



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

**WISH I COULD BE (PART OF THAT WORLD): GEEK  
CULTURE, FEMMEPHOBIA, AND THE EXPERIENCES OF  
GEEK WOMEN**

MASTER OF ARTS

**Gökşin Özge Çakar**

DEPARTMENT OF PSYCHOLOGY

Ankara, 2024



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Ankara, 2024

## APPROVAL PAGE

The thesis prepared by Gökşin Özge ÇAKAR and titled “Wish I Could Be (Part of That World): Geek Culture, Femmephobia, and The Experiences of Geek Women” is accepted by unanimous vote as a Master of Arts at Ankara Yıldırım Beyazıt University, Institute of Social Sciences, Department of Psychology.

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I certify that this thesis fulfills the requirements to be deemed a Master of Arts thesis at Ankara Yıldırım Beyazıt University, Institute of Social Sciences, Department of Psychology.

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## DECLARATION

I hereby declare that all information in this thesis has been obtained and presented in accordance with academic rules and ethical conduct. I also declare that, as required by these rules and conduct, 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:



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## **ABSTRACT**

### **Wish I Could Be (Part of That World): Geek Culture, Femmephobia and the Experiences of Geek Women**

Even though geeks existed well before the age of social media, little attention was given to them. The term geek is used to describe individuals who are passionately interested in a particular topic. Geeks created a sub-culture with its own rules and hazing process. This hazing process can be strict for some, including geek women. This thesis aims to understand what geek women deem as a geek, their experiences in geek spaces, and their struggles of existing in this male-dominated subculture as a woman using femme theory as a theoretical perspective. For this purpose, I conducted semi-structured interviews with twenty self-identified geek women and qualitatively analyzed the contents of these interviews. According to the results of the thematic analysis, various themes emerged in what it means to be a geek, who are considered geeks, multiple forms of femmephobia geek women were subjected to in the geek spaces, and the adverse effects these femmephobic incidents and gender-based discrimination have on geek women. I then discussed the possible implications of these results based on femmephobia literature.

**Keywords:** geeks, nerds, femme theory, femmephobia, thematic analysis

## ÖZET

### **Keşke Olabilseydim (O Dünyanın Parçası): Geek Kültürü, Femfobi ve Geek Kadınların Deneyimleri**

Geekler ya da Türkçedeki daha yakın temsiliyle inekler sosyal medya çağından çok önce var olsalar da yeterli ilgiyi görememişlerdir. Geek terimi, belirli bir konuya tutkuyla ilgi duyan bireyleri tanımlamak için kullanılır. Geeklerin, kendi kurallarını ve gruba alım süreçlerini oluşturmaları bakımından kendilerine ait bir alt kültür yarattıkları söylenebilir. Bu gruba alım süreci, kadınların da dahil olduğu bazı gruplar için oldukça katı olabilir. Bu tez, geek kadınların neyi geek olarak tanımladıklarını, geek alanlardaki deneyimlerini ve bir kadın olarak bu erkek egemen alt kültürde var olma noktasında yaşadıkları zorlukları femme teorisini teorik perspektif olarak kullanarak anlamayı amaçlamaktadır. Bu amaçla, kendini geek olarak tanımlayan yirmi kadınla yarı yapılandırılmış görüşmeler gerçekleştirdim ve bu görüşmelerin içeriğini nitel analize tabi tuttum. Tematik analiz sonuçlarına göre geek olmanın ne anlama geldiği, kimlerin geek olarak kabul edildiği, geek kadınların geek ortamlarda maruz kaldığı femfobinin çeşitli biçimleri ve bu femfobik olayların ve cinsiyet temelli ayrımcılığın geek kadınlar üzerinde bıraktığı negatif etkiler olmak üzere çeşitli temalar ortaya çıktı. Bu sonuçların olası çıkarımlarını femfobi literatürü temelinde tartıştım.

**Anahtar Kelimeler:** geek, inek, femme teori, femfobi, tematik analiz

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## INTRODUCTION

In *Little Mermaid* (Musker & Clements, 1989), a mermaid named Ariel desperately wants to belong to the land and have legs. However, there are obstacles in her way, like her father, the sea king, not wanting to leave his daughter away from him, or the conflict between humans and merpeople. So Ariel collects trinkets from the sunken ships that she thinks belong to the land and wishes to be a part of the magical world of land for people with legs.

I begin with this Disney cartoon because this synopsis seems close to women's experiences in geekdom. They desperately want to be a part of this world with all of their interests, but because of the obstacles in their way, they are generally incapable of doing so. Instead of an overprotective father and a tail, their problems seem to lie in the gender hierarchy and men who do not want to accept them because of it. This thesis aims to answer a couple of questions about this topic: What is a *geek*, and how can one be one? Are the experiences of women in this subculture affected by their gender? If so, what kind of problems do women face in this community?

What constitutes a geek? The term *geek* is commonly used to describe people passionately attached to a particular topic or subject (Reagle, 2012). However, according to the literature, that was only sometimes the case. Before mainstream media started to make movie adaptations of fantasy books and superhero comics and therefore gave value to being a geek in society, this word had much more negative associations (Bednarek, 2012; Finister et al., 2021; Mikac, 2023). At the beginning of its usage, geek meant someone who was a *fool* or a *simpleton* (Harper, n.d.; Merriam-Webster, n.d.). Even though we do not know the exact context in which the word was created, this meaning provides a pretty good idea. If we get closer to the current times in terms of the usage of this word, it has begun to describe people who were obsessively interested in a particular, primarily technological pursuit and were socially awkward (Kendall, 1999). This negative portrayal was no doubt supported by the media representation of the time. The positive association with the word geek started

after the 1980s or, in other words, with the rise of technology (Card & DiNardo, 2002). At this time, being a geek was seen as a feminine or a failed masculine attribute (Bury, 2011); however, after the rise of technology, a historically masculine domain (Banet-Weiser & Miltner, 2016; Rosser, 2006), geekiness gained significant importance, and since fields using high-technology types of equipment was dominated by men (Margolis & Fisher, 2002) all these developments made the light shine on geek men for the first time in history. Their information about technology was not foolish, niche, or feminine but instead valuable. This development also meant that geek culture was now a commercializable and profitable business opportunity (Scott, 2019). Nowadays, geek culture is acknowledged and celebrated with comic cons attracting thousands of interested attendees, and movies like Harry Potter or Iron Man are Box Office successes (Salter & Blodgett, 2017, p.4; Schrodt, 2016).

Simply put, a geek is a person enthusiastically interested in a specific and often niche subject or a hobby (Wong, 2016). These hobbies include but are not limited to programming, science, superhero comics, video games, board games, anime, and manga (Woo, 2012). One of the critical aspects of geekdom is that it provides community and social support for individuals previously not readily accepted by the general public (Tang & Fox, 2016; Wack & Tantleff-Dunn, 2009). Though this is not the case anymore, with geek interests becoming an essential part of popular media, geeks still share that sense of community with numerous online forums dedicated to geeks and comic conventions (McCain et al., 2015). In these spaces designed specifically for them, geeks can express themselves and their interests and find easy acceptance and like-minded individuals with whom they can connect (Woo, 2015).

In these aspects, the geek community is essentially a subculture, and like most subcultures, it also has its language, values, rules, and an assessing process before accepting its members (Hayden, 1996; Robinson, 2014; Woo, 2015). While informal, this process can be strict and even impenetrable for individuals in specific categories, such as women (Robinson, 2014). The limited literature on geeks shows that women are not seen as natural members of the geek community (Fox & Tang, 2014; Kendall, 1999; Leon, 2014; Robinson, 2014). According to online games literature, i.e., the most studied subject in all of geek interests, women are much more hesitant to label themselves as gamer even though they play online video games almost as much as men do (Duggan, 2015; Paaßen et al., 2016; Shaw, 2011). They also do not see online gaming as an opportunity to socialize and have an active social support system as much as their male counterparts do (McLean & Griffiths, 2018). According to multiple studies conducted with women gamers, one of the most prominent

reasons for this distinction is the gender discrimination women face in these places (Fox & Tang, 2014; Király et al., 2015; Royse et al., 2007; Salter & Blodgett, 2012). Another evidence that women are well aware of not being accepted in these spaces is a game named “Fake Geek Girl,” designed by a woman named Brooke Marston (2021). The character represents a woman discovering the geek/fan culture for the first time. This game aims to collect geekdom symbols, such as a comic book or a gaming console, and find the golden cup. However, unlike other games, when you find a collectible, instead of an encouraging text, you are faced with an insulting message saying you can not be a good enough geek because of your gender. When you find the golden cup, the game ends with a message that says, “No matter how hard you try to fit in, how much you know, or how much passion you have, you will be questioned...”.

When discussing the discrimination women face in the geek -or specifically gaming sub-genre of geekdom- world, feminist blogger Anita Sarkeesian comes to mind. In March 2013, Anita Sarkeesian started a YouTube series called *Trophes vs. Women in Video Games* to examine gender representation in online games (Dean, 2013). Sadly, this series went viral not by its merit but because of the gender-based targeted harassment Sarkeesian faced (Dolan, 2013). Besides the regular rape and murder threats Sarkeesian was subjected to because of this series, one of the aggressors developed a game called “Beat Up Anita Sarkeesian” that lets its player punch a photograph of Sarkeesian (Garcia, 2012). Even though gender-based discrimination in geek spaces, and especially online games, existed well before this, this incident and the Gamergate movement that turned into a backlash against women’s increased involvement in the gaming world as a consequence (Salter, 2017) cemented the importance of taking precautions when it comes to sexism in online geek spaces. As a woman who exists in these places and defines herself as a geek, I am interested in women's shared experiences and hardships on these platforms. Therefore, this thesis aims to discover the place of women in this subculture, how much geek women think they belong in it, what they think about the media representation of geek women, and what they think constitutes a geek in general.

## **1. LITERATURE REVIEW**

The literature on geeks, fans, or nerds is interdisciplinary; therefore, the literature review that follows in this thesis will be cross-disciplinary, covering media studies, sociology, linguistics, psychology, and economy. It will summarize what is considered a

geek, geek sub-domains, an unofficial geek taxonomy, media representation of women in geek media, discrimination against geek women, and the related theories and the real-life consequences of this discrimination.

### 1.1. What Is Geek: Stereotypes and Reality

Words like geek or nerd have a positive association in popular culture nowadays, but the literature shows this was not always the case. The term nerd originated from the American slang word *nerfs* from the 1920s to 1930s (Merriam-Webster, n.d.). While the word was used to mean *nonsense*, it is thought to be substituted for the offensive word *nuts* (Harper, 2023). Other than that, the first documented usage of the term nerd was in Dr Seuss's book "If I Ran the Zoo" to describe an old angry man who was one of the zoo creatures (Kendall, 1999). The subsequent notable usage of the word -and the first place to use the word in a derogatory way- is from a Newsweek article from 1951 in which it was used to describe a *slob or a drip* (Merriam-Webster, n.d.).

Similarly, the term "geek"- used interchangeably with the word nerd (Eglash, 2018; Woo, 2012)- was first used in early 19th century North America for an untalented carnival worker whose only entice came from biting the heads of live animals in front of an audience (Trota, 2019). The word originates from the Middle Low German *geck*, meaning fool, fop, and/or freak (Harper, 2023). Looking at the etymology of these words, it is not hard to see the negative connotations. In the eighties, the negative presentment of these terms was at its peak. In movies and TV series like "Revenge of the Nerds (Kanew, 1984)" and "The Big Bang Theory (Cendrowski, 2007-2019)," geeks/nerds were shown as white, scrawny men who were terrible at social interactions (Kendall, 1999; Leon, 2014). After the rise of modern cinema, technology, and social media, the area of interest previously thought of as *lame* suddenly gained importance (Kendall, 2000; Tocci, 2009). It was now *cool* to know a lot about comic books or be one of the first people to watch the latest Iron Man movie. Therefore, looking at the media, it is possible to separate the definition and characteristics of the geeks in the pre and post-digital revolution. With these niche and *weird* interests of geeks being popular, a new term came out to describe those who were into *geeky stuff: fans*. Now, being a geek was being a passionate fan of something/s, and it was okay to talk about it in public spaces without as much judgment. Nowadays, geek, nerd, or fan describes an individual with a passionate interest and vast information about selected obscure books, movies, TV shows, comic books, and video games. (McCain et al., 2015).

Despite the seemingly warm acceptance of geek interests and media in popular culture, that is not to say there still was not some backlash. Ultimately, the increase in good representation did not erase the problems geeks face regarding acceptance. Recent discourse on Marvel movies not being good cinema and being labeled as *juvenile* or *basic* by multiple film critics is only one of the examples of this issue (i.e., Chilton, 2024; Doyle, 2015). Video games are still primarily studied in the context of addiction (e.g., Akçay, 2020; Aktaş & Bostancı, 2021; Gökçearsan & Durakoğlu, 2014) or their effect on gamers' aggression levels (Bozkuş, 2021; Demirtaş-Madran & Ferligül-Çakılcı, 2014; Doğan, 2006) and are not widely accepted as a space for social interaction. Combining all this with their long history of rejection by *normal* people, it is not hard to see geeks still gatekeep what they consider theirs by right.

## **1.2. “How do I Apply?”: Taxonomy of Geeks and Geek Hierarchy**

As mentioned before, geeks were not a substantial part of daily life before technological developments arose. In the 1970s and 1980s, they were usually typified as teenage white boys who were not socially adept and interested in obscure media forms, such as comic books and role-playing games like Dungeons and Dragons (Backe, 2014). After computers became a part of day-to-day existence, so did the eccentric fields of knowledge; nowadays, geekdom is a vast space, including various topics of interest, including but not limited to sports, science, comics, TV, movies, music, science fiction, fantasy, anime, cosplay, and video games (McCain et al., 2015).

While there is no official hierarchy in geekdom, people in this community still cultivate a place for themselves by comparing themselves to others regarding stereotypical fan behavior, thus creating an unofficial geek hierarchy. These hierarchies change from one individual to another; the one middle ground is that individuals look at these hierarchies to convince themselves there are more intense geeks out there so that they can elevate their status, comfortable with the fact that there are more unusual individuals in geek spaces than them (Busse, 2013).

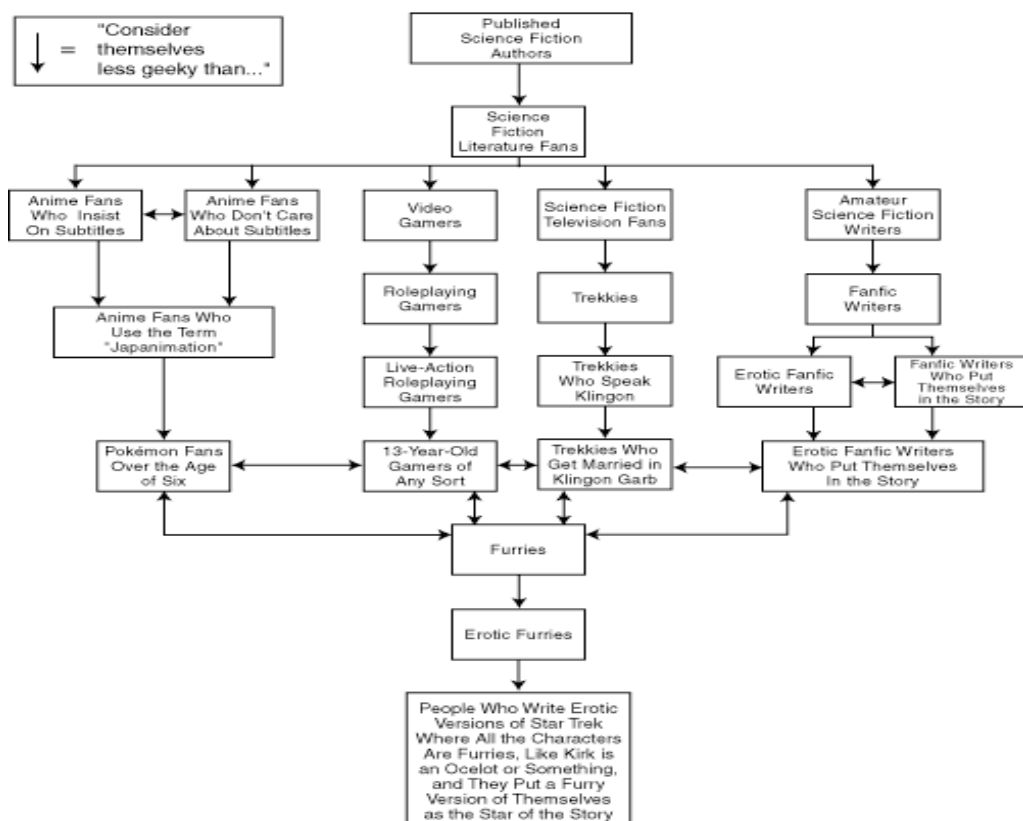
One of the first unofficial attempts at forming the hierarchy of geeks was the geek purity test and the East campus nerd test from a website launched in 1994 called The Armor (DuBois, 1994a; DuBois, 1994b). These tests are in the form of checking boxes that fit the test-taker and include questions about one's social and technological relationships. Another

example of the tests dedicated to measuring how geeky a person is is the geek test from the website Innergeek (2003). This test includes a question about the test-taker's gender; if they are women, they gain five bonus points (Beaudoin, 2003), implying that women are an anomaly in geek spaces. Matthew Barr's geek test is another test created to measure an individual's level of geekiness (n.d.). This test comprises 40 checklist questions, the first being "Have you ever been called a geek or a nerd?" This question implies that geekdom is not just a self-identification but how other individuals perceive your level of geekiness.

Probably the most widely accepted form of hierarchy in geek culture was created by Lore Sjöberg in January 2002. This hierarchy was published on his now-closed website, Brunching Shuttlecocks, and it is a chart that showcases which groups consider themselves less geeky than others. According to this chart, "published science fiction authors" are the least geeky -and most normal- people in the geek culture, while "People who write erotic versions of Star Trek where all the characters are furies" are the most geeky and thus bottom of the hierarchy (Sjöberg, 2010) (see Figure 1).

**Figure 1**

*The Geek Hierarchy*



Note: The geek hierarchy” by Sjöberg, L, 2010. Directly retrieved from <http://brunching.com/geekhierarchy.html>

### **1.3. Prevalent Gender Stereotypes and Underrepresentation of Women in the Geek Community**

However, where do geek women or fans fall in this male-dominated area? Turns out somewhere in the far corner where they can not be seen. The term geek defines a geek male (Kendall, 1999). If the purpose is to talk about a woman, it is almost mandatory to add the word girl at the end of the term (Leon, 2014). This is also true for the sub-cultures within the geek community. There are gamers, gamer girls, nerds, and nerd girls. This implies that women are not expected to be a part of this culture. They are considered such an anomaly in the culture that it needs to be specified when talking about a woman in geekdom that it is not a man. When things such as geek or nerd are said, the fact that they mean a man is a given.

Geek women and their genuine passion for anything geek also seem not to be taken seriously in the community. Their interest in geek topics is often attributed to the males in their close circle, such as their brothers or boyfriends (Letamendi, 2012), which implies that geek men are the only reason for their care and relation to the geek media. Tocci’s research (2007) on t-shirts sold in comic cons supports this narrative. According to his observations, the most commonly worn T-shirts by women at comic-cons are *I heart emoji nerds/my nerd*.

Even if women are considered serious about their interests, they are still held to a higher standard regarding their knowledge than their male counterparts (Robinson, 2014). In geek/fan subcultures, knowledge is used as a cultural capital to often prove one's level of geekiness through how much one knows about the topic (Kendall, 2000; Woo, 2012). They seem to use this gatekeeping mechanism -asserting authority over others based on their perceived superiority, in this case through knowledge (Tompkins, 2024)- to invalidate geek women as ingroup members.

If a woman is accepted as a geek girl, this instantly lowers her perceived attractiveness in the eyes of men. They are masculinized or labeled as undesirable. In a study conducted by Kendall (2000) on a chat forum, BlueSky, when a conversation on geek girls occurred, the participants aggressively remarked that they do not find geek women attractive at all, and one person even referred to geek women as “pasty-skinned blubbery pale

nerdettes.” While geek men are partially accepted in traditional masculinity due to their interest in technology and intellect and their apparent lack of relationship with women (Kendall, 2000), the same qualities get women further away from the idea of traditional femininity by lowering their attractiveness in the eyes of society.

Despite all this, women still seem to curate a place for themselves in the geek world through headcanon and fanfiction. These are the written forms of fans' theories and what they want to happen when unsatisfied with the canon (Permata-Widjayanti & Anwar, 2020). Fanfiction has been a big part of geek culture, from headcanons about Sherlock or Supernatural written on Tumblr to full-faceted Harry Potter fanfiction as long as -sometimes longer than- the actual books. These fanfiction spaces are mainly dominated by women, queer people, and other minorities (Busse, 2013; Duggan, 2019; Fielding, 2020); despite fanfiction being places where the groups who are less represented in geek media, they are still not fully accepted as part of geek culture. Fanfiction writers and readers are treated with contempt and/or ignored, and they are often depicted as the bottom line of the geek hierarchy (Sjöberg, 2002). While respected authors such as Neil Geiman win awards for fanfiction that they write without losing the respect of their peers and readers (Conroy, 2015), the author of the successful book series *Fifty Shades of Gray* is not seen as a real author because the series started as works of fanfiction (Kurp, 2015). This may suggest that when it comes to fanfiction, the difference between a respectable piece of work and a shameful fantasy may be the gender of the author.

#### **1.4. Understanding the Importance of Geek Women's Representation in Media**

According to cultivation theory, individuals who consume media tend to see the world through the media's messages (Gerbner & Gross, 2017). Social cognitive theory similarly explains the mechanisms of the media's influence on individuals' attitudes or behaviors (Bandura, 2001). Both theories suggest that individuals' schemas are shaped by the media they consume (Bandura, 2001; Gerbner, 1999). Therefore, media representation plays a significant role in developing gender roles and societal perceptions. Throughout history, the media has been filled with stereotypically feminine women, such as Mrs Bennett from *Pride and Prejudice*, reinforcing traditional feminine norms (Steinke, 2005). Moreover, the media's power in fortifying gender roles extends to children (Olsson & Martiny, 2018; Steyer, 2014). This underscores the urgency of examining how geek women and women in

general are represented in geek media, as this representation significantly influences societal perceptions, especially in the formative years of children.

As the media has evolved with the cultural climate, so has women's representation in the media. Study topics have shifted from stereotypical to more empowering representations of women (Das & Sharma, 2021; Jeyarania & Vasanthanb, 2023). However, there is still a significant gap in how women are portrayed in geek media compared to men. A general lack of representation of women in the media is observed (Murtiningsih et al., 2017). Moreover, numerous studies have documented the stereotypical representation of women in media (Johnston & Swanson, 2003; Massoni, 2004; Murtiningsih et al., 2017; Steyer, 2014). Two stereotypes emerge when we examine the representation of geek women in popular movies or TV shows. The first is what can be termed *The Hot Scientist*. These characters, such as Hermione Granger from Harry Potter or Ellie Sattler from Jurassic Park, are typically conventionally attractive women whose looks are “hidden” by a ponytail and a pair of glasses. A study by Steinke (2005) on female scientist representation in 23 movies found that almost all of the movies depicted the female scientist as attractive; moreover, in 20 of these movies, female scientists’ purpose was to be a love interest for a male character. This underscores the ongoing need for more diverse and empowering portrayals of geek women in media and the crucial role of this research in advocating for such change.

The other prevalent stereotype is the *Ugly Betty Geek Girl*. This typology usually consists of women who, at first glance, do not seem conventionally attractive but turn out to be pretty after a makeover (Leon, 2014). One of the most prominent examples of this stereotype is Scooby Doo’s Velma. Velma is one of the first characters represented as a geek woman in the 1969 animated show “Scooby Doo Where Are You?” (Hanna & Barbera, 1969-1970). The show depicts her as a pale, freckled brunette in an orange turtleneck, to Daphne’s fashionable, attractive ginger. However, in the 2002 adaptation of Scooby-Doo (Gosnell, 2002), Velma gets a makeover by Daphne, which includes taking off her glasses and letting down her hair, and she turns out to be an attractive woman. This is a similar progression to the 1999 movie “She is All That,” which depicts the female lead as an unpopular art geek who gets a makeover from the male lead’s sister and becomes popular enough to be nominated as a prom queen (Iscove, 1999). The recent Netflix TV series “The Geek Girl” (O’Dwyer, 2024) shows that this stereotype about geek girl makeovers is not behind us yet. In the show, the main character, a socially awkward geek student who is a

victim of school bullying, is discovered by a modeling agency, gets a makeover, and becomes a model.

All of these stereotypes about women point out one common ground when it comes to their place in geek media: They are something to be objectified. As previously mentioned, tech is primarily considered a male domain (Hardey, 2009; Lagesen, 2008; Riegle-Crumb et al., 2011; Scherz & Oren, 2006), and geek men seem to redeem their masculinity through their smarts and technology skills (Kendall, 2000). Women are not afforded the same kindness. The female geek is seen as unattractive for the same qualities that rehabilitate male geeks in the eyes of hegemonic masculinity (Kendall, 2000). Since geek women are deemed as unnatural because of their interests in these masculine considered domains, they are represented in the media as hyperfeminine in an attempt to distract from their masculine occupations (with a makeover and usually in the pursuit of a male love interest). In turn, they are usually objectified (Leon, 2014). It is also interesting to note that no geek men in movies need a makeover to gain the romantic attention of the beautiful women they desire.

A similar situation can be observed when examining how women are represented in what is specifically geared towards geeks. Video games are the most prominent example of this. Even though women compose almost half of the gaming population (Williams et al., 2009), the literature shows that they are underrepresented as characters or *avatars* in the games themselves (Choe et al., 2020; Dill et al., 2005). Besides the underrepresentation of women as the main characters of most video games, when represented, women usually occupy a sexualized helpless creature that needs rescuing (Ogletree & Drake, 2007). If they are not that, they are again overly sexualized villainess of the game (Fox & Tang, 2014).

This lackluster representation remains the same in other forms of geek media, too. In movies, comics, and TV shows that cater to geeks, women are usually shown as either damsel in distress waiting for a savior (Chen, 2024) or as superheroes who are blatantly less powerful and also less dressed than their male counterparts (Madrid, 2016). If they are not that, then they are the dumb, attractive blondes to the unattractive but intelligent male leads in shows like *The Big Bang Theory* (Cendrowski, 2007-2019) or *Beauty and the Geek* (Quail, 2011). The attempt to change these representations with female versions of popular movies such as *Ghostbusters* has been poorly received (see Furze, 2016). Even if there are intelligent female characters, such as in the case of *The Big Bang Theory*, their smarts stay

on theory mostly. At the same time, they spend their time doing *girly things* like makeovers while their male counterparts talk about science, comics, and video games (Leon, 2014).

### **1.5. Geek Women's Representation on Social Media**

It can be argued that *geek women* are a hot topic on social media that never loses its relevance (e.g., Brown, 2012; Fousek-Krobová & Švelch, 2024; Reagle, 2015; Salter, 2017). *The fake geek girl* or *fake nerd girl* memes are still as prevalent as ever in various discussions about what constitutes a geek. The fake geek girl in these memes is usually represented by a young, conventionally attractive girl in an emo hairstyle. Her hand faces the camera, and the writing *nerd* can be seen on her palm. Generally, a wrong statement about various popular geek fandoms accompanies her photo, such as “OMG Star Trek is so cool, I love Luke Skywalker,” referring to the fact that Luke Skywalker is the main character of Star Wars; therefore, the meme shows that she does not know the basic things about the fandoms and *proves* she is a fake geek girl (Reagle, 2015).

### **1.6. Real-Life Consequences of Gender-Based Discrimination in Geek Spaces**

Inadequate and inaccurate representation of women in geek spaces harms both geek women and the geek community, even though some argue that sexism is part of the culture of this community (Hamilton, 2012; Robinson, 2014). Amongst these debates, there are apparent real-life consequences of this gender-based discrimination.

As mentioned above, the consequences of discrimination start affecting individuals from childhood. Children grow up exposed to various media, some of which are geek media that support gender stereotypes, especially those about femininity (Steinke, 2005). These types of media reinforce gender role stereotypes for children, which affect every part of their lives, including their decisions about their future profession (Ezzedeen, 2015).

Interactive online geek spaces such as video games in which individuals can use in-game microphones to interact with each other (ESA, 2014) are known to support well-being by reducing stress and increasing the sense of belonging in individuals who play these games (Wack & Tantleff-Dunn, 2009). Fearing the gender-based discrimination they might face, women either leave these spaces or hide their gender by not using microphones (Choe et al., 2019). Accordingly, discrimination against women in geek spaces, amongst everything else, also causes them to lose a valuable social support platform that can act as a buffer for stress and depression (Russell & Cutrona, 1991). If they choose to exist in these spaces, the

discrimination they face can be a cause of anxiety and may result in women eventually leaving these spaces (McLean & Griffiths, 2018).

Furthermore, women hiding their gender in online geek spaces because of the fear of gender-based discrimination makes it harder to estimate the women population in these spaces accurately. By doing that, it sustains the notion that women are not in these spaces because these are men's interests; thus, women do not belong (Fox & Tang, 2014; Kendrick, 2015). This belief acts as a reinforcer of the gatekeeping behavior of men against what they deem as different from themselves (Kendrick, 2015; Robinson, 2014).

The gender-based discrimination also has consequences for men who perpetrate or witness it. Numerous research has shown that men who consume media that depicts violence against women are much more desensitized to various types of violence, including sexual violence, and inclined to commit violent acts against women (Dill et al., 2008; Jermyn, 2001; Linz et al., 1988; Nyabwengi, 2022; Yao et al., 2010). Thus, gender-based discrimination in these spaces, such as interactive video games, has adverse effects on men who play them (Dill et al., 2008). This underlines the importance of understanding the ingrained femmephobia in these spaces as a first step of solving the issue.

### **1.7. Femme Theory and Femmephobia**

Femme theory is a critical framework within feminist studies that focuses on the complexities of gender identity, expression, and representation (Hoskin, 2013). In the patriarchal world, traditional femininity (i.e., white, cisgender, heterosexual, nurturing, submissive women) is the ideal and expected form of women's expression (Blair & Hoskin, 2015; Hoskin, 2013; Mahalik et al., 2005). However, the dilemma of women is that, while they are expected to be feminine on a patriarchal standard when they are, they are devalued because of said femininity (Hoskin, 2018). Against this understanding, femme theory arises as a rich and multifaceted approach to understanding gender, femininity, and power dynamics within society (Hoskin, 2017).

The term femme originates from the 1940s lesbian subculture and is used to define feminine presenting lesbians (Munt & Smyth, 1998; Schwartz, 2018). Femme theory challenges traditional notions of femininity by defining *femme* as a deliberate self-identification of and a political engagement with femininity regardless of gender identity, assigned sex at birth, or sexual orientation (Blair & Hoskin, 2015; Hoskin, 2017; Schwartz,

2018). It is a “failed femininity,” one that denies the cultural oppressions of the sex/gender binary (Hoskin, 2013, p. 18). One of the critical aspects of femme theory is its emphasis on the fluidity and diversity of femininity, recognizing that there is no singular or fixed way to be femme (Blair & Hoskin, 2014). This theoretical approach seeks to dismantle rigid gender binaries and embraces the idea that femininity can manifest in myriad ways, transcending conventional stereotypes and expectations.

By centering the experiences of femme-identified individuals, femme theory aims to amplify marginalized voices and highlight their unique challenges within patriarchal systems (Hoskin, 2017). Moreover, with its interdisciplinary nature, femme theory provides a lens through which to analyze representations of femininity in various cultural artifacts, such as literature, film, and media (Hoskin, 2013; Hoskin, 2017; Hoskin, 2024; Schwartz, 2020).

Femmes are not accepted because they fail to conform to traditional standards of femininity (Hoskin, 2013), but that does not mean women are valued in their femininity if they meet the standards for traditional femininity. Hoskin describes this as femmephobia, in other words, “prejudice, discrimination, or antagonism directed against someone who is perceived to identify, embody, or express femininely and toward people and objects gendered femininely” (2017, p. 101). Femmephobia is a way to devalue and police traditionally feminine while punishing individuals who derive from the traditional expressions of femininity (Hoskin, 2018). It separates itself from sexism or misogyny by differentiating between women and femininity (Hoskin, 2017).

This theory mostly focuses on femmephobia. According to Hoskin (2018), there are four primary forms of femmephobia; each has the purpose of shaming and assimilating non-traditional femininity. These are structural/covert femmephobia, overt femmephobia, femme mystification, and pious femmephobia. While there are four subtypes of femmephobia, they all unite in their goal of devaluing and controlling femininity (Blair & Hoskin, 2014).

*Structural femmephobia* is an ideological condition that takes its messages to devalue femininity from cultural clues such as ideology and language (Hoskin, 2013). It uses the association between femininity and inferiority and the process of gendering to belittle and degrade the target, such as the feminization of important political figures for degradation or the ridicule and belittlement of feminine-coded characteristics (Hoskin, 2013; Prioletta & Davies, 2024b).

Secondly, *overt or perceived femmephobia* is the process of using one's perceived femininity to devalue the target based on said femininity overtly (Hoskin, 2013). The individual's perceived femininity is often used as a justification for discrimination, exclusion, or violence (Hoskin, 2013).

*Femme mystification*, thirdly, is a type of gender policing that uses the dehumanization of the feminine to naturalize and objectify femininity (Hoskin, 2013). It works to connect femininity to certain body types and/or identities and to artificialize femininity with the implication of masculine as natural and feminine as constructed; by doing that, it dismantles the agency of femme-identified individuals and reduces femininity to a patriarchal tool (Hoskin, 2013).

Lastly, *pious femmephobia* is using perceived moral superiority to shame feminine presentation, some of the examples being victim-blaming and slut-shaming (Hoskin, 2013). Pious femmephobia includes subordination of femme identity and the mentality of femininity as fragile, with femme-presenting individuals reporting they are taken less seriously the more they present as feminine (Blair & Hoskin, 2014).

## **1.8. Literature on Femmephobia**

While femmephobia is a relatively new research area, in recent years, the studies about femmephobia have been steadily increasing. Most of the studies partaking femmephobia are conducted with or in the context of Queer individuals and focus on the experiences of gender policing in LGBTQ+ individuals' (Hoskin, 2019), the relationship between femmephobia and anti-gay behavior (Hoskin et al., 2024), femmephobia as an underlying reason for the various types of violence directed at gender and sexual minorities (Hoskin, 2020) and a personal narrative about being a femme presenting homosexual man in a social networking site geared towards Queer men, Grindr (Conte, 2018).

Recently, Hoskin and colleagues (2023) conducted a study examining the responses of women when they are subjected to femmephobia and found that the overwhelming majority of women reported suppressing their feminine presentation to escape another femmephobic incident. In other words, when faced with two contradictory pressures (being more masculine/femmephobia and being more feminine/gender roles), femmephobia may be more influential. Another noteworthy research about femmephobia against women is a

conceptual analysis by Whiley and colleagues (2020) about the perceptions of public breastfeeding being a dirty performance of femininity.

A different context wherein femmephobia is observed in studies is kindergartens. Perhaps the most recent studies in the area of femmephobia were by Prioletta and Davies (2024a). In one of their studies, conducted by analyzing ethnographic data collected from two Canadian kindergarten classrooms, the authors found that kindergarten boys used mocking feminine-coded characteristics and objects and public humiliation of their peers when they acted feminine to police and regulate gender expressions (Prioletta & Davis, 2024a). Another study conducted in this area by Prioletta and Davies (2024b) calls attention to the lack of time provided to the children in kindergarten to engage in care-centered activities and states that the girls in kindergarten refusing to participate in the care activities is a direct consequence of the implication that caregiving is not something to be valued.

### **1.9. The Dilemma of Geek Women**

However, how does that connect to the geeks? According to Kendall (1999; 2000), geek men are partially rehabilitated and included in hegemonic masculinity by their technological capabilities, lack of social skills, and sexual prospects. While these stereotypic attributes draw them away from the feared potential femininity, it also means that geek women are also wandering away from their positive patriarchal feminine qualities like heteronormative sexuality. However, in the same breath, feminine presenting geek women are seen as fakes and blamed with the implication that they are in these spaces because they crave male attention (Berlatsky, 2013). Thus, geek women are not accepted in this community, whether they conform to patriarchal standards of femininity or not, because geekdom is a place where women do not belong; therefore, I propose that geek women could be considered as femmes for they fail to conform society's expectations of femininity by simply liking the things they like.

Femmephobia also affects how geek women are placed in the geek community. In geek culture, knowledge is the most essential cultural capital (Woo, 2012). Most gatekeeping practices involve questioning one's—usually a geek woman's—knowledge about the geek subject (Robinson, 2014). Since geeks use their knowledge to prove their credibility, it can be argued that knowledge plays a big part in creating the hierarchy in the geek community. However, according to Busse (2013), these hierarchies are also gendered. If a geek media an

individual is interested in includes predominantly female fandom – such as Twilight- it is automatically downgraded in the geek hierarchy (Busse, 2013). This forces geek men to either hide their interests or proclaim that it is sufficiently masculine to be interested in (Click et al., 2016).

### **1.10. Shortcomings of The Literature and The Aim of The Study**

Even though the word geek is defined as someone passionately interested in a niche subject, this word does not have a universally agreed definition in the literature (Woo, 2012). Moreover, while nerd is used interchangeably with the word geek in English written literature, the Turkish word *inek* countervails the word nerd as a person who is academically gifted and antisocial (Aslan, 2015, p. 201); it does not imply a geek. Therefore, the term geek has no Turkish equivalent, which brings out an interesting point about whether Turkish speaking geeks mean the same thing as their international counterparts when they use that word for themselves. This is also highlighted by the fact that no known scientific studies are done in Turkish about or with the geeks. Even though the word fandom brings out more studies (e.g., Kahraman & Fidan, 2022; Kim, 2023; Taşdemir, 2018), these studies are either not in the field of psychology and/or focus on the problems and negatives being in a fandom can bring to an individual (i.e., Kahraman & Fidan, 2022). Either way, these studies do not see these spaces as social gatherings and do not examine the psychological processes that occur in these spaces. In the international literature, the limited studies about geek women and their experiences are again not conducted in the field of psychology and, therefore, do not consider the theoretical explanations of these experiences in the context of social psychology (see Alfrey & Twine, 2017; Lang, 2003; Leon, 2014; Robinson, 2014; Twine, 2022; Westman, 2007; Varma, 2007).

Most studies on this subject focus on sexism in online gaming, a sub-group of geekdom (i.e., Cote, 2020; Fox & Tang, 2014; Fox & Tang, 2017; Paaßen et al., 2016; Seo et al., 2022; Woo, 2012). Although there are more studies in the Turkish sample about video games, these studies often focus on either video game addiction (Akçay, 2020; Aktaş & Bostancı, 2021 Gökçearslan & Durakoğlu, 2014) or the effect of online gaming on aggression and violence (Bozkuş, 2021; Demirtaş-Madran & Ferligül-Çakılcı, 2014; Doğan, 2006). The other studies about this topic focus on the practical applications of gaming, such as video game-supported learning (Demir & Akın, 2018; Eroğlu, 2019). International literature has begun to explore games as an online communication and socialization

environment, but these studies are still relatively new. They have, however, documented that sexism in these environments can have serious repercussions (McLean & Griffiths, 2018). This situation underscores the need for more balanced research in this area, especially in Türkiye's context.

Moreover, because people in Türkiye do not have the opportunity to participate in geek culture in a face-to-face setting in the way that Westerners do, and most of the content and material they follow possibly arrives late because of the language barrier and/or the time difference, the place where they exist is primarily social media or other online spaces. Most studies on geek women and their experiences focus on face-to-face settings such as Comic-Cons (Busse, 2013; Tocci, 2007). On the contrary, since there are not many physical geek spaces in Türkiye and most of the interaction goes on on social media, toxic disinhibition, i.e., losing one's inhibitions in an anonym online setting, and the adverse effects -trolling, bullying, etc.- come with it, might be in effect here (Suler, 2004). This means Turkish geek women's experiences may differ from those of Western countries. Thus, this topic needs to be studied in the context of Turkish culture.

As mentioned above, the femme theory is a recent theory developed by Hoskin (2013) and colleagues. Since the theory was introduced in 2013, it has been studied in the international literature in the context of Queer sexual identities (Hoskin, 2020; Hoskin et al., 2024), its relation to pop culture and media (Hoskin, 2024), gender norms (Hoskin et al., 2023); in the Turkish context, it has been studied concerning discrimination against trans women (see Türkoğlu & Sayılan, 2022). Femmephobia within a sub-group considered masculine has not yet been found in the literature, and this thesis aims to fill this gap.

This thesis explores the experiences of geek women in a space considered masculine and the role of femmephobia in shaping these experiences. It aims to do that by answering the following research questions:

- How do geek women define geek? Who is considered a geek?
- How does the hierarchy in geekdom look? How does femmephobia affect the way this hierarchy is shaped?
- What are the experiences of femmephobia geek women are exposed to or witness?
- How do these experiences affect geek women and their interaction with geek content?

## **2. METHOD**

### **2.1. Research Design**

Phenomenology is advantageous in connecting theory to lived experiences and understanding the formation of culture through performance (Finlay, 2014). Therefore, this study was meticulously designed and utilized a phenomenological approach to understand women's experiences in this male-dominated subculture fully.

### **2.2. Participants**

In this study, I sought to generate the information and intricacies of geek/fan culture from the source itself. Therefore, the targeted sample of the research constituted the self-identified female members of the geek/fan community in Türkiye. I used purposive sampling with a snowballing technique to reach out to potential participants, a method I chose because of its ability to capture diverse perspectives. Participants were carefully selected for the study, ensuring they met the criteria of being a woman at least eighteen or older and considered themselves members of any geek/fan communities. Overall, the total sample size of the study consisted of 20 individuals. The participants' ages were between 19 and 37 ( $M = 25.95$ ,  $SD = 4.62$ ). All participants had at least a high school diploma, with the majority having bachelor's degrees (60%). All the participants provided at least one geek interest, and the majority claimed more than one subject they actively followed (95%) (see Table 1).

**Table 1***Demographic Information of the Participants*

Participants	Age	Education Level	Fandoms They Partake
Doctor 10	29	Bachelors	Doctor Who, Star Wars, Rick and Morty, Game of Thrones
Tuğba	26	Master's	Marvel, video games
Pixelfey	25	Bachelors	Video games, Marvel, Harry Potter, DC
Purpie	24	Bachelors	Harry Potter, Marvel, Lord of the Rings, Star Wars, Dune, Doctor Who
Participant 5	31	Master's	Video games, anime, Marvel, Harry Potter, Lord of the Rings, Star Wars
Mitsuki	37	Bachelors	Anime, manga, Marvel, fantastic literature, video games
Participant 7	30	Master's	Harry Potter, Marvel, Lord of the Rings, Avatar the Last Airbender
Nanamicanfixme	22	Highschool	Anime, video games, STEM areas
Hiraeth	24	Bachelors	Video games, K-pop
Gizem	27	Bachelors	Video games, Lord of the Rings
Participant 11	22	Highschool	Disney/Warner Bros, Marvel-DC, comic books, anime
Participant 12	24	Bachelors	Doctor Who
Sutjek	19	Highschool	Harry Potter, Doctor Who, anime
Participant 14	20	Highschool	Marvel, anime, Harry Potter
Aeksio	29	Bachelors	Video games, Harry Potter, Lord of the Rings, Game of Thrones, Avatar the Last Airbender
Melek	26	Bachelors	Stardew Valley, Harry Potter, A Wizard of Earthsea, sitcoms, Dune, The Hunger Games, Doctor Who, K-pop
June	25	Bachelors	BL dramas, K-pop
İnjeolmi	21	Highschool	K-Drama, J-Drama, C-Drama, Webtoon, anime
İlayda	24	Bachelors	Harry Potter, Doctor Who, Hannibal, anime

## **2.3. Instruments**

### **2.3.1. Demographic Information Form**

I designed a demographic information form to comprehensively understand the participants and their experiences. This form included questions about the participants' birth year, gender, educational level, and fandom involvement. It also collected their contact information for the subsequent study phase (see Appendix B).

### **2.3.2 Interview Questions**

The interview questions aimed to understand the experiences of geek women in the fan community regarding their gender, their perceived acceptance within the community, the representation of women in geek media compared to men, and their sense of belonging in the community. I developed the semi-structured interview questions to obtain more comprehensive information on the geek community and participants' experiences (see Appendix C). The interview questions were tested via a pilot study.

## **2.4. Procedure**

I shared the written announcement for the study on social media platforms such as X (previously known as Twitter) and Instagram. From there, interested individuals could join the study by filling out the short demographic information form provided with the announcement post so I could reach them for the continuation of the study. After the initial process of sharing the written announcement for the study on several social media platforms, I reached the participants via the contact information they provided, and we agreed on a convenient time and place for both me and the participant. Since it could cause an inconvenience for some participants to make it to a face-to-face meeting, I obtained the qualitative data through virtual or in-person one-on-one semi-structured interviews according to the preference of the participant in question. This way, two participants preferred face-to-face interviews, and eighteen participants were interviewed via the online communication platform Google Meets. Participants were informed both orally and with a written informed consent form at the start of the interviews (see Appendix A). I conducted the interviews, which lasted around 30 minutes, with the most extended interview being 56

and the shortest being 17 minutes. The interviews were audio-recorded and later transcribed for the data analysis phase. For this phase, participants were asked to provide a pseudonym to use in the transcriptions to preserve their personal information; I assigned a pseudonym to the participants who did not provide one.

## **2.5. Data Analysis**

I analyzed the interview data following the steps described in Braun and Clarke's (2006) thematic analysis guide. I used a combination of inductive and deductive approaches when coding to ensure that the participants' experiences aligned with Hoskin's femmephobia typology, which includes structural femmephobia, overt femmephobia, femme mystification, and pious femmephobia (2018). To ensure that I read the interview transcripts to determine the initial codes, however, other than that, I derived the themes from the data. The interviews were transcribed and uploaded to the qualitative analysis software MAXQDA app (VERBI Software, 2021) for coding. The interview transcriptions were read and reread by me with the basis of femmephobia. After the initial coding, I reduced the codes according to their relevance to the femme theory perspective. I grouped the related thematic units for the second coding and arranged them into thematic blocks (Braun & Clarke, 2006).

## **2.6. Positionality**

A noteworthy disclaimer before the presentation of results for the sake of research transparency: Although the codes were mainly deducted from the data, I decided on the final form of the codes, and I coded all of the data. I identify as a femme presenting geek woman; therefore, since this thesis aims to understand the geek women's place in geek spaces, my positionality significantly influences my research. I mostly relied on my own experiences besides the literature while writing the interview questions. Therefore, potential biases in the interview and coding process, based on my experiences in these spaces as a femme woman, should be considered.

### 3. RESULTS

In this thesis, I aimed to understand the experiences of geek women in geek spaces, their perspective of what the term geek constitutes, the perceived discrimination they feel, and how they cope with said discrimination using the scope of femme theory. To do that, I conducted semi-structured interviews where I asked my participants about their definition of geek, their sense of belonging to the geek community regarding their gender, and their general experiences of being a woman in geek spaces. I analyzed the interviews per Braun and Clark's thematic analysis guide (2006) and presented my findings in this chapter.

#### 3.1. Geekdom Determinants

As can be seen in Table 2, geekdom determinants can be examined in three thematic blocks: *definitions of geek*, *definitions of geek interest*, and *determinants of joining a fandom*. The definitions of the geek block explored who geek women deem as geek. The most prevalent theme here was information about a topic (85%), followed by extreme/obsessive interest in a topic (60%), time spent on a topic (45%), enjoyment of a topic (45%), and self-identification as a geek (15%).

The second block, *definitions of geek interest*, concerns itself with what constitutes topic geeks can be interested in; it includes fantastical/science fiction content (65%), having a substantial fandom (50%), any hobbies an individual is interested in (45%), and content that includes a storyline (40%).

Lastly, *the determinants of joining a fandom* block is about what motivates geeks to join a fandom. It constitutes having shared feelings and reactions with others in the fandom (55%) and interest in the continuous pursuit of the content (55%).

**Table 2***Geekdom Determinants*

<b>Thematic Block</b>	<b>Frequency</b>	<b>N</b>	<b>Percentage</b>
<b>Definitions of Geek</b>			
Information about a topic	32	17	85%
Extreme/obsessive interest in a topic	18	12	60%
Time spent on a topic	11	9	45%
Enjoyment of a topic	12	9	45%
Self-identification as geek	3	3	15%
<b>Definitions of Geek Interest</b>			
Fantastical/science fiction content	17	13	65%
Having a substantial fandom	10	10	50%
Any hobby can be geek	10	9	45%
Content that includes a storyline	10	8	40%
<b>Determinants of Joining a Fandom</b>			
Shared feelings and reactions with others in the fandom	18	11	55%
Interest in continuous pursuit of the content	16	11	55%
<b>Total</b>	<b>157</b>	<b>112</b>	

**Note:** In this table, the Frequency column represents how many times the interviewees mentioned each theme, the N column represents the number of participants who mentioned the theme, and the Percentage column represents what percentage of interviewees mentioned the theme.

### 3.2. Types of Femmephobia Women are Subjected To in Geek Spaces

These main themes follow the femmephobia types Hoskin (2018) and propose four types of femmephobia geek women are subjected to in geek spaces. The first main theme, *structural femmephobia*, is composed of women as a side character (75%), masculine representation of women in geekdom (55%), the “media aimed at women isn’t geek” notion (50%), marginal stereotype of geek women (45%), questioning information (45%), lack of interest in feminine fandoms (40%), masculine geek stereotype (35%), and lastly, gender-based geek hierarchy (25%). The second main theme, *overt femmephobia*, includes the following themes: women are pushed away from fandoms (75%), ageism outside of fandom against geek women (65%), negative reaction to femininity (60%), contempt in geekdom against geek women (50%), gatekeeping as the most significant issue in fandom (45%), contempt outside of geekdom against geek women (30%), and sexism as the most significant issue in geekdom (30%).

The third main theme, *femme mystification*, includes three themes, namely, objectification of women in geek spaces (70%), assumption of inauthentic interest (45%), and harassment against geek women (35%). The last main theme of this block, *pious femmephobia*, includes the damsel in distress (35%) and naive women (30%) themes, respectively.

**Table 3***Types of Femmephobia*

<b>Main Themes</b>	<b>Frequency</b>	<b>N</b>	<b>Percentage</b>
<b>Structural Femmephobia</b>			
Women as a side character	20	15	75%
Masculine representation of women in geekdom	14	11	55%
“Media aimed at women is not geek” notion	21	10	50%
Questioning information	17	9	45%
Marginal stereotype of geek women	10	9	45%
Lack of interest in feminine fandoms	12	8	40%
Masculine geek stereotype	9	7	35%
Gender-based geek hierarchy	10	5	25%
<b>Overt Femmephobia</b>			
Women are being pushed away from fandom	34	15	75%
Ageism outside of fandom against geek women	14	13	65%
Negative reaction to femininity	15	12	60%
Contempt in geekdom against geek women	19	10	50%
Gatekeeping as the most significant issue in fandom	18	9	45%
Contempt outside of geekdom against geek women	8	6	30%
Sexism as the most significant issue in geekdom	10	6	30%
<b>Femme Mystification</b>			
Objectification of women in geek spaces	28	14	70%
Assumption of inauthentic interest	16	9	45%
Harassment against geek women	8	7	35%
<b>Pious Femmephobia</b>			
Damsel in distress representation of women	10	7	35%

Naive representation of women	7	6	30%
<b>Total</b>	300	188	

**Note:** In this table, the Frequency column represents how many times the interviewees mentioned each theme, the N column represents the number of participants who mentioned the theme, and the Percentage column represents what percentage of interviewees mentioned the theme.

### 3.3. Effects of Femmephobia on Geek Women

The effects of the femmephobia segment are composed of *coping mechanisms*, *negative consequences of femmephobia*, and *internalized femmephobia*. *Coping mechanisms* include the themes of character identification based on gender and personality (80%), hiding gender in fandom spaces (55%), joining geek media as an observer (40%), avoidance of male-dominated fandoms (30%), and using a male profile while engaging with geek media (20%) as themes.

*Negative consequences of femmephobia* include adverse effects of negative representation of women in geek media (55%), feelings of not belonging to the fandom (30%), and abandoning geek media (20%) themes.

Lastly, *internalized femmephobia* includes the themes: romantic stories cannot be geek (25%); the most significant issue in feminine fandoms is hysteria (25%); the purpose of women's representation in geek media is to be woke (25%); while consuming media men like war and women like relationships (20%); and geek women are manipulative (5%).

**Table 4***Effects of Femmephobia on Geek Women*

<b>Main Themes</b>	<b>Frequency</b>	<b>N</b>	<b>Percentage</b>
<b>Coping Mechanisms</b>			
Character identification based on gender and personality	19	16	80%
Hiding gender in fandom spaces	14	11	55%
Joining geek media as an observer	11	8	40%
Avoidance of male-dominated fandoms	8	6	30%
Using a male profile while engaging with geek media	5	4	20%
<b>Negative Consequences of Femmephobia</b>			
Adverse effects of negative representation of women in geek media	11	11	55%
Feelings of not belonging to the fandom	8	6	30%
Abandoning geek media	4	4	20%
<b>Internalized Femmephobia</b>			
Romantic stories cannot be geek	6	5	25%
the most significant issue in feminine fandoms is hysteria	6	5	25%
The purpose of women's representation is to be woke	5	5	25%
In consuming media, men like war, and women like relationships	6	4	20%
Geek women are manipulative	2	1	5%
<b>Total</b>	<b>105</b>	<b>86</b>	

**Note:** In this table, the Frequency column represents how many times the interviewees mentioned each theme, the N column represents the number of participants who mentioned the theme, and the Percentage column represents what percentage of interviewees mentioned the theme.

## **4. DISCUSSION**

In this chapter, I discuss the related themes I gained through the interviews and presented in the results section about what determines a geek in the eyes of geek women, and I will also discuss the discrimination geek women feel and the effect of said discrimination of geek women on them within the frame of femme theory.

### **4.1. Determinants of Geekdom**

The first thematic block, determinants of geekdom, includes three themes: definitions of geek, definitions of geek interest, and determinants of joining a fandom. This thematic block consists of the determinants of being a legitimate geek in the eyes of geek women and how the geek women decide to join specific fandoms.

In the definitions of geek theme, an overwhelming majority of the interviewees (85%) reported that to be a geek, one must have more information than a regular person about a given topic, as opposed to the interviewees who claimed that self-identification of a person as a geek is enough to be part of geekdom (15%). This finding is consistent with the notion that information is the most significant cultural capital for geeks (Woo, 2012). Moreover, it supports the literature suggesting that some semblance of gatekeeping remains active in geek women and geek spaces regarding information (Kendrick, 2015; Robinson, 2014). It is not enough to label oneself as a geek to be included in the community; one must know everything to know about the related topic. In Quote 1, for example, Participant 11 explained this notion as an unpurposeful gatekeeping because of the unequal knowledge of others about the topics she is passionate about.

## Quote 1 Participant 11

Ya bence şimdi öyle, biz geekler olarak bence buna bir tık takıyoruz, tamam mı? Yani hani şey gibi böyle. Bir noktada hani bu title'in getirdiği bir şey, evet hani ben biliyorum hani, ben araştırdım, ben öğrendim, ben biliyorum, bak o senin öyle düşündüğün gibi değil. Ya da ne bileyim böyle oturuyor saatlerce ayrıntı anlatıyor falan yani işte ya da mesela bunu şeyde çok yapıyorduk, Wanda ve Loki'nin dizileri aynı anda çıkmıştı ve hani bir şekilde bağlamaya çalışıyorsun işte Wanda'nın şeyine falan bağlıyorsun böyle saçma sapan hani ve başka birisi, bu kültürde ne olmayan başka birisi bunu gerçekten anlayamıyor yani hani şey yapıyor "ne anlatıyorsun, anlamıyorum ama çok heyecanla anlattığın için de kıramıyorum ve dinliyorum seni". Ama aynı paydada değiliz bilgi olarak, ister istemez. Kasten yaptığımız bir şey değil ama bence gerçekten bir farklılık var.

Well, I think that's the case now; I think we, as geeks, are paying attention to this, okay? I mean, it's like this. At some point, this is something that the title brings, "yes, I know, I researched, I learned, I know, look, it is not what you think." Or, I don't know, they sit like this and explain details for hours or something, or for example, we were doing this a lot in the series; Wanda and Loki's series were released at the same time, and you try to connect it somehow, you connect it to Wanda's thing or something, such nonsense, you know, and someone else, another person who is not in this culture cannot really understand this. Hence, they do something like, "I don't understand what you are telling me, but since you explain it with so much excitement, I can't make you sad, and I listen to you." But we are inevitably not on the same denominator in terms of knowledge. It's not something we do on purpose, but I think there is a real difference.

According to geek women in this study, extreme/obsessive interest in a topic is another strong determinant of being a geek (60%). This fits into one of the less favorable definitions of geeks as individuals who are obsessively interested in a pursuit (Kendall, 1999), and it implies that the representation of geeks didn't change; however, how people interpret this representation did. Geeks are still seen as obsessively interested in something,

as Participant Melek explained in Quote 2; however, this does not as negative insunations at least when it comes to the geek women interviewees.

### Quote 2 Melek

Çünkü geek dediğimde benim aklıma gelen Yüzüklerin Efendisi'ndeki Orta Dünya'nın haritasını ezbere çizebilecek bir tip canlanıyorken fan dediğimde bu kadar hardcore bir tip canlanmıyor.	Because when I say geek, what comes to my mind is a guy who can draw the map of Middle Earth in The Lord of the Rings by heart, but when I say fan, I don't think of such a hardcore type.
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Definitions of a geek interest block distinguish what the interviewees accept as an interest of a geek person and include the themes; having a substantial fandom, any hobby can be geek, fantastical/science fiction content, and content that includes a storyline. The geek women who reported interest in geek areas that are accepted as traditionally masculine defined the topics geeks are interested in as fantastical/science fiction content (such as Harry Potter, Lord of the Rings, or Star Wars) (65%) and content that includes a storyline (40%). On the other hand, the interviewees who reported their interest in areas that are accepted as more traditionally feminine, such as K-Pop (Korean pop music) and BL's (Boy Love: the romance TV series about homosexual male relationships) marked this question as any hobby can be considered as geek (45%). There seems to be a clear separation when it comes to the depiction of geeks according to the fandom that the interviewees were a part of, and the masculine fandoms are much more strict when it comes to what is accepted in geekdom. Since K-pop is widely considered to be of interest to women and femme-identified individuals (Oh, 2015), and the interviewees largely defined K-pop as a women-dominated interest, the process of excluding some topics from being a geek interest seems to aim at femininity.

The last theme of definitions of a geek interest, having a substantial fandom for a topic to be considered as a geek, was reported by half of the interviewees, and it was explained by Participant June in Quote 3 as something is a geek interest if it's still talked about.

### Quote 3 June

Çünkü şu an bile hala sosyal medyada ben çok karşılaşıyorum o Twilight muhabbetiyle falan. Yani takip ettiğim mesela influencerlardan bir tanesi sürekli ona referans vererek böyle videolar atıyor falan. Yani bence bu açılardan bakıldığında parçası da çünkü hani şöyle üzerinden kaç yıl geçmiş bunun ve hani hala bir şekilde o senin hayatında yer ediyorsa. Demek ki bir geek kültür orada da var ki sen bunlardan kopamamışsın ya da onların arasında bu geek kültür. Belki şu da çok yaygın hani bu fanfiction yazmalar falan hani Twilight'le ilgili de eminim ki çok fazla vardır mesela demek ki bir şeyin bence fan fiction'ı varsa o da belirleyici bir şey olabilir. Uğruna yeni bir medya yaratılıyorsa

Because even now, I still come across that Twilight conversation a lot on social media. For example, one of the influencers I follow constantly posts videos like this, referencing him. I mean, I think it's a part of it when you look at it from this perspective, because you know, how many years have passed since this happened and it still has a place in your life in some way. So, there is a geek culture there too, from which you have not been able to break away, or among them. Maybe this is also very common in geek culture, you know, these fan fiction writings etc. I'm sure there are a lot of them about Twilight, for example. If there is fiction, that too can be a decisive thing. If a new media is created for the sake of it.

This theme also ties into the shared feelings and reactions with others in the fandom theme (55%) of determinants of joining a fandom block. As explained by Participant 11 in Quote 4, this theme explains that for geek women to be in a fandom or be in any geek space in general, they need to have people they can talk to who share their passion about this particular subject. The participants' answers signify that, as mentioned above, to be a geek is to have a community, and it further implies that since geek women mainly consider joining a fandom if they feel togetherness with others, the potential discrimination they face, at its worst can result in their abandonment of geek spaces.

#### Quote 4 Participant 11

<p>Çünkü hani bir noktada bu ait olmakla ilgili bir şey ya. Yani hani mesela yani kendinizi nasıl tanımladığımız önemli değil. Ama sonuçta bir tanıma koyduğunuzda, bir grubun içerisinde, bir aidiyet içerisinde oluyorsunuz ya. Mesela geekler. Ben şu an birçok şeyden bahsediyorum ve büyük ihtimal siz de öyle olduğunuz için benim ne demek istediğimi anlıyorsunuz ve aynı duyguları paylaştığımızı biliyorum. Mesela bu ister istemez benim size duyduğum bir yakınlığı ya da sizin bana duyduğunuz bir yakınlığı doğuruyor.</p>	<p>Because, you know, at some point, it's about belonging. So, for example, it doesn't matter how you define yourself. But in the end, when you put a definition on it, you are in a group, in a sense of belonging. For example, geeks. I'm talking about a lot of things right now, and you probably understand what I mean because you are (a geek) too, and I know you share the same feelings. For example, this inevitably creates a closeness that I feel towards you or a closeness that you feel towards me.</p>
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#### 4.2. Types of Femmephobia Women are Subjected to in Geek Spaces

The types of femmephobia women are subjected to in geek spaces can be examined in four main themes, with reference to Hoskin (2013), namely, structural femmephobia, overt femmephobia, femme mystification, and pious femmephobia. In this thesis, I examined the types of femmephobia geek women stated that they were subjected to and witnessed in terms of both lived experiences in the community and the thoughts of geek women on representation of women in geek media.

Structural femmephobia is about the cultural representation and devaluation of the feminine (Hoskin, 2013). Structural femmephobia expresses putting femininity in a subordinate position to masculinity's superiority through cultural cues such as language, gender roles, or ideologies to undermine the value of femininity (Hoskin, 2013), such as using "you play girly games" (quote from Participant Pixelfey) as a means to insult someone's gaming abilities. Since geek spaces are seen as a masculine domain (Kendall, 2000) and women are not expected to be a part of it, it is expected for geek women to have

experiences regarding structural femmephobia. One of the codes that arise on this theme is questioning information. This code expresses that geek women are questioned more about their knowledge in geek spaces because of their gender. Participant Pixelfey expressed this theme as a need to prove her credibility in Quote 5. Moreover, with the knowledge that geeks value information above all else (Woo, 2012), geek women reporting they are questioned about their information more because of their gender has the implication that geek women are trying to be devalued on account of their supposed ignorance about geek interests.

#### Quote 5 Pixelfey

Herhangi bir şekilde kadın olduğum ortaya çıkarsa kredibilitem daha düşük algılanıyor bence. Kendimi önce kanıtlamam gerekiyor. Böyle şey, ne yaptığım, kim olduğum belli değilken şey oluyor. "Ha sen bunu düşünüyorsun, tamam". Sen bunu düşünüyorsun ama sen şimdi bir kadın oluyorsun. "Bir de şu var mı, o ne" falan oluyor. Ondan bir kanıtlama şeyi hissediyorum, zorunluluğu.	If it is revealed that I am a woman in any way, I think my credibility is perceived as lower. I have to prove myself first. When it is not clear what I do or who I am, something like this happens. "Oh, you think about this, okay". You think about this but now you are a woman. "Is there another thing, what is that" and so on. Because of that, I feel an obligation of having to prove (myself).
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According to the interviewees, there is also the issue of geek men deciding what it means to be geek and refusing to accept femme-dominated interests as geek. Participant Doctor-10 explains this issue she faced in terms of men policing her interests in Quote 6.

### Quote 6 Doctor-10

<p>Ama bir şey söyleyeceğim. Alacakaranlık'la ilgili kendimi açıkçası geek olarak değerlendiriyor muyum diye bir düşündüm. Genelde bu konuda çok zorbalanmışım. Hani biraz şey yani bu, daha ergence bir şey olarak yorumlanıyor. Zamanında gerçekten çok seviyordum ama ... bence orada bayağı bildiğimiz yaşlı erkekler de devreye giriyor ve onların beğendiği şeyler sanırım daha makbul kabul ediliyor bence... Yani toplum gözünde bir şeyin geek olup olmadığını biraz daha yaşça büyük erkekler beliriyor. Onların dünyasında yaşıyoruz galiba. Öyle düşünülüyor sanırım.</p>	<p>But I will say something. I thought about whether I consider myself a geek of Twilight. I was generally bullied about it. You know, it's interpreted as something more adolescent. I really liked it at the time, but... I think there are also older men that we know step in and I think the things they like are considered more acceptable... I mean, in the eyes of the public, it is the older men who determine whether something is geek or not. I guess we live in their world. I guess that's how it's thought.</p>
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Since femme-dominated interests are not perceived as geek, there is another issue that arises regarding the representation of women. Interviewees expressed that women are not represented as sufficiently feminine in the geek media they consume. An example of this is in Quote 7 from Participant 11 in regards to finding femininity in geek media.

### Quote 7 Participant 11

<p>Kadınlar (geek medyda) eksik temsil ediliyorlar. Temsil edildiklerinde de yine maskülen temsil ediliyorlar. Yani feminen bir kadın görmek çok kolay değil bu medyalar içerisinde.</p>	<p>Women are underrepresented. When they are represented, they are still represented as masculine. So it is not easy to see a feminine woman in these media.</p>
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The second main theme, overt femmephobia, is defined as devaluing and violent acts against a person or an object for their perceived femininity (Hoskin, 2013). Until recently,

before they were accepted for their masculinity through their technological skill, geek men were considered feminine because of their tiny bodies and lack of athletic skills (Kendall, 1999). Nowadays, with minority groups in the geek spaces, such as women being visible parts of geekdom, geeks are again threatened to be perceived as feminine by the outside (Eaglash, 2018; Salter, 2017). Since men look at other men to validate their masculinity (Kimmel, 1994), to avoid being perceived as feminine, geeks gatekeep their community from the people they deem as a threat to their masculinity. The gatekeeping as the most significant issue in geekdom and sexism as the most significant issue in fandom codes of overt femmephobia block ties into this context. According to the interviewees, the most prevalent form of overt femmephobia in geek spaces against women is being pushed away from the fandom because of their gender (75%). Participant Nanamicanfixme exemplifies this theme in Quote 8 by defining how she observes geek men treat geek women.

**Quote 8 Nanamicanfixme**

<p>Erkekler bu topluluklarda kadınları istiyormuş gibi davranmıyor pek. Ama hani ilginç bir şekilde bütün cosplayer kadınların instagram yorumları bu komüniteye dahil kendini bu şekilde ifade eden erkeklerle dolu ben anlamıyorum. Kadınları böyle sadece komünitenin kenarında böyle bir süs gibi istiyorlar ama aktif katılımcı olarak istemiyorlar.</p>	<p>Men don't really act like they want women in these communities. But interestingly, all the cosplayer women's Instagram comments are full of men who belong to this community and express themselves in this way I don't get it. They only want women as decorations on the fringes of the community, but not as active participants.</p>
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Connected with the structural femme phobia's masculine representation of women, the interviewees also expressed that when women/femininity is represented, it is faced with negative reactions from the fandoms. For example, Participant Purpie exemplified the issue with a female doctor coming as the main lead in Doctor Who in Quote 9.

### Quote 9 Purpie

Kadın doktor (Doctor Who) geldi biliyorsunuz. Kadın doktor geldiğinde çok fazla kadın doktoru, yani doktor nasıl kadın olur, doktorun erkek olması lazım diye çok fazla isyanlar çıktı ve bununla ilgili çok fazla tartışmalar başladı. Bence kadın doktor gerçekten rolüne çok uygun biriydi, gayet başarılı biri olduğunu düşünüyorum ben. Ama buna çok fazla tepki geldi.

You know, a female doctor came (into Doctor Who). When a female doctor came, there were many, I mean, “how can a doctor be a woman, a doctor should be a man”, there were many rebellions and many discussions about this. I think the female doctor was really suitable for her role, I think she was very successful. But there was a lot of backlash against this.

Ageism from people who are not in geek spaces also seems to be an issue for geeks, but according to the interviewee Melek in Quote 10, this is, like all else, a bigger issue if you are a geek woman.

### Quote 10 Melek

Yaş noktasında yine bir küçümsendiğim artık bir tepki var ve bu, yani bu benim her yaş grubumda vardı, anlatabiliyor muyum? Bence insan bunu sadece bir geeklere karşı ya da fanlara karşı bir discrimination point (ayrımcılık noktası) olarak kullanılıyor. Ben 17 yaşındayken de bu yaşta mı deniyordu, anlatabiliyor muyum? Benim (erkek) kuzenim benden çok yaşça büyük. 40 yaşında kuzenimin PUBG'ye oynamasına kimse takılmıyor.

There is a reaction that I am belittled in terms of age and this, I mean this was in every age group of mine, can I explain? I think people only use this as a point of discrimination against geeks or fans. Even when I was 17, it was called “in this age?”, can I explain? My (male) cousin is much older than me. No one cares about my 40-year-old cousin playing PUBG.

Another main theme in this block is what Hoskin (2013) defines as the dehumanization of femininity or femme mystification. According to the literature, women are expected to adhere to the heterosexual male gaze (Mishali, 2014), so geek women who do not fit into what patriarchy deems as women are excluded. As a result, geek women are constantly walking on the thin line between being too geeky compared to other women and not geeky enough for the male members of their community (Bury, 2011).

On the other hand, feminine presenting geek women are seen as fake geek girls who do these things for male attention (Berlatsky, 2013); however, because they reject male attention, geek women also fail to adhere to what Hoskin defines as the masculine right of access: the presumption that femininity is expressed to attract sexual attention from men (Hoskin, 2007). This is supported by the fact that women are represented in the media in a one-dimensional way that adheres to the male gaze, thus limiting the acceptance of diversity in the expression of femininity and perpetuating the cycle of regulating femininity (Hoskin, 2014). Thus it is expected that the most prevalent code in this theme is the objectification of women in geek spaces (70%). Participant İlayda articulates this issue by saying:

**Quote 11 İlayda**

Hiçbir şey anlatmıyor (kadın) karakterler, geçmişlerini bilmiyoruz, amaçlarını bilmiyoruz, düşüncelerini bilmiyoruz, sadece göğüsleri var. Bu kadar. Başka hiçbir şeyleri yok. Var olduğunu bildiğimiz tek şey ve onu da gözümüze sokuyorlar zaten.	The (female) characters have nothing to speak of; we don't know their past, we don't know their goals, we don't know their thoughts, they just have breasts. This much. They have nothing else. It's the only thing we know exists, and they're rubbing it to our faces anyway.
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The last of the main themes in this block is pious femmephobia. Hoskin (2013) defines pious femmephobia as the subordination of femme identity and the mentality of femininity as fragile. In the codes, this theme shows itself as the damsel in distress representation of women (35%) and naive representation of women (30%) in geek media. Participant Sutjek explained this situation as follows:

## Quote 12 Sutjek

Yani mesela daha geçen izledim Netflix'te bir tane anime var My Happy Marriage diye bir şey galiba. Çok sinir oldum, bitirmedim. Ya kızını böyle çok güçsüz, işte çok böyle bir insana, bir adama muhtaç şekilde göstermişler. En sevmediğim konseptlerden bir tanesi. Dayanamıyorum öyle şeyleri izlemeye. Hani bir stand up yani, değil mi?	For example, there is an anime on Netflix that I just watched last night, I think it's called My Happy Marriage. I was so angry I didn't finish it. Well, they showed the girl as very weak and in need of a person, a man. One of the concepts I dislike the most. I can't stand watching things like that. You know, like stand up, right?
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### 4.3. Effects of Femmephobia on Geek Women

The effects of femmephobia on geek women is examined in themes of coping mechanisms, negative consequences of femmephobia, and internalized femmephobia. The geek women I interviewed reported several coping mechanisms for dealing with the femmephobic incidents they face in geek spaces, one of the most prominent ones being hiding their gender. Similarly, they also reported using a male profile when consuming geek media and not creating a profile and just being an observer in online geek spaces, as compatible with the existing literature (Choe et al., 2019).

Similarly to the previous theme, when it comes to the negative consequences of the femmephobia theme, interviewees reported feeling like they do not belong or ending up abandoning the fandoms or geek spaces they are a part of. As previously mentioned, geek spaces such as video games are known to reduce stress and also increase the sense of belonging (Wack & Tantleff-Dunn, 2009). However, according to the interviewees, these benefits seem to be lacking for geek women. On top of the adverse effects of discrimination they face on these platforms (McLean & Griffiths, 2018), they also lose on a social support platform. Moreover, since geek women in this study reported regularly hiding their gender, using a male profile, or not creating a profile, this causes an issue when estimating the population of geek women and maintains the notion that they don't belong in geek spaces (Kendrick, 2015).

Lastly, internalized femmephobia came up as a theme. One of the most prevalent codes in this theme was about how romantic stories- historically a feminine interest (Shulman, & Scharf, 2000)- can not be considered as a geek interest and explained further by Participant Purpie as follows:

### Quote 13 Purpie

<p>Ama ben o kadar da geeklik bir içeriği olduğunu düşünmüyorum açıkçası. Bana daha çok romantik bir hikaye gibi geliyor. Romantik bir vampir hikayesi. amam detaylı şeyleri olabilir. O konseydir, geçmişe dair şeylerdir. Ya da çocuğu oluyor. Mesela çocuğu kendisi, o kan içmesi gerek çocuğu beslemesi için falan. Ama bu daha çok bence romantiklik üzerine kurulmuş bir hikaye gibi.</p>	<p>But I don't think it has that much geek content, to be honest. It seems more like a romantic story to me. A romantic vampire story. But it can have detailed things. It's the council, things about the past. Or she has a child. For example, she has the child herself, she has to drink blood to feed the child, etc. But I think this is more like a story based on romance.</p>
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In second-wave feminism, feminist theorists proposed that the reason for gender discrimination women faced was related to their presentation of femininity and proposed that the lessening of femme presentation would also lessen gender discrimination (Friedan, 2010, as cited in Reicher, 2023). There may have been a similar situation when it comes to the internalized femmephobia the geek women interviewees expressed in this study. As a result of existing in the balance of being objectified or being excluded, most geek women go through the phase of “not like other (fake) geek girls” to prove they are not one-dimensional characters for the pleasure of men but unique individuals with real interests (see Brown, 2012).

#### 4.4. Shortcomings of This Thesis and Future Directions

Since no study on this topic has been conducted in Türkiye before, this thesis serves as a reference for the field of study. However, this study has multiple shortcomings. First of all, in this study, no assigned male-at-birth participants were included due to time constraints and concerns that assigned male-at-birth participants might not be able to open up to a female

researcher on a subject such as sexism. Furthermore, the experiences of geek women were prioritized in this thesis for exploratory purposes on the topic of femmephobia in geek spaces. However, since the literature describes geek men as a community who tries to escape from rebranding as feminine (Bury, 2011; Kendall, 2000), future studies may include geek men as participants to conduct more comprehensive studies that consider their perspectives about the feminine representations in geekdom. Secondly, LeCompte & Gomez (1982) suggest strategies such as having multiple researchers or peer examination to establish internal reliability in qualitative studies; however, because of time constraints, I could not utilize these strategies.

Thirdly, even though it did not show itself in the codes, some interviewees shared that some of the problems they face in this community have to do with their race and sexuality next to their gender. This could be further explored in future studies for the sake of intersectionality.

Fourthly, this study acted with the assumption that the experiences of geeks in Türkiye and other countries might not be the same due to inequality of conditions. Still, in future studies, this situation can be examined comparatively in terms of experiences in international literature. Fifthly, future studies can also include a broader representation of fandoms. This study indicated an issue regarding femmephobia and the acceptance of women in geek spaces; however, this topic will benefit from large-scale quantitative studies conducted in the field of social psychology for the sake of more holistic and generalizable results.

Lastly, in this study, I observed a difference in how geek women who are interested in more masculine fandoms look at being a geek compared to geek women who are in more feminine fandoms. In future studies about this topic, the experiences of geek women who participate in fandoms that are perceived as more feminine and the views of geeks on these fandoms can be examined.

#### **4.5. Conclusion**

Geeks are a largely ignored or marginalized community in literature and life (Massanari, 2017; Peterson & Ray, 2006). This thesis started with the aim of answering what it means to be a geek in the Turkish context and what the geek women's experiences are in

this sub-culture. According to the result of this thesis, identifying as a geek is more about the amount of information one has about one's geeky interests than self-identification, supporting the literature claiming that information about interests is of the utmost importance in geek culture (Woo, 2012). Furthermore, according to studies in the literature, geeks may have been negatively stereotyped and be invisible in some contexts (Kowert et al., 2014); however, this negative stereotyping and invisibility are even more prevalent when it comes to geek women (Kendall, 2000; Leon, 2014; Robinson, 2014). Society and the media automatically think of a man when they are asked to picture a geek (Kendall, 1999), and geek women are either forgotten or deemed as attention-seeking by faking their interests (Leon, 2014; Letamendi, 2012).

I assumed femme theory would uniquely fit in the context of this study at the start of my thesis because although it is a new theory that was recently named (Hoskin, 2013), the femmephobia phenomenon can be observed throughout the studies about geekdom, both for geek men, such as Bury (2011) naming geekdom as a feminine or a failed masculine attribute for men, and geek women as expressed in the study conducted by Kendall (2000) about geek women losing their femininity and therefore their attractiveness in the eyes of men because of their interests. The results of the thematic analysis in this thesis also show that femmephobia indeed exists and is observed by geek women in geek spaces. Furthermore, all four types of femmephobia, named by Hoskin (2013), were reported by the participants in various degrees on top of the negative effects of femmephobic incidents and the coping strategies to deal with said negative effects. The findings implicate that there is a genuine femmephobia issue in geek spaces. The literature shows that femmephobia can cause serious consequences for those who are subjected to and those who witness it, such as mental health problems, discrimination, and violence against individuals who are perceived as feminine, and overall fortifies the notion of femininity as weak and devaluates femininity (Kirakosian et al., 2023; Prioletta & Davies, 2024b). Therefore these findings are important in regards to drawing attention to femmephobia that is prevalent in this sub-culture as a first step to lessen the potentially catastrophic effects the said femmephobia can bring about.

Overall, in this thesis, I aimed to understand the meaning of geeks, which was sparsely studied, and the struggles of women in this male-dominated subculture from the eyes of Turkish geek women. The thematic analysis results indicated that while there are various definitions of geekdom, the most robust one is learning everything to know about the related topic. The results also point out that all forms of femmephobia are somewhat

present in geek spaces, and women are forced to develop defense mechanisms to escape from femmephobic incidents, some of which may be harmful to their well-being. These findings imply that women or femininity are still not entirely accepted, even in the sub-cultures that have a history of being discriminated against and have been previously labeled as feminine.



## 5. REFERENCES

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## 6. APPENDICES

### Appendix-A Informed Consent Form

Sayın katılımcı,

Bu çalışma Ankara Yıldırım Beyazıt Üniversitesi Genel Psikoloji Tezli Yüksek Lisans öğrencisi Gökşin Özge Çakar tarafından Doç. Dr. Gülden Sayılan danışmanlığında yürütülmektedir. Çalışmanın yürütülebilmesi için gereken izinler Ankara Yıldırım Beyazıt Üniversitesi Etik Kurulundan alınmıştır. Çalışmanın amacı geek, nerd veya fan toplulukları olarak bilinen topluluklar içerisinde kadınların deneyimleri, aidiyet algıları ve yerlerini anlamaktır. Bu doğrultuda katılımcılarla yüz yüze veya çevrimiçi platformlarda (zoom, discord, google meet vb.) görüşmeler yapılacaktır. Araştırma yaklaşık olarak yarım saat sürecek olup bu süreçte sizden geek/fan toplulukları içerisinde karşılaştığınız durum ve deneyimlerinize ilgili birtakım sorular cevaplamanız istenecektir. Soruların herhangi bir doğru veya yanlış cevabı yoktur, soruları sizin kişisel deneyimlerinizi en iyi yansıttığını düşündüğünüz şekilde cevaplamanız önem arz etmektedir.

Çalışmaya katılım tamamen gönüllülük esasına dayanmaktadır. Herhangi bir nedenden ötürü kendinizi rahatsız hissederseniz herhangi bir sebep belirtmeden çalışmadan ayrılabilirsiniz. Çalışmaya katılmayı kabul edip demografik formu doldurduğunuz takdirde sağladığımız iletişim bilgileri kullanılarak çalışmanın gerçekleştirilebilmesi için uygun yer ve zamanı kararlaştırmak amacıyla sizinle iletişime geçilecektir. Yapılacak görüşmeler ses kaydına alınacak olup görüntü kaydı alınmayacaktır. Alınacak ses kayıtları daha sonrasında sadece araştırmacı tarafından veri analizinde kullanılacak olup verileriniz herhangi bir üçüncü şahısla paylaşılmayacak ve yalnız bilimsel amaçlar doğrultusunda kullanılacaktır. Çalışma sonuçları raporlanırken kullanılmak üzere dilerseniz bir rumuz belirleyebilirsiniz, eğer belirlemezseniz araştırmacı tarafından size bir rumuz atanacak olup isminiz çalışmada kullanılmayacaktır. Herhangi bir sorunuz olması durumunda aşağıdaki e-mail adresi üzerinden araştırmacıyla iletişime geçebilirsiniz. Çalışmamıza sağlayacağımız değerli katkılarınızdan ötürü şimdiden teşekkür ederiz.

Çalışmacının:

Adı Soyadı: Gökşin Özge Çakar

e-mail adresi:

## Appendix-B Demographic Information Form

1. Cinsiyetiniz:

Erkek       Kadın       Diğer \_\_\_\_\_

2. Yaşınız: \_\_\_\_\_

3. Eğitim seviyeniz nedir? (En son mezun olduğunuz okul)

İlkokul       Lise       Lisans       Lisans Üstü

4. Hangi geek medyalarını aktif takip ediyorsunuz/aktif parçasısınız? (Bilgisayar oyunları, kitap serileri, manga, anime vb.):

5. Çalışma içinde kişisel bilgilerinizin korunması adına bir rumuz belirlemek ister misiniz? (Belirlemez iseniz çalışmacı tarafından sizin için bir rumuz atanacaktır.):

6. Çalışmanın bir sonraki aşamasına yönelik size ulaşabilmemiz için iletişim bilgilerinizi bırakır mısınız? (telefon no, e-mail vb.):

## Appendix-C Interview Questions

- Geek/nerd/fan terimi sizin için ne anlama geliyor/neyi kapsıyor? sizce benzer şeyleri mi ifade ediyorlar, ayrışıyorlarsa nerede?
- Geeklerin ilgi alanları genellikle nelerdir/neleri geek ilgi alanı olarak tanımlarsınız, örnek verebilir misiniz?
- Bir insanın geek olarak kabul edilmesi için geçmesi gereken belli bir bilgi sınırı var mı, varsa bu sınır sizce nedir?
- Siz bu ilgi alanlarından hangilerini paylaşıyorsunuz/hangi fandomların parçasısınız?
- Kendinizi bir geek olarak görüyor musunuz?
- Sizce geekler nasıl görünür, belirleyici özellikleri nelerdir?
- Geek bloglarında/video oyunlarında vb. aktif katılımcı mısınız?
- Bu ortamlarda bu konularla ilgili bilginiz ne sıklıkla sorgulanır?
- Toplum içinde geek ilgi alanlarınız hakkında konuşur musunuz?
- Ne kadar sık konuşursunuz, neden?
- Çevrimiçi ortamlarla karşılıklı konuştuğunuz ortamlarda iletişim ya da tepkiler yönünden bir fark gözlemlediniz mi?
- Bu ilgi alanlarından bahsettiğinizde insanların tepkileri nasıl oluyor?
- Geek topluluğunun en büyük sorununun ne olduğunu düşünüyorsunuz?
- Kendinizi bu topluluğa ait hissediyor musunuz?
- Sahte geek/fan deyimini duydunuz mu?
- Sahte geeklerle/fanlarla hiç karşılaştınız mı, bununla ilgili bir tecrübeniz oldu mu?
- Sizce “sahte geekler” bu topluluklar için bir sorun mu?
- Sahte geeklerin özellikleri nelerdir, bir geek ve sahte geeki nasıl ayırt edersiniz?
- Siz hiç sahte geek/fan olmakla suçlandınız mı, örnek verebilir misiniz?
- Sizce geek topluluklarında kadınlar kabul görüyor mu?
- Geek topluluklarında cinsiyete dayalı ayrımcılık konusunda ne düşünüyorsunuz?

- Siz hiç bu topluluklarda cinsiyetçiliğe maruz kaldınız mı, örnekle açıklayabilir misiniz?
- Kendinizi bu topluluğa kabullendirmek/ait hissetmek için belli davranışlar gösterdiğiniz oluyor mu?
- Sizce kadın geekler ve erkek geekler bu topluluklardaki ilgi alanları bazında ayrışıyorlar mı?
- Geek topluluklarında bir hiyerarşi olduğunu düşünüyor musunuz, sizce bu hiyerarşi nasıl dizayn edilmiş?
- Topluluğa girme çabanızda cinsiyetinizin kabul edilmeniz hususunda bir dezavantaj yarattığını düşünüyor musunuz?
- Aklınıza gelen bazı ünlü geek isimlerden örnekler verebilir misiniz?
- Sizce bir dizi/film/kitap vb. hem mainstream, hem geek kültürün bir parçası olabilir mi? Örnek verebilir misiniz?
- Geek kültürün bir parçası olan dizi/film/kitap/çizgi roman gibi yayınlardaki kadın temsilleri hakkında ne düşünüyorsunuz?/ Geek kabul edilen medya ürünlerindeki kadınları düşündüğünüzde bu kadınlarla ilgili ilk hangi özellikler aklınıza geliyor?
- Herhangi bir geek medyadan negatif kadın temsili sebebiyle uzaklaştığınız-daha az keyif aldığınızı fark ettiğiniz oldu mu?
- Kendinizi özdeşleştirdiğiniz bir film/dizi/video oyunu/çizgi roman vb. karakteri var mı? Varsa kim ve hangi özellikler bakımından?
- Sizin bir fandoma girmek istemenizde ya da girerkenizde belirleyici olan şeyler nelerdir, örnek üzerinden açıklayabilir misiniz?
- Alacakaranlık serisine hâkim misiniz? Sizce bu seri geek kültürün parçası mıdır?