**The Importance of Female Characters in Esports: A Quantitative Analysis of Players’ Perceptions of Gendered Character Representations in Sports Video Games**

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While the increasing popularity of esports has been substantial, representation and acceptance of women as both players and characters within the games constitute a major point of concern. This includes sports video games, which is among the least diverse esports genres in terms of female representation. This study analyses the role of female character representations in the overall marginalization of women in esports and gaming. Based on an online survey of 444 sports video games players, the current study aims to examine gendered differences in how players perceive gendered character representation in sports video games. The results reveal a clear gendered pattern among respondents, indicating that women feel that female character options remain too scarce and poorly portrayed. From a feminist post-structuralist perspective, this study emphasizes the need to normalise female characters towards competent and non-objectified representations in order to reduce gender disparities in esports environments.