In the game, I can engage in virtual violence, which allows me to avoid the act of physically harming individuals in the real world"*(P 12, 19 years old).

One reason for the popularity of online gaming is the novel experience of assuming different roles or performing activities that are improbable or unattainable in real life. In the virtual gaming world, players can embody alternative personas, explore the limits of their imagination, and encounter situations that surpass conventional understanding. These role-playing experiences provide a unique and engaging thrill that draws online gamers. Additionally, players can explore their human sides by pursuing partners and engaging in taboo activities.

Cross-gender avatars

"The female characters in the game exhibit qualities that I find appealing. My preferred traits in a romantic partner are similar to how these characters are depicted. In the game context, these depictions are free from subjective evaluations. In contrast, presenting similar opinions on social media can provoke controversy and lead to questions about the necessity of a specific type of representation" (P 4, 20 years old).

"Mmm, maybe it would be more appropriate to play an in-memoriam character. I feel a stronger connection to the person when I portray a character based on their personality, but of the opposite sex." (P 13, 35 years old).

"Female characters often appear weak, but when portrayed as strong and achieve victory, it demonstrates that their initial weakness was only a facade. This can also apply to me as a small and seemingly inferior individual by showcasing my strength, I can prove my worth" (P 14, 21 years old).

An intriguing finding from this study reveals that all 15 male participants created female characters or avatars in the games they played, whether in a main or side role. Creating a female character allowed participants to obtain unique advantages or treatment from other players. Secondly, society has traditionally held the value that women are not as capable of physical strength as men. Nearly all participants reported feeling challenged in developing their female characters' abilities, ultimately striving to surpass male character strength. Demonstrating women's physical prowess provided personal satisfaction and compensated for perceived personal deficiencies. Third, participants created avatars with characteristics that matched their ideal woman. Two reasons emerged: the first was emotional, always reminding them of a special person in their heart, and the second showed others the desired female character. Displaying the perfect female character in gaming allowed them to avoid negative criticism from others, unlike when sharing it on social media platforms or discussing it with friends in the physical world.

VI. DISCUSSION

Gaming was more than a recreational activity; it was a joyful aspect of gamers' lives that provided valuable experiences to develop skills beyond gaming. In other words, non-problematic or enthusiastic gamers exhibit a significant passion for online games, but their passion is harmonious. According to Vallerand (2003), harmonious passion is when the passion for something aligns with other aspects of the individual's self and life, resulting in primarily adaptive outcomes.

Individuals tend to value and invest time in activities that contribute to their self-identity or have the potential to do so in the short and long term (Vallerand, 2015). This suggests that a person's self-identity influences their evaluation of playing online games. Participants in the study reported a strong reflection of their self-identity in the avatars they created in the game. Identity refers to an individual's relevant features, characteristics, experiences, and interrelationships (Schlenker & Leary, 1985). The authors found that participants believed the video game avatars they created reflected their own traits and characteristics. The game provided a venue for free expression, challenge, and competition. This study demonstrated that players' sense of self and identity were strongly tied to their in-game experiences, leading them to hold the activity of online gaming in high esteem and view themselves positively in relation to the game.

Passion for a specific activity or object can develop with each new experience. Social and personal factors influence the development of passion. Social and personal factors contribute to the autonomous internalisation process and enable the operative aspect of passionate activities to become part of one's autonomous identity. This facilitates developing and maintaining harmonious passion (Vallerand, 2015). The enthusiasm of gamers increases as they have new experiences that offer positive reinforcement, specifically, the sensation of embodying a character of the opposite gender. Gender swapping involves assuming a gender that varies from one's biological sex (Roberts & Parks, 1999). The online world presents significant opportunities for exploring identity, which could explain the difference (Huh & Williams, 2010). This pattern is consistent with our results, as all male participants chose

female avatars for their online characters. In online gaming, players are not bound to use genders that align with their own; thus, character gender swapping is a frequent practice among gamers (DiGiuseppe & Nardi, 2008). The research conducted by Hussain and Griffiths (2008) also suggests multiple reasons for gamers to prefer playing cross-gender characters, such as personal attraction, pleasure of experimenting, and avoidance of unwanted male attention.

In response to previous studies, this research discovered four primary rationales for why all male participants in this study selected avatars of the opposite gender. These motives are: (1) obtaining preferential treatment from other gamers, (2) obtaining convenience in executing missions, (3) feeling satisfied while fighting stigma, and (4) having the opportunity to convey messages regarding ideal female characters.

When female characters are used in gaming, they are frequently subjected to different treatment, including gentle speaking, better protection against attacks from opponents, and the offering of favors by male gamers. This has the advantage of simplifying the completion of certain missions. The first two reasons cited by these participants align with Hussain and Griffiths' (2008) findings, which showed that individuals posing as attractive women and interacting with male players do so to earn extra money or weapons and avoid being targeted by fellow gamers. Kuss (2013) also found in his research that male players employ female characters as a strategy to gain more support from other gamers.

A separate finding reveals that gamers experience the greatest satisfaction when using characters of the opposite gender, challenging the misguided notion that female characters are weaker than male characters. This preference is largely due to the belief that male figures and characters possess superior skills over their female counterparts. Tippet et al. (2009) found that male gamers demonstrate greater efficiency utilising their skills in virtual environments with more effective problem-solving abilities than female gamers. When male gamers succeed in making their cross-gender characters as robust as their male counterparts, it provides them with a profound feeling of satisfaction and purpose. These findings challenge Huh and Williams's (2010) hypothesis that gender-swapping gamers tend to exaggerate. The world of gaming can exhibit "hypermasculinity" and "hyperfemininity" (Scharrer, 2004, p. 397). However, this study's participants did not display hyperfemininity; instead, they demonstrated that women can be equally strong as men.

Another finding is that the developers intentionally customised the opposite-gender characters to depict the ideal woman. Running the characters in the game conveys a feeling of closeness to this ideal woman, indirectly suggesting that the developers prefer this figure. This aligns with King and Delfabbro's (2019) definition of avatar attachment, which refers to the emotional connection between a player and their in-game avatar or character, often equating it to that of a friend, intimate partner, or a part of themselves. According to the research conducted by Bailenson and Beall (2006), avatars are a fascinating subject for investigation because they offer an opportunity for players to express themselves through the behaviours and appearance of their avatars. In this study, showcasing a character with a specific design serves as a medium for self-presentation and communication of personal messages.

The chance to implicitly communicate that they seek a certain type of woman without encountering uncomfortable judgments is present. Social media posts and conversations with friends can often yield discomforting feedback. Participants in online gaming experiences felt a climate of mutual respect and non-judgment through interactions with fellow gamers. This phenomenon may be linked to the online disinhibition effect (Suler, 2004), which implies that people tend to be more candid in online social interactions because of reduced social risk perception and user anonymity. As a result, they readily crafted their preferred female avatars as their in-game personas.

Using a female avatar to receive preferential treatment from fellow gamers, gain advantages in mission completion, feel empowered when fighting stereotypes, and communicate ideas about ideal female characters demonstrated gamers' readiness to assert themselves. The author examined the concept of individuation as the foundation of Jung's (1988, as cited in Stein, M., 2012) psychology. Individuation refers to the process of self-realisation, discovery, and experience of meaning and purpose in life, which enables a person to find themselves and become their true self. This framework can provide insight into the emergence of these behaviours. By applying other ideas from Jung (1988, as cited in Stein, M., 2012) and Bem (1974), it can be observed that male gamers also exhibit their anima or feminine side.

The integrated anima, or positive personality trait in men, enables them to exhibit calmness, self-restraint, self-love, empathy, and the ability to make judgments beyond rationality. Men have a tough exterior, but possess feelings and traits of compassion, sentiment, and a desire for unity and tolerance. All male gamers in the study described feeling empathetic when creating a female character, which they believed proved that women can be strong. This idea challenges societal norms. Additionally, creating a female avatar allowed them to feel closer to their ideal woman and demonstrated an involvement of affection, often associated with the female identity.

Jung believed that the anima arises from a man's encounters with women—including his mother, sister, lover, and others that combine to create a generalised image of femininity. As the anima develops, this archetype becomes part of the collective unconscious of all men. Each projects the anima onto beloved figures and sees them not as they are, but as formed by their personal and collective unconscious (Hayman, as cited in Feist et al., 2021)

According to Jung, individuals are healthy when they have achieved individuation, which occurs through integrating their personality and becoming their unique self. Individuals who have achieved individuation can bring their unconsciousness into their consciousness. This allows them to become aware of the dialectics within their personality, such as those between the persona and its anima/animus or with its archetypes, as well as between the ego and its shadow. Additionally, they can integrate all of these aspects into their authentic self.

Many psychoanalysts agree that individuals who undergo the individuation process can recognise, control, and evaluate themselves (Ahmadi, 2019). To identify one's unique self, one must first be aware of one's distinct qualities and then regulate how the archetypes that impact them - including the shadow, wise parent, great mother, and hero - integrate, thereby emerging as the archetype of the self and reaching consciousness (Schlamm, 2014).

Overall, this study demonstrated that online gaming can have positive effects on mental health and is not necessarily associated with psychological issues. Games provide a means for channeling harmonious passion, where gamers consciously set limits to prevent excessive immersion in the online world and instead treat online gaming as fulfilling their recreational needs. According to Stein and Jung (1995) and Garcia (2022), individuals with self-unification and self-awareness exhibit the ability to state "I am" and "I know that I am." This ability serves as a sign of their self-awareness.

VII. CONCLUSION

In addition to the benefits obtained by gamers, including psychological satisfaction from honing social skills and managing emotions, as well as having an entertaining leisure activity, playing online games has become a platform for gamers to express the characteristics of their ideal type of woman through cross-gender avatars created in the game world. Creating and developing a female character equal in strength to male characters provided satisfaction to non-problematic gamers and preferential treatment from other players. Factors such as activity valuation and internalisation of the activity representation in one's identity played roles in developing harmonious passion. However, online games were not always problematic. Online games can provide a platform for gamers to express their feminist ideals

within the boundaries of societal norms. Such aspects can promote beneficial psychological states among online gamers.

VIII. CONFLICT OF INTEREST

There are no conflicts of interest in this article.

IX. DATA AVAILABILITY STATEMENT

The datasets generated during and/or analysed in the current study are not publicly available due to the inclusion of sensitive participant information. However, de-identified data are available from the corresponding author upon reasonable request and with permission from the Institutional Review Board of the Universitas Indonesia.

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