



THE REPUBLIC OF TURKEY  
ANKARA YILDIRIM BEYAZIT UNIVERSITY THE GRADUATE  
SCHOOL OF SOCIAL SCIENCES

**AND THAT IS HOW IT BECAME A PART OF ME: IDENTITY  
INTEGRATION AND DIGITAL GAMING**

MASTER OF ARTS

**Meleksima TÜRKIRKI**

DEPARTMENT OF PSYCHOLOGY

Ankara. 2024



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**Asst. Prof. Dr. Gülден SAYILAN**

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## APPROVAL PAGE

The thesis, prepared by Meleksima TÜRKIRKI and titled “And That’s How It Became a Part of Me: Identity Integration and Digital Gaming” is accepted by a unanimous vote as a Master of Arts at Ankara Yıldırım Beyazıt University, Institute of Social Sciences, Department of Psychology.

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Director of the Institute of Social Sciences    Ass. Prof. Dr. Muhammet Enes KALA

.....


## DECLARATION

I hereby declare that all information in this thesis has been obtained and presented in accordance with academic rules and ethical conduct. As required by these rules and conduct, I also declare that I have fully cited and referenced all materials and results that are not original to this work; otherwise, I accept all legal responsibility.

Date (20/08/2024)

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Signature:



## **DEDICATION**

To my grandma, Meliha Polat, who always supported my education, and to all the women around the world who were not as lucky as I was, and last but most importantly, for the dream of a free Palestine

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## **ABSTRACT**

### **And That's How It Became a Part of Me: Identity Integration and Digital Gaming**

The revenue of the gaming market is expected to reach US\$490.60 billion by the end of 2023 and US\$688.40bn by 2027, with an annual growth rate of 8.84%; also, it is expected to have 4.3bn users by 2027. With this growing interest in digital games, a gaming culture itself emerged with a gamer identity. The current thesis focuses on the experiences of Turkish-speaking players in multicultural gaming spaces and how social identity and identity integration processes take place in their experience. To investigate the identity process of Turkish-speaking gamers, I interviewed 20 individuals who have various levels of gaming experience. The findings suggest that gamers fall into different categories of the identity integration process, and while some features of gaming communities help this process and ensure that players have a positive gaming experience, others negatively impact the experience. Furthermore, the findings suggest that gamers may also fall into identity integration patterns in the context of the Cognitive-Developmental Model of Social Identity Integration (CDSMII), and the factors such as stressors affecting their identity process can be explained based on the Bicultural Identity Integration Model.

**Keywords:** Gaming, Digital Games, Identity Integration, Social Identity

## ÖZ

### **Ve Böylece Bir Parçam Haline Geldi: Kimlik Entegrasyonu ve Dijital Oyunlar**

Oyun pazarı gelirinin 2023 yılı sonunda 490,60 milyar ABD dolarına, 2027 yılında ise 688,40 milyar ABD dolarına ulaşması ve yıllık %8,84 büyüme oranına ulaşması bekleniyor; ayrıca 2027 yılına kadar 4,3 milyar kullanıcıya sahip olması bekleniyor. Dijital oyunlara olan bu artan ilgiyle birlikte, oyuncu kimliğine sahip bir oyuncu alt kültürü de ortaya çıktı. Türkçe konuşan oyuncuların çok kültürlü oyun alanlarındaki deneyimlerine ve sosyal kimlik ve kimlik entegrasyon süreçlerinin nasıl gerçekleştiğine odaklanan bu tez kapsamında Türkçe konuşan oyuncuların kimlik sürecini araştırmak için çeşitli seviyelerde oyun deneyimi olan 20 kişiyle derinlemesine görüşmeler gerçekleştirdim. Bulgulara göre, oyuncular kimlik entegrasyon sürecinin farklı kategorilerine girmektedir ve oyun topluluklarının bazı özellikleri bu sürece ve oyuncuların olumlu bir oyun deneyimi yaşamasına yardımcı olurken diğerlerinin deneyimi olumsuz etkilemektedir. Ayrıca bulgular, oyuncuların Sosyal Kimlik Bütünleşmesinin Bilişsel-Gelişimsel Modeli (CDSMII) bağlamında kimlik bütünleşme örüntülerine de girebileceğini ve kimlik süreçlerini etkileyen stres faktörleri gibi faktörlerin İki Kültürlü Kimlik Bütünleşmesi Modeli temel alınarak açıklanabileceğini göstermektedir.

**Anahtar Kelimeler:** Oyun, Dijital Oyunlar, Kimlik Entegrasyonu, Sosyal Kimlik

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## **LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS**

BII: Bicultural Identity Integration

CDMSII: Cognitive-Developmental Model of Social Identity

MUD: Multi-user Dungeon

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## INTRODUCTION

Digital games have always been popular since their emergence, and thanks to the commercial use of the internet, their popularity now reaches millions of people around the globe. The revenue of the gaming market is expected to reach US\$490.60bn by the end of 2023 and US\$688.40bn by 2027, with an annual growth rate of 8.84%; also, it is expected to have 4.3bn users by 2027 (Games - Worldwide | Statista Market Forecast, n.d.). The worldwide demand for online gaming can also be seen in Türkiye, with 44 million active online gamers (Türkiye Oyun Sektörü Raporu, 2022). This rising popularity has also drawn the attention of researchers in recent years, both in Türkiye and globally, though the gaming literature is still relatively new, and there is still much to discover. In addition to its growing popularity and market volume, as the researcher, I myself have been playing games since I was 12. As a woman gamer with mixed ethnicity, I have always been curious about games and identity processes that affect the gaming experience; that's why I chose this topic.

According to Kankaanranta and colleagues (2017), a digital game is an interactive leisure activity accessed via digital devices such as mobile phones, computers, or consoles. With the ability to connect to the internet, these games also offer a social environment for users by connecting millions of gamers. The popularity of digital games also raised some questions. First, why is gaming this popular? According to literature, people keep playing digital games for the challenge and interactivity aspects (Kocak Alan et al., 2022). Also, digital games meet a fundamental need of humans: socializing. According to Koivisto and Hamari (2019), the digital gaming experience occurs in a social environment, even if the player is technically alone in their room. While these aspects of digital games, such as the ability to socialize, interactivity, and competitive nature, explain why they are so popular, this also means that digital games and various aspects of digital games can be studied by social psychology.

After getting a general idea about games, the next question becomes, "Who are these people playing these games?" With simple logic, a gamer could be defined as someone who plays games. However, this might not be enough to describe it. According to Kowert (2020), gaming and gamers now have their own sub-culture and social category and become part of players' identities. There are many different aspects and categories of gamers. Grooten and Kowert (2015) argue that every gamer plays games, but not everyone who plays games is a

gamer. Moreover, it is hard to decide if someone is a gamer; thus, the literature takes *self-identification as a gamer* into consideration. According to a study by Stone (2019), the frequency of playing games and engaging with other gamers in the gaming community affects whether players identify themselves as gamers.

Lastly, when identity is considered, we must answer how this gamer identity becomes part of our global identity. Some identity integration models argue that different parts of our identities can integrate into each other and create a new identity that is coherent and stable (Amiot & Jaspal, 2014). Nevertheless, we need to learn how this process works with gamer identity. In this thesis, I aim to explore how people who play games identify and how their gamer identity interacts with their overall self.

In the following parts, I will first introduce the history of games and gamer taxonomies to understand gaming and gamers better. After that, I will connect gaming to social identity and related topics that align with this thesis's purpose.

## **1. LITERATURE REVIEW**

### **1.1. Digital Games and Gamers**

#### **1.1.1. History of Digital Games**

The gaming industry has been shaped over the years by all these advancements. According to O'Hagan and Mangiron (2013), the history of videogames can be divided into five main eras: (1) the early development phase before the 1980s, (2) the growth phase between the mid-1980s and the mid-1990s, (3) the development phase until the late 1990s, (4) the maturation phase between 2000 and 2005, and (5) the progress phase from 2005 to the present.

A lot happened in the *early development phase*. The First computer-based game was developed by A.S. Douglas in 1952, though it was offline and had elementary mechanics and graphics (Hile, 2010; p.9). We are still familiar with these games, such as Microsoft Minesweeper, Solitaire, and computer-based chess games. The first video game in 1958 was a digital tennis game that could be multiplayer, but it was not online. In 1972, a significant breakthrough took place: the first big video game company was founded by Nolan Bushnell: Atari (Hile, 2010; p.9). However, the main breakthrough came in the 80s within the *growth phase*. Personal computers such as Commodore 64 were introduced, allowing players much

better gaming experiences and debuting games like Pac Man (Hile, 2010; Yılmaz, 2022). The 90s were not particularly quiet in the gaming industry either during the *development phase*. Consoles such as Nintendo's Game Boy were introduced to players, and Sony's PlayStation was also released. Meanwhile, in the 2000s, Nintendo's Wii and Xbox gaming systems were introduced within the *maturation phase* (Hile, 2010).

Even though digital games have been developing for a long time, there are ongoing discussions about categorizing them. According to Apparley (2006), we can use the following aspects to categorize games: (1) Genre, (2) Platform, (3) Mode, and (4) Milieu. Games can be sorted using these aspects, but it also means that the same game can have different categories. The hardship of categorizing the games is also reflected in the gaming studies. We cannot come up with easy conclusions about "games" or "gamers" because each game style has different experiences, interactions, and even different gamer profiles. Between these categorization styles, genres are the most used and known. The following genres are distinctly used in both everyday use and literature: (1) Simulation, (2) Strategy, (3) Action, and (4) Role-playing (Apparley, 2006). These games can have different gaming platforms and visuals; they can be offline or online and single-player or multi-player. As stated above, they can all have different categories altogether. After exploring the games themselves, now I will be diving into gamers and how they are categorized.

## **1.2. Who are gamers?**

A very generic definition could be that a "gamer" is a person who engages in various games consistently. Nevertheless, when the previously given information is considered, the game is a complex term with different aspects, and it would only be fitting if the same applies to "gamers." According to Williams (2005), the generally believed stereotype about gamers is that they are white, skinny male teenagers sitting in a dark basement obsessively clicking computer keys. Even if this stereotype has changed over the years, it remains white, young, and male, and the gaming industry is still catering to *male, heterosexual, and young* audiences (Paaßen et al., 2016).

As stated by Kowert and colleagues (2012), "online gamer" is a comparatively new social class, yet it already has a collective stereotype about it; negative traits about their popularity, social skills, and attractiveness, and these stereotypes are consistent in both gamers and non-gamers. This finding shows how wide the stereotypes go, even in the gaming community. However, who is a gamer, actually, outside of the stereotypes? This question

also has no easy answer; many scholars have different answers. For example, Bartle (1996) has four types of gamers based on their engagement style with the game, Ip and Jacobs (2005) have two types of gamers based on the investment level of the player, Tseng (2010) has three types of gamers based on their socialization style. However, the literature is not limited to these types; many different categorizations exist for the scope of this thesis, I will be explaining the most popular ones.

### **1.2.1. Bartle's Taxonomy of Player Types**

Bartle (1996) developed a player taxonomy based on two axes: interaction style with the gaming world and interaction style with other players. With this categorization, four types of gamers emerged: Achiever, Explorer, Socializer, and Killer. (i) *Achievers* are the players who engage with the game, give themselves goals within the game, and hoard in-game resources and in-game points. *Explorers* are the ones who want to discover as much as possible in the game and wander around. *Socializers* are less interested in the game's mechanics and other aspects; they prefer to roleplay, engage with the game's community, and interact with other players. *Killers* are the ones who use game mechanics to distress other players using in-game weapons. Though this is not precisely hostile behavior, some games give points or rewards for killing people.

Bartle's taxonomy is widely used in various fields, such as game design, research, and education. It is valuable because it incorporates the motivations of different players to explain gamer types. Game designers must design the perfect game to entertain every kind of gamers, but it is also critical for researchers. However, it should be considered that this taxonomy is based on MUD (multi-user dungeon) types of games and might not be relevant to all game types.

### **1.2.3. Ip and Jacob's Hardcore-Casual Gamer Distinction**

Ip and Jacobs (2005) have a different approach than Bartle (1996) when categorizing gamers: hardcore and casual. This categorization is characterized by the time and energy invested in the game. Hardcore gamers are the players who play the games longer, have more in-depth knowledge of the said game, play more frequently, and are more likely to engage with gaming communities and join forum discussions about the game. On the other hand, casual gamers are less invested; they are less intense about games, play for shorter sessions, and have a more relaxed understanding of gaming. One player could be a hardcore gamer for one game but casual for another simultaneously, or it can change over time.

#### **1.2.4. Tseng's (2011) Motivation Based Segmentation.**

Tseng (2011) distinguishes between the two motivations of gaming: aggression and exploration; these two motivations lead to 3 types of gamers: *aggressive*, *social*, and *inactive*. The aggressive gamer has the highest scores on both motivations; the social gamer has a high score on exploration while having the lowest score on aggression; on the other hand, the inactive gamer has the lowest score on exploration and has a middle score on aggression (Tseng, 2011). An interesting finding from Tseng's study is that aggressive gamers tend to be mainly male players (64.9%). In comparison, social and inactive players tend to be female players (respectively 72.7% and 63%), and aggressive gamers are more likely to spend money on games than social and inactive gamers. These results show that gaming motivations can be affected by factors such as gender and gaming behaviors such as spending money and gameplay styles.

While these are important distinctions, they are not the only ones. For example, Chang (2004) has three categories for games: Single-oriented play, community-oriented player, and Off-real world player. Yee (2006) also categorizes game players as achievement, social, and immersion. Lazzaro (2004) has easy fun, hard fun, altered states, and the people factor with no particular game considered. Even though there are various sortings of gamers, it is evident that the social aspect of games is always an essential factor; online games cannot be examined without considering social interactions and gamers' engagement.

#### **1.1.3. Gaming Literature and Its Shortcomings**

As discussed above, online games have a short history and are relatively new to our day-to-day lives. Even if the recent literature shows that the interest in digital games is increasing, more is needed. A couple of main drawbacks and shortcomings are present. First of all, there needs to be more uniform terminology. The gaming world and literature have an immense amount of vocabulary and no agreed-upon uniform terminology (Carras et al., 2018; Jamal et al., 2023; Turner et al., 2016). From the gaming categories to gamer types, gaming styles, and in-game features, many different terms are used to describe the same or similar things. The unclarity of terminology makes it harder for researchers to develop a collective understanding of games and prevents literature from growing.

Another problem is that gaming literature can be considered *severely* undertheorized (Egenfeldt-Nielsen et al., 2019). Some scholars consider gamers a sub-culture (Carbone & Ruffino, 2016), whereas some claim that games can be considered a context that reflects our

culture and shows humans' core values (Pyae, 2018). This could be the direct conclusion of the fact that gaming literature is new and lacks research. Nevertheless, the disagreements make it harder to study gaming.

Lastly, the existing body of literature itself needs to be more nuanced. When the current studies on gaming are considered, the vast majority of the literature can be described as one-sided. Gamers are considered as either gaming addicts or potential addicts (e.g., Aziz et al., 2021; Meng et al., 2022). Games are considered causes of violence, or at least the extent of the discussion about games ends there, whether they cause violence or not; the results are inconclusive (e.g., Gray et al., 2017; Hartmann et al., 2014). Games are almost demonized, and the primary sample of the studies is only children and teens. All of the above considered, gaming literature needs more attention from many different disciplines and points of view. Especially gaming, and gamers should be considered outside of the “addiction/violence” box. Within this perspective, this thesis focuses on the gamer identity.

## **1.2. Digital Games and Social Identity Perspective**

### **1.2.1. Social Identity**

Developed by Tajfel and Turner, social identity theory focuses on how individuals define their personality based on the social groups they are members of (Tajfel & Turner, 1979). This theory emphasizes that individuals shape their identity around their involvement with various social groups and derive their self-concept based on this. Later on, this categorization shapes one's intergroup behaviors and relations with others. This theory assumes that individuals want to have a positive social identity and, in this way, have a positive self-concept. Accordingly, the concept of social identity can be defined as the *social glue* that helps people navigate their social interactions with *others* (van Vugt & Hart, 2004). Social identity theory has been popular in various psychology fields, such as consumer behavior, leadership, and intergroup relations.

Fundamental processes related to social identity can be named social categorization, identification, and social comparison. Firstly, *social categorization* can be summarized as the process by which individuals categorize themselves and others into various social groups based on the information they gather from the world. Ingroups and outgroups are formed by categorizing other people and selves into various groups based on their features. Ingroup

means the group to which the said individual belongs, while outgroup means the group to which the said individual does not belong. This formation affects one's perception, attitude, and behavior towards others based on their group. It can be based on various categories such as gender, ideology, fan of a particular sports team, and socioeconomic status (Tajfel & Turner, 1979). As individuals derive their self-concept from group memberships, social categorization plays a crucial role in forming social identity. Forming ingroups and outgroups can also cause stereotyping, prejudice, and intergroup relations.

Secondly, *group identification* should be mentioned. Group identification concerns the concept that people perceive themselves as a member of a social group and, in addition to that, individuals develop a certain level of sense of belonging and attachment to a group (Roccas & Brewer, 2002). At its core, social identity theory claims that individuals derive their identity based on their membership in various social groups; in this sense, group identification is a central part of the social identity theory (Leeper, 2011). Group identification is directly associated with outcomes in behaviors toward ingroups and outgroups, directly affecting participation, group cohesion, and life satisfaction (Stevens et al., 2018). The relationship between social identity and group identification goes both ways. In contrast, one's identification with a particular group can contribute to forming a social identity; one's social identity can also strengthen one's group identification (Häusser et al., 2020).

Lastly, another critical element of social identity is *social comparison*. According to Gerber (2017), the social comparison process is about the psychological processes of how people compare themselves to others. This process claims that people want to determine the progress of their own lives, and they use others' lives as a comparison standard (Myers & Crowther, 2009). However, this comparison is not limited to the personal level; it is also reflected at the group level, where groups compare their situation to other groups (Buunk & Mussweiler, 2001). Just like social categorization, social comparison is also a part of the construction of social identity (Sun et al., 2021). Driven by the motivation to keep a positive self-identity while avoiding a negative one, individuals use social comparison to evaluate their opinions, capabilities, and emotions and how these concern others, especially with their ingroup (Khan, 2021). Individuals keep comparing themselves to others, their ingroup, and their outgroup within the social context; in this way, they construct and maintain their social identity dynamically (Richard & Hennekam, 2021).

### 1.2.2. Gamer Identity

The social groups on which we base our social identity form not only in the physical world but also in digital media; for example, people can engage with a particular form of media, and this determines how they form their identity and group membership (Reid et al., 2004; Tagg & Seargeant, 2014). In contrast, individuals' social identity and group membership can decide the type of media they consume, such as choosing a certain TV content to watch (Barker, 2009; Harwood, 1997; Oliver, 2000; Postmes, 2007). Considering these, it would not be illogical to think digital games are platforms where social identity plays a critical role and gets formed.

According to De Grove et al. (2015), the concept of *gamer identity* goes back to the 1980s, when the game industry was crushed, and the discourse around the term started. Even though online gaming literature can be seen as severely undertheorized, there is some evidence that gamers experience gaming as a group rather than as individuals (Kaye et al., 2017). Crawford and Gosling (2009) suggest that digital games can be a part of individuals' lives, acting as a platform where sociocultural needs can be met and can be a part of the formation of one's social identity. Social interactions begin when two or more players engage in a gaming environment, influence each other's behavior, and share in-game recourses (Zakaria et al., 2022). This interaction can take different forms; for example, two players can use in-game chats or voice chats if the game allows it, and via these interactions, they can build in-game clans, groups, and guilds together (Williams et al., 2007). This way, ingroups and outgroups within the gaming community itself can form. The degree of one's group identification with a particular gaming ingroup could also affect players' relations with other players, self-esteem, and well-being (Kaye et al., 2017). However, it should be kept in mind that group connections are related to proximity, frequency, and personal acquaintanceship, and these could vary in digital spaces due to the nature of the medium and, in some cases, could be lower than the physical world (Reicher et al., 2010).

We still do not have the answer to the question "Who are gamers?". When others imagine a "gamer," as I discussed above, they usually think of a "young, white male" who aggressively clicks keys in front of a screen in a basement (Dill & Thill, 2007; Paaben et al., 2016; Williams, 2005). The general perception of gamers is that they are socially awkward, nerdy, isolated, and obsessive people who spend too much time inside (Taylor, 2012). Is this true or still relevant? Even if earlier studies show that the stereotypes might be

true (McClure & Mears, 1984), some recent studies show that these stereotypes are not valid anymore (Griffiths et al., 2004; Yee, 2006), and also they are changing over time (Kowert et al., 2014). We still do not have a uniform definition of *gamer* (Ćwil & Howe, 2020). However, how do gamers see themselves?

The literature shows that using self-identification as a gamer is a valid option (Kowert et al., 2012). Self-identification as a gamer is about one's social identification with the said group; this approach fits considering the social nature of online games and gaming communities. However, this approach does not also solve the problem; for example, women who play games are less likely to call themselves *gamers* than their male counterparts due to sexism in online gaming spaces (Howe et al., 2019). On the other hand, self-identification still seems better at defining gamers than outsiders' categorizing a player based on various dependants, such as gaming time (Jetten et al., 2001). According to Ćwil and Howe (2020), the best way to determine one's gamer status is to ask whether they define themselves as a gamer.

### **1.2.3. Acculturation and Identity Integration**

People often are members of multiple social groups and identify themselves with various categorizations. Moreover, these categorizations might not be fixed, but they can change. For example, one person might change schools, start to follow a new sports team, immigrate to a different country, change jobs, and so on. All of these situations might cause a change in one's identity. For example, when immigrating to a new country, a person faces changes in language, social norms, culture, values, and more; therefore, they must adapt to many new situations and change their identity accordingly (Amiot, 2007).

One related question would be, "Is immigration the only context in which a person faces these changes?" The answer would be no, it is not. With the advantages of technology and globalization, people can have these experiences without leaving their houses (Huynh et al., 2018). People can connect with others from all around the globe, watch videos about their cultures, and be exposed to their norms and language via social media. One of the mediums that allows all of these is online gaming platforms. Gaming provides different aspects that could end in changes in one's identity. First, as discussed above, being a "gamer" is a whole new identity that a person who plays games can take or not take. Secondly, online gaming makes it easier for one to engage with different people. Two people from different regions could play together, talk, develop game strategies, and engage with each other's

language and culture without leaving their rooms. However, first, we should look into how different identities fuse and create a “self.” In literature, some theories examine how people integrate different identities, such as the Bicultural Identity Integration (BII) by Benet-Martinez and Haritatos (2005) and the Cognitive-Developmental Model of Social Identity Integration (CDMSII) by Amiot et al. (2007).

#### **1.2.4. Bicultural Identity Integration**

“Bicultural” can be defined as being exposed to more than one culture, for example, immigrants and their children, minorities, refugees, biracial people, people who were adopted by parents with different ethnicities (i.e., transracial adaptation), and anyone who experiences and internalizes more than one cultural identity can be counted as bicultural or multicultural via the process of adapting to a second culture (Benet-Martínez & Hong, 2014; Huynh et al., 2018; Nguyen & Benet-Martínez, 2013). The cultural change or acculturation process can be affected by various factors such as individual variables such as personality and linguistic proficiency and psychosocial pressures like experiencing discrimination (Haritatos & Benet-Martínez, 2002).

Introduced by Benet-Martinez, Leu, Lee, and Morris (2002) based on their literature review on bicultural identity, Bicultural Identity Integration (BII) argues that there are two dimensions to identity integration: cultural harmony/conflict and cultural blendness/distance; the first one (cultural conflict) is about feeling divided between two cultural identities, while the second one (cultural distance) is about having non-overlapping, segmented identities. Accordingly, a high BII score means the person perceives two or more identities as compatible and considers themselves as a part of the united third identity rather than separately part of the said identities. On the other hand, a low BII score indicates difficulty incorporating both identities into a cohesive *self*, seeing the two cultures as different and incompatible and choosing one over the other based on the situation (Haritatos & Benet-Martínez, 2002).

Gamer identity comes into our lives relatively later than other identities, such as gender and race. However, we do not know where gamer identity falls into someone's overall “self” and how it interacts with other identities. Moreover, we know games are multicultural platforms where people from different countries can play together and interact, yet we do not know how it affects the identification process. For example, BII argues that language proficiency affects identity integration, but we do not know how language proficiency affects

gamer identity while playing with people worldwide. For these reasons, BII can be used to understand gamer identity better.

### **1.2.5. Cognitive-Developmental Model of Social Identity Integration**

The Cognitive-Developmental Model of Social Identity Integration also explains how individuals integrate their different identities and create a coherent global self-structure and be simultaneously crucial to the self via connections and links being established between different identity components so they would not feel fragmented. This way, the *self* is consistent, identity is integrated, and different parts of the self feel complementary rather than clashing (Amiot et al., 2007; Amiot & Jaspal, 2014). CDMSII consists of 4 stages of identity integration: (i) anticipatory categorization stage, where a person is about to enter a new environment and a social group and self-anchoring take place; (ii) categorization stage, where social identities are isolated and different from each other, and this takes part meanwhile the person is joining to a new group so differences are prominent; (iii) compartmentalization stage where the new identity gradually becomes part of the self, in this stage multiple identifications is possible, and there are increasing overlaps between identities, yet they are still compartmentalized, and it becomes salient with different contextual cues; (iv) integration stage where finally identities are being integrated, and the conflict between different identities are resolved (Amiot & Jaspal, 2014).

This model also claims there are factors affecting identity integration. When a person feels both of their identities are appreciated socially, they might associate both identities with high value and thus have a better identity integration; on the other hand, if a person is from a culture perceived as *low*, their identities are more likely to clash, and higher status identity might take the place of the other identity completely rather than integrating (Amiot & Jaspal, 2014).

Similar to the BII model, CDMSII can also be used to evaluate the gamer identity and where people stand when integrating their gamer identity into their general “self” identity. Although both models focus on the identity integration process, they have some key differences. For example, BII focuses on integrating two cultural identities, while CDMSII does not have this condition (Yampolsky et al., 2016). Moreover, CDMSII covers stages such as categorization and compartmentalization, which are absent in the BII model. Overall, we can say that CDMSII has a broader scope (Yampolsky et al., 2016).

### 1.2.6. Social Identity and Online Games

Due to the dynamic nature of social identities, one person can endorse multiple identities simultaneously. For example, an individual can identify as a “gamer” and a “woman” simultaneously. This intersectionality between identities can be defined as the “idea that social identities such as race, class, and gender interact to form qualitatively different meanings and experiences” (Warner, 2008, p. 454). Both of these would be different identities that exist together within the individual. Individuals’ gender, race, and sexuality could intersect to affect their gamer identity and gaming experience. The combination of various identities could lead to unique gaming experiences and challenges that differ from person to person within gaming communities. As the literature suggests, online games provide a platform for different people to come together and interact, create new social connections, and maintain them (Waechter & Meschik, 2023). On the other hand, the same context of digital gaming spaces leads to stereotypes and biases, mainly based on gender, race, and other social identities.

The intersectionality of social identities in online games also manifests itself in the marginalization of certain groups. As discussed above, self-identification is important to gamer identity (Stone, 2019). Studies show that the sexism and the stigmatization of women in online games cause women to be less likely to categorize themselves as gamers and have a lower level of gamer identity compared to men (Vermeulen et al., 2017). Every step of the gaming experience can be perceived as a gendered experience, from gameplay to in-game dynamics between players; it is even seen as female gamers taking up space in a male-oriented activity (Delamere & Shaw, 2014). Moreover, some games are considered *girly games* (e.g., casual games), while some games are considered more *masculine* (e.g., hardcore games), which results in women being excluded from a variety of gaming spaces (Roy & Deshbandhu, 2020). The literature shows that the sexism and marginalization of women in the offline world manifest themselves in gaming spaces and affect the dynamics and interactions between gamers (Fox & Tang, 2014).

Similar to gender, the misrepresentation of race and ethnicity is evident in gaming spaces; as discussed above, the general opinion about games is that they are for white young men. When the game designs and content around gaming (such as gaming magazines) were studied, researchers found that there was a common racial stereotyping, like minority male characters being represented as aggressive and dangerous (Burgess et al., 2011). On the other

hand, a study shows that some minorities, such as Latina women and Indigenous men, are never even represented in games (Glaube et al., 2001). Moreover, gamers who are from a minority group often face racist behaviors such as racial slurs and hate speech from other gamers (Cary & Chasteen, 2022; Cary et al., 2020; Keum & Hearn, 2021). Also, gamers with a minority background face allegations of cheating rather than having gaming skills (Tomlinson & Srauy, 2021). The discrimination does not stop there; for example, gaming spaces are considered not safe for black gamers because of the racism they face from other players (Fletcher, 2022). The results of this racism can be presented in adverse effects on the mental health of minority gamers (Keum & Hearn, 2021). With all of these in mind, this thesis focuses on the experiences of Turkish-speaking gamers, their identity processes, and the challenges they face because of their identities.

### **1.3. Aim of the Current Study and Research Questions**

The current thesis focuses on the experiences of Turkish-speaking players in multicultural gaming spaces and how social identity and identity integration processes take place in their experience. Even though the literature accepts gamer as a valid identity, there is still much to discover in this area. To fill this gap, I aim to research the gamer identity with existing identity integration models. The present study will explore the following research questions:

- How do Turkish-speaking gamers integrate their different identities in gaming spaces?
- What are the factors affecting identity integration in gaming communities?
- According to the identity integration stages, where do Turkish-speaking gamers fall?

## **2. METHOD**

In this study, I focused on the experiences and identities of Turkish-speaking gamers with a qualitative research approach. In order to understand the experiences of Turkish-speaking gamers and the identity integration process, I endorsed a grounded theory analysis. Grounded theory is a research method that aims to generate theory from data in a systematic way. First introduced by Glaser and Strauss (1967), grounded theory is characterized by its iterative data collection and analysis process, which allows researchers to develop categories and theories that emerge from the data (Charmaz & Thorberg, 2020). Grounded theory also emphasizes the importance of reflexivity, where researchers should be aware of their own biases and their influence on the research process (Tie et al., 2019). Due to the nature of the data, I choose this method. In this direction, I interviewed 20 volunteers with different levels of gaming experience.

To make sure players are getting across and getting involved with players from other countries and even continents, I focused on the games that allow players to engage with each other via different forms of communication (e.g., written chats, in-game voice chats) and played by a diverse community of gamers, such as Fortnite, Overwatch, League of Legends, and Dota2. Also, to obtain more diverse experiences related to the gaming world, the sample individuals who have played these games for at least six months. I used the purposive sampling method with the snowballing technique to reach my sample. This method aims to select the participants who would contribute meaningful experiences to the research questions (Campbell et al., 2020). I prepared a research announcement text and shared it on various social media platforms. Each participant received a Google Play or Appstore gift card valued at 100 Liras after their participation.

### **2.1. Positionality Statement**

I, the researcher, have been also part of the gaming community since I was 12. As a woman gamer with a mixed ethnicity background, I myself faced much discrimination and struggled with my identity in online spaces. My position on the subject could have affected my results and point of view. Being a gamer myself, on the other hand, helped my participants feel connected and comfortable sharing their experiences.

## 2.2. Participants

The sample comprises 20 Turkish-speaking players over 18 (5 women and 15 men). The participants were frequent online game players who had been gaming for 1 to 20 years ( $M = 12.5$ ,  $SD = 1.15$ ). The ages of the participants were between 18 and 31 ( $M = 22.60$ ,  $SD = 3.38$ ). Participants consisted of 5 bachelor's degrees and 15 high school graduates. All participants' mother language was Turkish with one exception of Kurdish, and 18 stated that they knew intermediate to advanced levels of English. Some participants also said they know third and fourth languages, such as French, Kurdish, Spanish, and German. All of the participants were single, with one exception being married. Ten participants stated they preferred playing on European servers, while eight preferred playing on Turkish servers. To keep their data secure and anonymous, I kept their real names hidden throughout the data analysis and reporting and used code names such as Participant 1 and Participant 2.

**Table 1:** *Demographics*

Variables	<i>N</i>	Percentage	Mean	<i>SD</i>
Age	20		22.6	3.3
				8
Gaming Experience	20		12.15	5.1
				6
Gender				
Woman	5	25%		
Man	15	75%		
Education				
Highschool	13	65%		
Bachelors	7	35%		
Occupation				
Not Employed	11	55%		

**Table1(Continued)**

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Part-Time	1	5%
Full-Time	4	20%
Other	4	20%
Marital Status		
Married	1	5%
Single	19	95%
Mother language		
Turkish	19	95%
Kurdish	1	5%

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### **2.3. Instruments**

*Demographic Information Form:* I presented the participants with a demographic information form consisting of questions about their age, gender, game experience in playtime, and so on (Appendix B).

*Interview Questions:* I asked participants about their gaming experience and the discrimination they faced while playing games during the interviews (see Appendix C). Interviews included questions about how participants describe their gamer identity, whether it is integrated with their other identities, whether it is essential to their identity overall, and their experiences based on their language use and race in gaming spaces.

### **2.4. Procedure**

As stated above, this study aims to understand the experiences of Turkish-speaking gamers in the gaming community and to get a more profound knowledge of the experiences of Turkish-speaking players. To achieve this, I endorsed the phenomenological approach throughout the research. Accordingly, I conducted in-depth interviews over the Google Meet platform.

After filling out the initial demographics and informed consent forms, participants received further contact forms via their e-mails and written consent forms. After that, we set an interview time. The entire interviews were voice-recorded with the consent of the participants. Interviews took about 20 minutes to an hour, with a mean of 30 minutes.

After the interviews, I transcribed the voice records and labeled them with time stamps using the MAXQDA app (VERBI Software, 2021). Later, I followed the Thematic analysis steps to analyze the data. According to Braun and Clarke (2006), thematic analyses include the following phases: Getting to know the data, coding the data, subtracting themes from the codes, checking the themes, identifying the themes, and reporting. Following these steps, I first read the interviews repeatedly. After that, I determined the subthemes and coded them. After this step, I revisited my data transcriptions to ensure the main themes were inclusive and nothing was overlooked. Finally, I named and reported the themes.

### 3. RESULTS

In this thesis, I aimed to explore Turkish-speaking gamers' experiences with their gamer identities and the process of identity integration. I identify my participants as Turkish-speaking because while some of my participants identified themselves as Turkish, some of them identified themselves as Kurdish. The common ground between all of them was that they all spoke Turkish. To achieve this goal, I interviewed my participants with questions about their gaming experiences and how they perceive their identity. In this section, I present the findings of the thematic analysis. First, I explain the identity integration process of the participants based on the CDMSII model and BII model. I used the CDMSII model to decide which identity integration step my participant was on and BII to decide the acculturative stressors (factors affecting identity integration negatively) and factors affecting the identity integration model positively. Thus, there are three main categories based on the data analysis.

#### 3.1. Identity Integration of Gamers

They gave various answers when I asked the participants about their gamer identity and how it affects their other identity elements. Later, I analyzed their answers based on the identity integration model of CDMSII. According to CDMSII, identity integration happens in four steps: anticipatory categorization, where one might be considering moving to another country or playing a game; categorization, where one is aware of the other identity but chooses not to identify with it, compartmentalization where one might identify with the two identities but it is context-dependent and not integrated, integration where one is identifying with both identities and it is coherent one identity (Amiot et al., 2007). According to the results, only one of the participants was in the first stage, which is *anticipatory categorization*. The second stage followed that, the *categorization* stage; three of the participants were in this stage. Nine of the participants were in the third stage, *compartmentalization*. Lastly, seven of the participants were in the final stage, *integration*. Besides the CDMSII stages, when I asked the participants if their gamer identity is in the center of their self, five participants agreed, while ten disagreed.

**Table 2: Identity Integration**

	N	Frequency	Percentage
Anticipatory Categorization	1	1	2.86%
Categorization	3	3	8.57%
Compartmentalization	9	9	25.71%
Integration	7	7	20%
Gamer Identity Is in The Center of My Identities	5	5	14.28%
Gamer Identity Is Not in The Center of My Identities	10	10	28.6%
<b>Total</b>	<b>35</b>	<b>35</b>	<b>100%</b>

*Note:* In the table, the N column shows the number of participants who mentioned the theme, the column Frequency shows how many times it was mentioned, and the Percentage column shows what percentage of the mentions belong to that theme.

### **3.2. Factors Affecting Identity Integration Positively**

After determining the CDMSII stage of the participants, I analyzed what makes identity integration easier. Four themes emerged from the data: *positive emotions*, *secondary benefits*, *social support mechanisms*, and *likeness*. The contents of these themes are presented in Table 3.

The themes of *positive emotions* are about how gaming provides positive emotions for gamers and, in return, makes it easier for them to identify as gamers. Two sub-themes are under this category: playing games is fun, and it feels good to play games. The *secondary benefits* theme consists of the benefits that gamers gain that are not directly a result of gaming, such as improving English, escapism, new experiences, and personal growth. The third theme was about how games provide *social support* systems, and this helps players to feel a sense of belonging to the gaming community, such as solidarity, cultural and linguistic harmony when playing with other Turkish gamers, socializing, and how it provides a sense of belonging. The last theme, *likeness*, was about how perceived similarities and alignment of gaming purposes increased the sense of belonging to the gamer identity.

**Table 3: Factors Affecting Identity Integration Positively**

	N	Frequency	Percentage
<b>Positive Emotions</b>			
Gaming Is Fun.	7	8	6.78%
It Feels Good to Play Games.	6	6	5.08%
<b>Secondary Benefits</b>			
Playing Games Improves English Proficiency.	9	10	8.47%
Playing Games Allows Me to Escape from Real Life.	5	5	4.24%
Playing Games Allows Me to Have New Experiences	8	9	7.63%
Playing Games Contributes to My Personal Growth.	6	4	3.39%
<b>Social Support Mechanisms</b>			
Solidarity With Gamers	11	14	11.86%
Playing With Turkish Players Brings Cultural and Linguistic Harmony	14	19	16.10%
Socializing	10	19	16.10%
Socializing Brings a Sense of Belonging with Gamers	9	13	11.02%
<b>Likeness</b>			
Alignment Of Playing Purpose Affects Belonging Positively	7	9	7.63%
Perceived Similarity with Other Players Affects Belonging Positively	2	2	1.69%
<b>Total</b>	<b>86</b>	<b>118</b>	<b>100%</b>

*Note:* In the table, the N column shows the number of participants who mentioned the theme, the column Frequency shows how many times it was mentioned, and the Percentage column shows what percentage of the mentions belong to that theme.

### 3.3. Factors Affecting Identity Integration Negatively

Lastly, factors that negatively affect identity integration were analyzed. Themes from this were *language proficiency*, *experiences with racism*, *practical stressors*, and *harmful norms of gaming culture*. The contents of these sub-themes are presented in Table 3.

*Language proficiency* was about how not knowing another language (mostly English in this context) would affect the gaming experience, in-game communication, access to the game content, socialization with other gamers, and enjoyment of the game. *Experiences with racism* were about how players facing or witnessing racism from other players affect their

gamer identity and gaming experience. Practical stressors were about the factors that make gaming more challenging and less accessible, thus making it harder to have an integrated gamer identity, such as the lack of a gaming community size and how games are paid to win. Lastly, *harmful gaming norms* were about how negative behaviors become norms in the gaming community and make it harder for players to identify as gamers.

**Table 4:** *Factors Affecting Identity Integration Negatively*

	N	Frequency	Percentage
<b>Language Proficiency</b>			
Not Knowing the Language Affects the Game Experience	18	26	8.33%
Not Knowing the Language Affects Access to The Game	14	17	5.45%
Not Knowing the Language Affects In-Game Communication	12	13	4.17%
Not Knowing the Language Affects Socialization in The Game	9	10	3.20%
Not Knowing the Language Affects the Enjoyment of The Game	5	5	1.60%
<b>Experiences With Racism</b>			
Racism	15	34	10.90%
Racism Against Turks	12	25	8.01%
Racism Against Russians	10	18	5.77%
Turks Are Known as Toxic Players	9	9	2.88%
Turks Are Made Fun Of	9	9	2.88%
Turks Are Known as Aggressive Players	6	6	1.92%
Turks Are Disliked	6	6	1.92%
Racist Behaviors of Turkish Players	9	8	2.56%
<b>Practical Stressors</b>			
Inequality Of Opportunities	5	10	3.20%
Gaming Experience Depends on How Much Money I Spent	10	11	3.52%
Turkish Gaming Community Is Not Big Enough	4	4	1.28%

**Table4(Continued)**

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<b>Harmful Norms of Gaming Culture</b>			
Rivalry	6	7	2.24%
Toxicity	15	30	9.61%
Aggressive Behavior of Turkish Players	12	16	5.13%
Toxic Behavior of Turkish Players	15	36	11.54%
Sexism	7	12	3.85%
<b>Total</b>	<b>215</b>	<b>312</b>	<b>100%</b>

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*Note:* In the table, the N column shows the number of participants who mentioned the theme, the column Frequency shows how many times it was mentioned, and the Percentage column shows what percentage of the mentions belong to that theme.



## **4. DISCUSSION**

In this section, I discuss the results based on identity integration literature. I use the CDMSII model to decide where my participants fall on the identity integration stages, such as anticipatory categorization, categorization, and compartmentalization. Since my participants had multiple distinct identities that could affect their gaming experience such as identifying as a woman or being Kurdish, and all having different levels of language proficiency in different languages such as English, German, French, and so on, I used this model to analyze how gamer identity gets integrated of overall “self” of the participants. The BII model helped to categorize the positive and negative factors affecting the identity integration process, such as acculturative stress.

### **4.1. Identity Integration**

Within the scope of this thesis, I used the CDMSII model for the identity integration stages. CDMSII starts with the first stage of identity integration before someone takes place in a certain culture and ends when an individual fully integrates their identity (Amiot et al., 2007). When I analyzed the data based on these steps, I found that my participants were at various stages of identity integration.

#### **4.1.1. Anticipatory Categorization**

This is the first step of integration. In this step, an individual might consider participating in a culture but still needs to experience it fully (Amiot et al., 2007). Because of the nature of this thesis, I expected that only a few participants would be in this stage. To focus on the gaming experiences, I chose participants from people who already have a gaming experience; thus, only one participant was in this stage, as expected. However, Participant 9 stated that they were not actually playing games themselves other than mobile games

#### **4.1.2. Categorization**

This stage is when an individual participates in a certain culture but does not identify with it. Even if some participants were gaming regularly, they still stated they did not identify as gamers. This is a natural second step in CDMSII (Amiot et al., 2007). For example, Participant 18 stated that they do not consider themselves to be gamers even if they are

playing games. There might be various reasons why someone would not identify with a culture they regularly participate in, which will be discussed later in this chapter.

**Quote 2 (Participant 18)**

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Ben kendimi çok gamer olarak tanımlamıyorum. Aslında düz böyle kendi yaptığım gamer tanımına bakacak olursam gamer olarak tanımlayabilirdim. Ama hem zamansal olarak çevremdeki benden daha gamer olduğunu düşündüğüm kişilere baktığımda onlar kadar buna vakit ayırmadığımı düşündüğüm için. Benim için yani benim hayatımda çok böyle günlük rutinime işlemiş bir şey olmadığından kendimi çok gamer olarak tanımlamıyorum.	I do not define myself as much of a gamer. Actually, if I were to look at my own definition of a gamer, I could define myself as a gamer. But when I look at the people around me who I think are more of a gamer than me, I think I do not spend as much time on it as they do. For me, I mean, since it is not something that has become a part of my daily routine in my life, I do not define myself as much of a gamer.
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**4.1.3. Compartmentalization**

This is the third step of identity integration, where the individual actually identifies with more than one identity, but the identities are not integrated and context-dependent (Amiot et al., 2007). For example, one can identify as a gamer when playing games but not when they stop playing. Most of the participants were in this category. For example, Participant 1 said that they only identify as gamers when they are playing games.

**Quote 3 (Participant 1)**

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Şöyle, bana göre ben bilgisayarın başından ayrıldığım anda artık oyuncu kimliğimle bir bağım kalmıyor.	Well, for me, the moment I leave the computer, I no longer have any connection with my gamer identity.
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#### 4.1.4. Integration

This is the fourth and final step of identity integration. In this step, individuals would have an integrated and coherent identity that is not context-dependent (Amiot et al., 2007). After the third stage, second, most of the participants were in this stage. For example, Participant 17 said that their different identities and gamer identities are integrated into each other, and they identify with multiple of them at once. This means that as much as there are reasons holding gamers back from identifying as one, there are also some positive reinforcements, which will be discussed later in this chapter.

#### Quote 4 (Participant 17)

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<p>Kesinlikle (kimliklerim) etkileşime giriyor. Yani iç içeler, ben kendimi gamer olarak tanımlıyorum ama bir yandan da kendimi geek olarak da tanımlıyorum. Aslında bir şeylere gönülden bağlı, her şeyi bilmeye çalışan biri olarak da diyebilirim. Oyunlar da zaten bu kimlik parçamla bir arada geçiyor. Bir oyunu oynuyorsam herhangi bir tür fark etmeksizin, hikaye tabanlı, stratejik, FPS fark etmeksizin o oyunun bütün hikayesini, karakterlerini ya da mekaniklerini ezbere, gönülden bilene kadar öğrenmeye çalışıyorum. O yüzden iç içe girdiği kısımlar kesinlikle var diğer kimliklerimle.</p>	<p>(My identities) they definitely interact. So, they are intertwined. I define myself as a gamer, but I also define myself as a geek. Actually, I can say that I am someone who is devoted to something and tries to know everything. Games also go hand in hand with this part of my identity. If I am playing a game, regardless of its genre, story-based, strategic, or FPS, I try to learn the entire story, characters, or mechanics of that game by heart until I know it by heart. So, there are definitely parts where it intertwines with my other identities.</p>
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#### 4.1.5. The Centrality of Gamer Identity

Another essential element of gamer identity was about how the gamer identity takes place in the overall self of participants. While some said being a gamer is not an essential or central identity even though they identify as gamers, others mentioned that being a gamer is very important to their overall self. For example, while 11 said that their gamer identity is not central, Participant 6 said that their gamer identity was at the center of their identity.

#### Quote 5 (Participant 11)

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Oyuncu kimliğim daha arka planlarda duruyor yani ön plandaki stresi alan arka plandaki bir kimlik denebilir.	My gamer identity is more in the background, so you could say it's a background identity that relieves the stress in the foreground.
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#### Quote 6 (Participant 6)

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Biraz önce dediğim gibi, yani küçüklüğümden beri gerçekten 4-5 yaşından beri ben kendimi bildim bileli evde bilgisayar hep oldu ve hep oyun da oynuyordum ben. Bu yüzden benim bütün gelişim evrelerimin içinde oyunların her zaman bir parçası oldu.	As I said earlier, since my childhood, really since I was 4-5 years old, as far back as I can remember, there was always a computer at home, and I was always playing games. That is why games have always been a part of all my developmental stages.
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## 4.2. Factors Affecting Identity Integration Positively

As discussed above, participants were in the different stages of identity integration. Some of them found their identity to be integrated, and being gamers was part of their identity. In this part, I discuss what might contribute to identifying as a gamer.

### 4.2.1. Positive Emotions

One of the factors that positively contributed to being a gamer was the positive emotions around it, such as feeling good while playing or the fact that gaming brings players joy. Some participants associated their gaming experience with overall positive emotions, even if they also went through some hardships. For example, Participant 16 said that playing games made them very happy.

#### Quote 7 (Participant 16)

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Beni açıkçası çok mutlu hissettiriyor çünkü herhangi bir oyunun hikayesi için veya oyunu sevdiğim için takip etmek ve bu topluluğun içerisinde o oyunu sürekli beklemek hayatımda bir heyecan ve bir beklenti oluşturuyor sürekli ve bu da bana iyi geliyor.

It honestly makes me feel very happy because following a game for its story or because I love it and constantly waiting for that game in this community creates excitement and anticipation in my life and this makes me feel good.

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#### 4.2.2. Secondary Benefits

Another positive experience associated with gaming was the secondary benefits that gaming brought. These benefits included attributes such as personality qualities that gaming brings to individuals, like leadership or problem-solving ability. For example, Participant 2 said that the leadership skills and confidence they gain from gaming help them in their job. Another important outcome was that some participants said gaming brought them some escapism from their *real-life* problems. Another secondary benefit was that individuals said their English proficiency benefited from gaming. This is important, because, according to the literature, language proficiency plays a vital role in identity integration with a new culture (Smith & Khawaja, 2011).

#### Quote 8 Participant 2

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Şunu bile söyleyebilirim, çalıştığım yerde bile bana faydası oldu. O getirdiği özgüven, liderlik vasfı, bu bilincin gelişmesi. Hayatımda çok olumlu bir ışık tuttu yani.

I can even say that it was beneficial for me even where I worked. The self-confidence it brought, that leadership quality, the development of this consciousness. It shed a very positive light on my life.

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#### 4.2.3. Social Support Mechanisms

Having a social support mechanism provided by games was also positively associated with the gaming experience. A critical factor in this was those online games

themselves, most of the time, provide a platform for socializing, such as in-game chat rooms or the ability to add other players as friends. Literature shows that social support and engaging in social activities related to a certain identity helps with the identity integration process (Rosario et al., 2008). Furthermore, cultural engagement is essential to identity integration (Al-Zoubi, 2020). Participants supported these findings by emphasizing the importance of socializing and social support aspects of gaming. For example, Participant 2 said that their online friends are just like their *real-life* friends

#### Quote 8 (Participant 2)

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Real arkadaşlarımın gibi hissettiğim, her gece konuştuğum sesli konuştuğum erkek arkadaşlarım da var. Sohbetlerinden çok zevk alıyorum ve bunu bizzat size söylüyorum, bazen kendimi böyle yalnız veya sıkıntı hissettiğim zaman oyuna girip arkadaşlarımla sohbet ettiğimde yanlarındaymışım da hani yan yana sohbet ediyormuşum hissiyatı oluyor. Rahatlıyorum, hoşuma gidiyor. Kardeşim dostum ablam abim gibi insanlar çok var.	I have male friends who I feel like they are my real friends, who I talk to every night and talk out loud. I really enjoy my conversations, and I tell you this myself sometimes: when I feel lonely or distressed when I enter the game and chat with my friends, I feel like I am with them and I am chatting side by side. I relax, I like it. There were lots of people like my brother, my friend, and my sister.
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#### 4.2.4. Likeness

Lastly, being similar or at least perceiving themselves as similar to other gamers was a part of the positive factors affecting the gaming experience and gamer identity. According to Benet-Martinez and Haritatos (2005), the BII model suggests that identities integrate when individuals perceive their identities as compatible and similar rather than different or conflicting. Participants reported feeling better when their gaming purpose aligned with other gamers and when they perceived themselves and other players as similar. This contributed to individuals identifying as gamers or having a sense of belonging to other gamers. For example, Participant 5 said that they preferred playing with people whom they could have a chat with and have fun together.

### Quote 9 (Participant 5)

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Hem oyuncu hem oyun dışı olarak yani Both in-game and out of them, I prefer to play sohbet edebildiğim, anlayışlı, eğlenmesini games with people I can chat with, who are bilen yani amacı eğlenmek için olan understanding, who know how to have fun, insanlarla oyun oynamayı tercih ederim. and whose purpose is to have fun.

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### 4.3. Factors Affecting Identity Integration Negatively

Even if some participants were in the last stage of the identity integration process, some were at the earlier stages, and just like there were positive factors to the process, there were also some factors that negatively affected the process. In this section, I discuss these factors.

#### 4.3.1. Language Proficiency

A significant factor that prevented people from identifying as gamers or enjoying their gaming experience was their language proficiency and related problems. Many aspects of gaming were related to language proficiency, such as the gaming experience, communication with other players, access to the game itself, and overall enjoyment from gaming. The literature also supports this finding. According to Benet-Martinez & Haritatos's BII Model (2005), language skills are an important factor in identity integration; incidents such as being misunderstood because of one's accent negatively affect the process. Also, Finch and Williams (2003) that language is an acculturative stressor. Parallel to the literature, I also found that language skill was an essential part of identity integration and directly affected the gaming experience. For example, Participant 6 said that not knowing the common language in a game, you lose the ability to get information and communication.

#### Quote 10 (Participant 6)

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Mesela Valorant türünden ya da CS gibi oyunlardan bahsedeyim, info vermek vardır. Eğer konuşamazsınız oyun içinde çok büyük bir eksiklik yaşarsınız. Ya da hani konuşmayı da geçtim, onları da anlayamazsanız çok büyük bir açık oluyor. Çünkü işte düşmanın nerede olduğunu söylüyorlar, taktik veriyorlar, bunları kaçırıyor oluyorsunuz. O yüzden çok aslında kilit bir noktada dil bilmek.

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#### 4.3.2. Experiences of Racism

Another critical factor was facing or witnessing racism in online gaming spaces, which is already prevalent in gaming communities (Cary et al., 2020). It was also a vital part of the participants' experiences in this thesis. Participants stated that either they themselves faced racism from other gamers or they witnessed racism towards other ethnicities and minorities. For example, Participant 13 said that when other players realize they are Turkish, they start to make fun of them. The discrimination did not stop there; another important issue was the discrimination done by Turkish players. For example, Participant 20 said that even some games banned the word *Kurdish* because it was being used as an insult. According to Downie and colleagues (2006), how their culture is perceived in a new environment affects how individuals react to that culture and perceive themselves as accepted or rejected. Racism takes part in this process. Smith and Khawaja (2011) argue that facing discrimination is an expected stressor from individuals joining a new culture.

### Quote 11 (Participant 13)

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Yine işte loblilerde, LoL'de daha çok oluyor. Orada oyundaki adım Türkçe bir karakter içerdiği için, direkt oyuna girdiğimizde isimler gözükteği zaman oyun içinde, direkt böyle karşıdan bir kışkırtma gelmeye başlıyor işte. Turkish, kebab falan o tarz şeyler yazılıyor. Bir kışkırtmaya çalışıyorlar özellikle ki biz de cevap verelim. Cevap verdiğimiz zaman da direkt senin üstünde oynamaya başlıyor.

Again, it happens more in lobbies than in LoL. Since the name in the game contains a Turkish character, when we enter the game directly, when the names appear, a provocation starts coming from the opposite side of the game. Turkish, kebab, and such things are written. They are trying to provoke us, especially so that we will respond. When we respond, they start to play directly against us.

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### Quote 12 (Participant 20)

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Biz de dediğim gibi işte belki biliyorsunuzdur bir oyunda, geçen Valorant'ta mıydı, Kürt kelimesi banlı kelimeler arasına düştü. Çünkü o kadar fazla Kürt'ü hakaret olarak kullanıyorlardı ki artık Kürt yazıldığında şey otomatik olarak hakaret ettiğinizi düşünüp oyun sizi banlıyor.

As I said, maybe you know, in a game, was it Valorant last year, the word Kurd was among the banned words. Because they used Kurd as an insult so much that when you write Kurd, the game automatically thinks you're insulting and bans you.

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### 4.3.3. Practical Stressors

Practical stressors such as needing to pay a significant amount for games, inequality of opportunities between people who game, and local gaming communities not being large enough to participate also affected gamer identity and gaming experience. For example, Participant 10 said that even the best internet in Turkey was worse than the internet in Germany, and this created an inequality between players from both countries. Literature

shows that factors such as time, finance, and socialization affect gamer identity and whether someone identifies as a gamer altogether (Cwil & Howe, 2020). Moreover, practical stressors such as finances are also stressors regarding identity integration (Smith & Khawaja, 2011). Parallel to the literature, participants also stated that these practical stressors contributed to having a negative gaming experience and sometimes even prevented them from identifying as gamers.

**Quote 13** (Participant 10)

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<p>En çok mustarip olduğum şu ana kadarki şey server problemleri idi çünkü bazı oyunların, yani çoğu oyunun Türkiye'de değil Avrupa serverları var ve bu yüzden internet bağlantısı çok fazla problem oluyor. Bu sadece internet bağlantısı kötü olan insanlar değil. İnternet bağlantısı Türkiye şartlarında çok iyi olan insanlar bile Almanya'da serverı bulunan bir Alman oyuncudan atıyorum 20 ping 30 ping daha geride olduğu için bu mesela first person shooter oyunlarla çok fazla etkisi oluyor.</p>	<p>The thing I have suffered the most so far has been server problems because some games, most games, do not have servers in Turkey but in Europe, and therefore, internet connection is a big problem. This is not just for people with bad internet connections. Even people with very good internet connections in Turkey are 20 or 30 ping behind a German player who has a server in Germany, so this has a big effect on first-person shooter games, for example.</p>
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#### **4.3.4. Harmful Norms of Gaming Culture**

Lastly, the harmful norms of gaming culture itself affected players from having a positive gaming experience and identifying themselves as gamers. This notably explains the participants in the compartmentalization stage of identity integration. For example, Participant 6 said that they didn't like playing on Turkish game servers because there was a lot of toxicity. According to Amiot and colleagues (2017), the compartmentalization stage plays a role as a buffer to reduce the adverse outcomes of an identity. Compartmentalization isolates the negative aspects of a specific identity from spreading the overall self. When game communities themselves have some harmful norms and attributes, such as sexism and toxicity (Cote, 2023; Fox & Tang, 2014), this prevents people from enjoying their gaming experience and considering themselves a part of the community.

#### Quote 14 (Participant 6)

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Ben Türkiye'deki serverlarda mesela For example, I do not like playing on servers  
oynamayı çok sevmem. Çünkü dediğim gibi in Turkey. Because as I said, the toxicity here  
buradaki toksiklik diğer ülkelere nazaran çok is much higher than in other countries. You  
yüksek. Hani burada toksikliğe maruz know, being exposed to toxicity here. I have  
kalmak. Diğerleri de biraz daha, nasıl a bit more, how should I say, a more  
diyeyim, daha Avrupalı bir kafaya sahip European mindset in this game mentality. I  
olduğumu düşünüyorum bu oyun am more chill, let us have fun, etc. I do not  
mentalitesinde. Daha chill, keyif alalım falan get hung up on increasing the rank like the  
kafasında oluyorum. Buradakiler gibi işte ones here.  
rank'ın yükseltisine takılmıyorum.

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#### 4.5. Limitations and Future Directions

This thesis has its limitations. First, gender was not equally represented in my data, with five women and 15 men. This could affect the data in some ways. For example, a study shows that women and men do not identify as gamers the same: women are less likely to identify as gamers even if they play the same amount of time as their male counterparts (Howe et al., 2019). Since this thesis focuses on the identity perspective of the gaming community, this is an important detail. In the future, gender should also be considered as a part of the determinants of gamer identity and how gender affects identification stages within the gamer community. Also, on another note, since women are less likely to identify as gamers, it was hard to find women gamers to join the thesis.

Secondly, as discussed in the first chapter of this thesis, games have many categories and types. I chose my participants from anyone who played online games without considering game categories. My main criteria were to focus on games that allow some sort of communication with other players. As results show, spending money on games, some games' competitive nature affects people identifying as gamers. Different games have different competitiveness (in any) levels, and while some games are pay-to-win, others are not. Considering this, examining how different game types affect individuals' gamer identities would be critical.

Thirdly, results show that language proficiency was a significant element of identifying as a gamer. On that note, one of the participant's mother languages was Kurdish, and they all had different levels of second language proficiency in various languages such as English, French, and German. In the future, it would be beneficial to keep mother languages, and its effect on the said experience would be beneficial.

Lastly, facing and witnessing some form of racism was a part of the negative factors when it comes to identifying as a gamer. In the study, participants mentioned various kinds of racism. For example, some participants mentioned racism happening against Kurdish players in Turkey, while others mentioned racism against Russians, Arabs, and so on. In this study, I analyzed all of them under the racism umbrella, but all of these are fundamentally different experiences. Accordingly, future studies should focus on different types of racism.

#### **4.6. Conclusion and Implications**

Literature suggests that the concept of *gamer identity* goes back to 80's De Grove et al. (2015). Yet, we do not see a lot about gamer identity studies. Moreover, we don't know how gamer identity takes place in the identity integration process. The aim of this thesis was to investigate the identity integration processes of gamers and their experiences in gaming spaces.

In conclusion, the results of the thematic analysis show that gamers fall into different categories of identity integration process according to CDMSII, such as anticipatory categorization, categorization, compartmentalization, and finally, *integration*. Even if most of the participants were regular gamers, some of them did not identify themselves as gamers, and some of them were on different levels of the identification process. Also, the analysis shows that there were many factors that helped people to identify as gamers, as well as a lot of factors preventing people from identifying as gamers. For example, factors like social support and positive emotions were positive, but factors like racism and low language proficiency were negative. With these findings, we now know that "gamer" is also an identity that gets integrated into already existing identities stage by stage. Moreover, this integration process gets affected by many factors, both positively and negatively.

The findings of this thesis are important when it comes to understanding how gamers approach their gamer identity, what makes it easier to identify as a gamer, and what makes

it harder. It is important to look at gaming experience outside of the violence-addiction framework and see it as a natural part of some individual's daily life and identity.



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## 6. APPENDICES

### Appendix-A

#### Informed Consent Form

Bu çalışma Doç. Dr. Gülden Sayılan danışmanlığında Meleksima Türkırkı tarafından tez çalışması kapsamında yürütülmektedir. Araştırma, Türkçe konuşan bireylerin dijital oyun deneyimini anlamayı amaçlamaktadır.

Prosedürler: Bu çalışma yaklaşık 30-40 dakika sürecektir. Dijital oyunlardaki deneyimleriniz ve görüşlerinizle ilgili bazı soruları yanıtlamanız istenecektir. Çalışmadan istediğiniz zaman çekilebilirsiniz ve eğer çekilerseniz sizden başka herhangi bir bilgi toplanmayacaktır. Katılmayı kabul ederseniz, iletişim için e-posta adresinizi yazmanız istenecektir. E-posta adresiniz verilerinizle ilişkilendirilmeyecek ve iletişim dışında herhangi bir amaçla kullanılmayacaktır.

Riskler: Bu çalışmada önemli riskler bulunmamaktadır. Cevaplarınız tamamen anonimdir.

Faydalar: Bu çalışmaya katılarak, psikolojik çalışmaların nasıl işlediği hakkında daha fazla bilgi edinecek ve bilim ve toplumun genelinde faydalı bir çalışmada yer alacaksınız.

Veri Güvenliği: Sizden topladığımız veriler yalnızca bilimsel amaçlar için kullanılacaktır. Sonuçlarınız kimlik bilgilerinizle değil (örneğin, ad, e-posta adresi vb.) bir numara ile saklanacaktır, bu şekilde cevaplarınızın gizliliği korunacaktır. Bu projenin verilerini yayınlarsak, tanımlayıcı bilgiler kamuya açıklanmayacaktır. Profesyonel ve bilimsel çalışmanın belgelenmesini sağlamak için, anonimleştirilmiş veriler bu araştırmanın yayınlanmasını takiben süresiz olarak saklanacaktır. Anonimleştirilmiş veriler ayrıca diğer araştırmacılarla paylaşılabilir, açık kaynak web uygulamalarında kullanılabilir ve bilimsel yayınlar ve sunumlar için kullanılabilir. Size ait kişisel bilgiler içermeyecektir.

Katılımcının Hakları: Bu çalışmaya katılımınız gönüllüdür ve istediğiniz zaman çekilebilirsiniz. Buna bağlı olarak herhangi olumsuz bir sonuç yoktur.

Teşekkür: Çalışmaya katılmanız halinde her katılımcıya 100 lira değerinde hediye kartı verilecektir.

Eğer tüm bu şartları kabul ediyorsanız, lütfen çalışmaya devam edin. Eğer katılmıyorsanız veya katılmak istemiyorsanız, **sorun değil; sadece bu siteden ayrılabilirsiniz.**



## Appendix-B

### Demographic Information Form

1. Doğum yılınızı belirtiniz. \_\_\_\_\_
2. Cinsiyetinizi belirtiniz.
  - Kadın
  - Erkek
  - Belirtmek istemiyorum
3. Tamamladığınız en yüksek eğitim derecesi nedir?
  - Örgün eğitim almadım
  - İlkokul
  - Ortaokul
  - Lise
  - Lisans
  - Lisansüstü
  - Diğer (Lütfen belirtiniz) \_\_\_\_\_
0. Aşağıdakilerden hangisi sizi en iyi tanımlar?
  - Emekli
  - Çalışmıyor
  - Yarı zamanlı çalışan
  - Tam zamanlı çalışan
  - Diğer (lütfen belirtiniz) \_\_\_\_\_
0. Mesleğiniz nedir? \_\_\_\_\_
0. Haftada ortalama kaç saatinizi bilgisayar oyunlarına ayırıyorsunuz?
0. En sık oynadığınız oyun(lar) hangileridir? (en fazla 3 tane) \_\_\_\_\_
0. Kaç yıldır aktif olarak bilgisayar oyunu oynuyorsunuz? \_\_\_\_\_
10. Ana diliniz dahil, ileri seviyede konuştuğunuz dilleri belirtiniz.  
\_\_\_\_\_

## Appendix-C

### Interview Questions

1. Sizin için gamer/oyuncu ne anlama gelmektedir?
  - a. Kendinizi bir oyuncu/gamer olarak tanımlar mısınız? Nasıl tanımlarsınız?
  - b. Oynadığınız oyunlarda kendi performansınızı nasıl değerlendirirsiniz?
0. Oyun dünyasında en sık karşılaştığınız problemler nelerdir?  
. Örnek verebilir misiniz?
0. Oyun profilinizi oluştururken kendiniz hakkında ne tür bilgilere yer verirsiniz?  
. Peki bu bilgilere yer verme sebebiniz nedir? Açıklayabilir misiniz?
0. Takım arkadaşlarınız ile oyun içi hangi yollar ile iletişim kurmayı tercih edersiniz? Açıklar mısınız/örnek verebilir misiniz? Neden (Ne zaman daha iyi bir opsiyon) bunu tercih ediyorsunuz?
0. Takım arkadaşlarınızın oyun sırasında size karşı tutumu nasıldır?
0. Peki burada ana dilinizin ve veya nereli olduğunuzun oyun süreçlerinde rolünün ne olduğunu düşünüyorsunuz? Açıklayabilir misiniz?
1. Dijital oyun topluluklarında ırka, konuşulan dile ya da kişinin ülkesine dayalı bir ayrımcılık konusunda ne düşünüyorsunuz? Örneklendirebilir misiniz? (Şu ana kadar bahsetmedi ise: ayrımcılık var mı sizce? diye sorulabilir)
0. Oyun oynamadaki başarı ve yetenek açısından bunun rolü sizce nedir? (Türk/Türkçe konuşan ve yabancı oyuncuların performansını karşılaştıracak olsanız, bir fark görüyor musunuz? Bunu neye göre değerlendiriyorsunuz/ölçüyorsunuz?)
1. Kendinizi oynadığınız oyun topluluğuna ait hissediyor musunuz?  
Ne tür katılımcı davranışlar gerçekleştiriyorsunuz?
2. Bir oyun anında kendinizi o an içinde bulunduğunuz oyun takımına ait hisseder misiniz? Bunu hangi faktörler etkiler?