

THE CO-CULTURAL COMMUNICATION APPROACH OF FEMALE PLAYERS IN FACING TOXIC COMMUNICATION BEHAVIOR IN MOBILE LEGENDS BANG BANG

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ABSTRACT

*The study examines toxic communication in Mobile Legends Bang Bang among female players using Mark Obe's co-cultural communication theory. Employing a qualitative approach using constructivist paradigm, including interviews with eight female players, the research identifies how these players encounter and address toxic behavior. The findings reveal that most participants use an assertive accommodation approach. They actively challenge and attempt to change the prevailing norms in the game by reprimanding and educating those who engage in toxic behavior. They also utilize reporting and blocking features to manage these interactions, demonstrating resilience and a commitment to fostering a fairer gaming environment. Other participants adopt a non-assertive separation strategy. They avoid or isolate themselves from toxic situations, preferring non-confrontational methods to minimize interaction with those displaying toxic behavior. A smaller group uses an aggressive assimilation approach. These players conceal their virtual identities to blend in with the dominant group, adapting to the toxic norms rather than challenging them. The study highlights the various strategies female players use to cope with issues like sexual harassment, racism, insults, and trolling. This behavior includes trashing such as sexual harassment, racism, insults, intimidation, gender discrimination, and trolling (contextually inappropriate threats). Insults like n**b, janc*k, bngs*t, and cewek gbl*k are examples of toxic communication in online games. It underscores their awareness of the causes of toxic behavior, such as poor gameplay or social media influence, and their diverse methods of responding, from active confrontation to avoidance and adaptation.*

KEYWORDS

Toxic Behavior, Toxic Communication, Co-Cultural Communication, Mobile Legends Bang Bang, Toxic Communication Behavior



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INTRODUCTION

Games come in many different varieties. Some popular mobile games among both young people and adults include Mobile Legends Bang Bang, Player Unknown's Battlegrounds Mobile (PUBG Mobile), Arena of Valor, Vainglory, AyoDance Mobile, and Genshin Impact. These games fall into various categories such as MOBA (Multiplayer Online Battle Arena), FPS (First Person Shooter), MMORPG (Massively Multiplayer Online Role-Playing Game), and many others that can be played with just a mobile device and internet access.

The advancement of information and communication technology has significantly impacted the development of games, particularly in Indonesia (Littlejohn, Stephen et al., 2017). Nowadays, players only need a mobile device to play games online, unlike a few years ago when players required electronic computers or laptops, which were relatively heavy compared to today's gadgets, phones, or tablets.

A survey conducted by tSurvey.id on April 6, 2023, published through katadata.co.id, outlines the 10 most popular games in Indonesia based on responses from 2,000 participants across the country. The majority of respondents are male students or working adults with a middle to upper socioeconomic status. The results of this survey are summarized in Table 1, showing the top 10 games in Indonesia for 2023:

Table 1. Top 10 Popular Games in Indonesia (Survey by tSurvey.id, 2023)

No	Developers and Organizations Parent	Game Name	Data Results Overall Ratio
1	Moonton , Bytedance	Mobile Legends	67%
2	Lightspeed and Quantum Studio Group, PUBG Corporation	PUBG Mobile	28%
3	Supercell, Tencent Holdings Limited	Clash of Clans	24%
4	111dots Studio, Garena International	Free Fire	17%
5	Konami, Konami Digital Entertainment	eFootball PES 2021	10%
6	King, Activision Blizzard	Candy Crush	10%
7	Activision, TiMi Studio, Tencent Games, Timi Studio Group	Call Duty Mobile	7%
8	Supercell, Tencent Holdings Limited	Clash Royale	7%
9	EA Mobile, EA Canada	FIFA Mobile	6%
10	Rovio Entertainment, Sega	Angry Birds Mobile	4%

Mobile Legends Bang Bang (MLBB) is one of the most popular online games in Indonesia, attracting millions of players from various backgrounds. MLBB, a Multiplayer Online Battle Arena (MOBA) game, involves ten players divided into two teams (Marcella & Sazali, 2023). Each team selects from ten different heroes with the primary goal of destroying the opponent's turrets and eventually

conquering the main turret. The game is played across three main lanes: Exp Lane, Mid Lane, and Gold Lane, each protected by several turrets. Each hero has a specific role, such as Jungler, Exp, Mid, and Gold, with additional roles like Roamer to protect the Jungler or Gold Lane, ensuring more effective attacks and defenses to achieve victory (Rani, Hasibuan, & Barus, 2018). In this gaming ecosystem, social interaction among players is an integral part of the gaming experience. However, as with many online communities, toxic behavior or negative conduct often arises, impacting the gaming experience and psychological well-being of players, particularly female players.

According to data from a Newzoo survey published by Databoks, the majority of global e-sports players are male (66%), while female players account for about 34%. This survey, conducted with 72,000 respondents across 33 countries in 2021, highlights this gender disparity (Databoks, 2022). Additionally, an interview with Martinus Manurung, Head of Marketing & Business Development E-Sports at Moonton, revealed that in Indonesia, 80% of the 34 million Mobile Legends Bang Bang players are male, and only 20% are female (Suara.com, 2021). This data indicates that MLBB is a male-dominated game, leading to female players being a minority within this community. This situation can create an environment rife with discrimination against female players, who are often perceived as less competent or unfit to play.

Social stigma regarding gender roles, particularly the view that women should be involved in household activities, reinforces this discrimination. Traditional beliefs lead some male players to treat female players differently and often unfairly in the game. Considering the data and dynamics, female players in MLBB can be classified as a minority or subordinate group based on Co-Cultural Communication Theory.

Mobile Legends Bang Bang is a MOBA game involving ten players in two teams. The game features a ranking system that makes it highly competitive. Players' ranks or "tiers" are determined by how often they participate in matchmaking and the number of victories they achieve. The rankings include several levels, from Warrior, Elite, Master, Grandmaster, Epic, Legend, Mythic, Mythical Honor, Mythical Glory, to Mythical Immortal. This ranking system adds a layer of competition to the game (Rani 2018).

MLBB provides communication features such as microphones, speakers, and warning signals designed to enhance team coordination. An essential feature is the warning system, which allows players to issue instructions like advance, retreat, or regroup. These warnings come with loud and clear sounds, such as "Attack," "Retreat," "Gather," "Skill Cooldown," "Spell Cooldown," and "Attack The Lord/Turtle." These features are crucial for team communication, helping players convey information about enemy positions, skill status, and optimal times for attacking, defending, or regrouping. In addition to voice chat, text, and warning signals, players can also use non-verbal features like stickers, automated voice messages, or other tools not intended for direct communication but used for taunting opponents, such as the Recall feature. These features can also be employed for

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negative behaviors such as trolling, trash-talking, flaming, and taunting, which fall into the category of toxic behavior. Such behavior can occur whether the team is winning or losing and is often used to belittle or insult opponents and teammates.

Previous research has extensively examined communication behavior and symbolic violence in online games. For instance, Retno (2020) from Universitas IAIN Purwokerto analyzed how Mobile Legends Bang Bang players formed hate speech with religious content during a national livestream tournament, categorized into four types: curses, insults, sexual harassment, and other form of hate speech. Marcella, D., & Sazali, H. (2023), highlighted various forms of toxic behavior, including hate speech with religious content and trash-talking targeting players' intelligence, physical attributes, or social status. Their research identified six categories of trash-talking, including insults related to intelligence, disgusting animals, sexuality, social status, physical attributes, and general insults. Factors contributing to trash-talking include poor team performance, losses, players leaving the game, and player ranks.

Princess P. Amestato et al. (2023) in the Journal of Education and Social Studies explored gender discrimination with a study titled "Exploring Gender Stereotypes Among Filipina Gamers of Mobile Legends: A Phenomenological Study." It concluded that female players in the Philippines are viewed as weak and incompetent, with male players often reluctant to play with them. Female players receive negative feedback, face threats, harsh behavior, and harassment, leading them to hide their identities, conceal profile information, and avoid using microphones (Amestoso et al., 2023).. Despite these challenges, female players often ignore negative comments, focus on the game, and attempt to prove their skills. Some limit their playtime to avoid negative stereotypes and focus more on physical and academic activities. In the Philippines, female players are also stigmatized as lesbians because they participate in a game perceived as masculine and male-dominated.

This situation raises certain issues regarding toxic behavior and its impact on female players in Mobile Legends Bang Bang. As a minority group within the gaming community, there is a power dynamic between the majority (male players) and the minority (female players), as explained by Co-Cultural Theory. This theory emphasizes the classification of society into majority and minority groups, with minority groups or co-cultural groups facing dominance and discrimination from the majority. In MLBB, female players can be considered a co-cultural group frequently encountering dominance and discrimination from the majority (male players).

Based on this background, the research aims to explore the communication strategies used by female players in dealing with toxic behavior in Mobile Legends Bang Bang. By employing qualitative and phenomenological descriptive methods, this study hopes to provide a deeper understanding of effective communication strategies in online gaming contexts and contribute to efforts in creating a more inclusive and fair gaming environment.

RESEARCH METHODS

This research method is qualitative descriptive research using constructivist paradigm and phenomenological descriptive approach, aimed at making systematic, factual and accurate descriptions of the facts or characteristics of certain populations or objects (Creantono, R., & Sauce, 2010). Apart from that, it aims to describe and describe existing phenomena, both natural and human engineered, which pays more attention to characteristics, quality, and interrelationships between activities. Qualitative research aims to explain a phenomenon in depth through data collection as in-depth as possible. This research does not prioritize the size of the population, in this research the issue of depth (quality) of data is emphasized rather than the amount of data (quantity).

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Profiles of Informants

The study involved 8 female informants, chosen purposively based on specific criteria such as being female players, their years of gameplay, frequency of playing, ranking in the game, and motivation. All informants agreed to have their names mentioned, but for ethical reasons, their names have been anonymized. Below are the profiles of each informant:

1. CPD

CPD is motivated to play the game because she finds MLBB exciting and enjoyable. She first tried the game on a friend's phone and then recommended it to others. The average duration of her gameplay is 2 hours per session. She has reached the Mythical Glory tier, with a primary role as Mage or Support. CPD is in one of the highest tiers in MLBB, reflecting high gameplay ability and serious involvement in the game. At this level, team communication becomes crucial for effective coordination, which also increases the likelihood of encountering toxic behavior if there is imbalance or failure.

"The highest I've reached is Mythic Glory, and after that, I played as Mage or Supports" (Interview with CPD, 2024).*

2. SFA

SFA plays for entertainment, primarily because the game is popular and widely played by others. Her interest was sparked by MLBB's popularity in her social environment, illustrating how social trends can influence individual decisions to play. The average duration of her gameplay is 2 hours per session.

3. BFH

BFH is active as an influencer in the E-Sports industry and acknowledges that MLBB is the most played game in the industry. Her motivation is career-oriented;

her involvement in MLBB is not only for personal enjoyment but also as part of her professional activities in E-Sports. The average duration of her gameplay is 2 hours per session.

“For communication roles in Mobile Legends, it’s not really that important for casual play because it’s not ranked, so it’s just a relaxed mode” (Interview with BFH, 2024).*

4. SM

SM is involved in both online and offline MLBB communities and participates in global and local tournaments. For her, the game is not only a source of entertainment but also a platform for broader social engagement. Her involvement in the community and tournaments indicates a deeper motivation than merely passing time. She has played for up to 5 hours, from 1 AM to 5 AM.

5. ER

ER plays almost every day with a duration of 4 hours per day (from 9 PM to 12 AM). Her motivation is typical among players seeking recreational activities to fill their leisure time. The enjoyment she derives from the game often leads to increased play frequency, even though it started as just entertainment.

“Usually, one match takes about 30 minutes; the longest I’ve played was 5 hours, from 1 AM to 5 AM.” (Interview with ER, 2024).*

6. YL

YL’s average gameplay duration is 2 hours per session. Her motivation aligns with the common drive among players seeking recreational activities to fill their leisure time. The pleasure derived from the game often leads to increased frequency of play, even though it started as a form of entertainment.

7. TA

TA plays for an average of 2 hours per session. Her motivation is typical among players seeking entertainment during their free time, new experiences, and a break from work fatigue. The enjoyment from the game often encourages more frequent play, although it started as just a form of entertainment.

8. GA

GA’s motivation is common among players seeking recreational activities to fill their free time. The enjoyment derived from the game often leads to increased play frequency, although it started as just entertainment, influenced by friends who play Mobile Legends with her. Her average gameplay duration is 2 hours per session. The high duration of play indicates significant commitment to the game. High frequency also increases the likelihood of encountering toxic behavior in the game. The informant does not play for extended periods and experiences social dynamics, including toxic behavior. Motivations and rankings of the players are summarized in Table 1.

Table 2: Profiles of Informants with Backgrounds, Motivation, Level, and Duration

No	Name & Backgrounds	Motivation	Tier & Duration
1	ER, Jakarta, 24 years old, College Student & Workers	Entertainment	Mythic & ≥ 4 hours/day
2	GA, Depok, 20 years old, College Student	Entertainment, Following Social Trends	Mythical Honor & 2 hours/day
3	SFA, Bekasi, 23 years old, Workers	Stress Relief, Following Social Trends	Mythic & 2 hours/day
4	SM, Jakarta, 20 years old, College Student	Active in Tournaments, Following Social Trends	Legend & ≥ 4 hours/day
5	TA, Tangerang, 22 years old, Workers	Stress Relief, Seeking New Experiences	Epic & 2 hours/day
6	CPD, Jakarta, 20 years old, College Student	Following Social Trends	Mythical Glory & 2 hours/day
7	BFH, Jakarta, 21 years old, E-Sports Influencer/ KOL	Career Development as an E-Sports Influencer	Legend & 2 hours/day
8	YL, Depok, 20 years old, College Student	Entertainment	Legend & 2 hours/day

Informants' Identity in the MLBB Game

Mobile Legends, as an online game, offers players the freedom to configure their virtual identities. This identity includes name, profile photo, bio, gallery, and gender, all of which can be set without verification. This flexibility allows players to define their virtual personas but also opens up opportunities for misuse or identity fraud.

For BFH, virtual identity is very important due to her role as an influencer in the E-Sports industry. With a large following, BFH feels it is necessary to maintain the accuracy of her identity to prevent impersonation. Here is BFH's explanation:

"My name is definitely Belle Ruby. For email, phone number, and profile photo, they all reflect my real self. In my bio, I only list my Instagram, and the gallery feature includes some of my photos. I also selected female for the gender field. This is quite important because when playing randomly, if the identity is not filled out properly, it feels less authentic, and people might think it's not a real account" (Interview with BFH, 2024).

BFH's openness in filling out her virtual identity also reflects her confidence in maintaining her image as an authentic and professional player. Other players, however, choose not to provide accurate virtual identities. For instance, GA opts to keep her identity confidential, including name, profile photo, and gender, as a form of self-protection against other players who might have malicious intentions.

"I don't list my nickname, profile, or gender to avoid predators out there" (Interview with GA, 2024).

GA's decision reflects a distrust of a male-dominated gaming environment where women are often targeted with unpleasant or even dangerous behavior.

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TA also shares a similar perspective, considering virtual identity to be less important and preferring to keep her identity private. She uses an anime image for her profile photo and selects "unknown" for gender.

"For identity, it's not that important because what matters is playing in Mobile Legends. I use an anime picture for the profile photo, and gender is set to 'unknown'" (Interview with TA, 2024).

This approach shows that for some players, virtual identity is merely a formality that does not warrant special attention, especially if they feel it is irrelevant to their gaming experience.

Female players in Mobile Legends Bang Bang often have to strategize about their identities within a male-dominated community. In this community, there is pressure for female players to conform to norms that are often disadvantageous to them. Toxic behavior related to their gender, as revealed in interviews with SFA and ER, indicates that female players are frequently subjected to discriminatory treatment simply because of their gender.

Female players who choose to reveal their identities accurately often face various forms of toxic behavior, from mockery to harassment. Meanwhile, those who opt to keep their identities private do so as a form of self-protection, avoiding stigma and discrimination they might face.

This situation creates a complex dynamic where female players must continuously navigate social challenges in the game. Although Mobile Legends provides freedom to configure virtual identities, the gaming environment is often not welcoming to female players. They must adopt certain strategies to protect themselves, either by adjusting their virtual identities or altering how they interact within the game. Figure 1. shows an example of online game player identities.



Figure 1. Example of Online Game Player Identities Male Dominance in Mobile Legends Bang Bang

Toxic behavior in communication involves actions that violate social norms, including insults, slurs, and derogatory remarks, targeting intelligence, ethnicity, race, religion, nationality, and sexual harassment. Online games provide a platform for such toxic behavior due to their anonymous nature and the ability to connect through the internet, enabling users to interact with others without revealing their identities.

Mobile Legends Bang Bang is a highly competitive game where teamwork plays a crucial role in achieving victory. The objective is to destroy the opponent's

ten turret towers and the main base turret. Interviews with research informants reveal that Mobile Legends Bang Bang is predominantly male. One informant stated:

“Everyone knows that most players are male. Even in tournaments, males dominate, and if there are female players, they are very rare” (Interview with SFA, 2023).

This aligns with an interview with Martinus Manurung, Head of Marketing & Business Development E-Sports at Moonton, reported on suara.com on August 12, 2021. He stated that Mobile Legends Bang Bang players in Indonesia number over 34 million, with a gender composition of 80% male and 20% female.

This dominance is evident not only in player numbers but also in the community, tournaments, organizations, and related groups. SFA emphasizes that male dominance in tournaments is very strong, with female participants being extremely rare, reflecting the overall male dominance in the Mobile Legends community. SM, another informant, added that the Mobile Legends community on social media platforms like WhatsApp and in real life is almost entirely male, creating a less inclusive environment for women. As stated:

“Knowing this from joining the ML community on WhatsApp or in real life, the community is mostly male, and there are a lot of males.” (Interview with SM, 2024).

Toxic Communication Behavior in Mobile Legends Bang Bang

The phenomenon of toxic communication behavior in MLBB is a significant concern and has received serious attention within the gaming community. Informant BFH, who works as an influencer in the E-Sports industry, mentioned that toxic behavior in MLBB is more prevalent compared to other games she has played. She stated:

Maybe it's understandable among both new and veteran Mobile Legends players, as I've experienced toxic players even now. This is a negative aspect of MLBB because, as a gamer myself who plays various types of games, whether on mobile or PC, I've noticed that toxic behavior is more prevalent in Mobile Legends.” (Interview with BFH, 2024).

A similar experience is shared by YL, who frequently faces toxic behavior due to perceived poor gameplay. As YL is still adjusting to the game, they often encounter harsh comments.

SFA also adds that almost every time they play for 2-3 hours, they encounter toxic players. This indicates that toxic behavior has become a common and even normalized part of the game. As SFA remarks:

“In 2-3 hours of playing, there's always someone being toxic.” (Interview with SFA, 2023).

Many informants have direct experiences with toxic behavior in this game, even from the start of their gaming journey. For instance, CPD recalls being shocked by extremely harsh insults when they first started playing.

Toxic behavior in MLBB extends beyond the virtual confines of the game itself. With the rise of social media and digital platforms, such behavior also spreads through various channels like YouTube, livestreaming, and other social media content. This phenomenon is discussed in journals such as “Symbolic Violence in Online Games (Analysis of Hate Speech with Religious Content in Mobile Legends on Streaming),” which addresses how offensive language including elements of SARA (ethnic, religious, racial, and sexual harassment) and personal attacks frequently appear in comment sections on YouTube and other streaming platforms.

This behavior illustrates that the Mobile Legends Bang Bang environment has become a venue where expressions of hatred and verbal violence flourish, not only within the game but also outside it through broader platforms. This indicates that toxic communication has become a wider issue affecting not just players but also viewers and other social media users.

According to informants ER and BFH, toxic behavior is also reinforced by content creators and public figures who serve as role models for many players. ER highlights how public figures can rapidly influence their followers' behavior. When public figures or content creators use offensive or toxic language, this behavior tends to be mimicked by their fans. ER reveals that many players imitate the speech and actions of their idols, which further entrenches toxic culture in the gaming community.

“Social media has a significant impact. For example, if public figure A uses crude language, who wouldn't follow their lead? This is because there's a toxic communication factor from public figures as well.” (Interview with ER, 2023).

ER's statement is supported by BFH, who says:

“On social media, especially in YouTube content, livestreams, or Mobile Legends tournaments, there is certainly toxic behavior as well.” (Interview with BFH, 2024).

ER's statement is corroborated by BFH, who asserts that toxic behavior is not limited to the game but also appears in YouTube content, livestreaming, and Mobile Legends tournaments. This shows that content creators have a significant impact on shaping player behavior, both positively and negatively.

Furthermore, toxic behavior extends beyond the virtual realm and can be observed in real-life environments as well, as experienced by SM with their partner and classmates who also exhibit toxic behavior. As SM describes:

“It's quite evident because my own partner plays and is also toxic, and my classmates are extremely toxic as well. I frequently observe this phenomenon based on my own experiences.” (Interview with SM, 2024).

Toxic behaviors in MLBB can be categorized into: derogatory behavior, gender discrimination, sexism, and racism.

Degrading Behavior in Mobile Legends: Bang Bang (MLBB)

Degrading behavior, often referred to as toxic behavior, is commonly observed in the online game Mobile Legends: Bang Bang (MLBB). This behavior not only reflects a lack of respect towards fellow players but can also impact the social dynamics within the game, particularly for those in vulnerable positions or with limited gaming skills.

GA, one of the informants, describes how degrading behavior is frequently directed at players perceived as less skilled. GA acknowledges his own limitations in the game and explains that this often makes him a target for insults from other players. GA attempts to remain composed and not retaliate against toxic behavior, although he often feels "resigned" when faced with abuse. This statement illustrates how players with lower skill levels often become targets for degrading behavior and how they try to cope with the situation by accepting their shortcomings without further confrontation.

CPD provides another example of how degrading behavior can arise even when someone tries to adhere to existing norms. CPD explains that he always strives to play well and politely informs his teammates about his limitations in mastering a specific role, namely mage. However, rather than receiving understanding, CPD is considered "selfish" by his team. This experience shows that even efforts to be polite and follow norms are not always appreciated, and players who try to perform well can still become targets of degrading behaviour.

YL faces a similar situation when competing with teammates for the use of a hero he excels at. Although tensions arise, YL chooses to yield and adapt to his teammates' preferences. YL's decision reflects how players try to avoid conflict by yielding, even when they believe their skills in that role are superior.

Degrading behavior in MLBB is a manifestation of a toxic culture that has permeated the gaming community. Despite some players' efforts to maintain norms and play well, they remain targets of degrading behavior due to their skill limitations or broader social pressures, such as those experienced by female players. Gender stereotypes and social dynamics that prioritize gaming skills over positive attitudes contribute to the perpetuation of degrading behavior in this game. It is crucial to understand that this behavior not only affects individual gaming experiences but can also undermine community cohesion as a whole.

In online gaming communities like MLBB, toxic behavior and the use of harsh language often become part of player interactions. Observations in the game reveal that terms like "n**b" are widely used to demean other players, both male and female. This term, originating from "newbie," initially referred to new players but has evolved into an insult to describe someone perceived as unskilled, weak, or playing poorly.

The use of derogatory terms such as "n**b" and other insults not only creates an unfriendly environment but also reinforces power dynamics and dominance within the game. This behavior often aims to belittle and pressure other players, both psychologically and socially.

Interestingly, while such toxic behavior targets all players, there are differences in how it impacts male and female players. For male players, insults like "n**b" are often linked to their game performance or skill deficiencies. However, for female players, such insults are frequently compounded by gender elements, where they are not only criticized for their performance but also subjected to persistent gender stereotypes within the gaming community. For example, assumptions that women are less competent gamers often make them more vulnerable to such insults.

The use of harsh language such as "n**b," "anj*ng," "t*lol," "noob," "bang*at," "j*ncuk," and sexual slurs reflects the prevalent degrading behavior in MLBB. These terms are commonly used to express frustration or anger, and their usage aligns with patterns of discrimination against female players in online gaming environments. Research by Pramesty (2021) confirms that these terms are part of a broader pattern of discrimination in gaming (Pramesty, 2021).

In other regions, such as the United States, toxic behavior in online games is also present. For instance, Saarinen (2017) one informant from a scientific study reported being called a cheater and facing extreme insults, including wishes for cancer. Similarly, terms like "whore" and "retard" are used in the U.S to insult and demean players (Saarinen 2017). In the Philippines, Amestoso (2023) phrases like "putang ina mo," "bobo," and "lesbians" are common insults in the gaming community, reflecting similar patterns of toxic communication. In Singapore Blackburn (2014) terms like "noob" and "retard" are used internationally, while sarcasm is also employed to insult players.

Such environments dominated by toxic behavior can diminish enjoyment and satisfaction, prompting players to adopt defensive mechanisms, which will be discussed in the following sections. Observational results also highlight that derogatory terms like "n**b" are used extensively to describe players perceived as unskilled or performing poorly, reinforcing the hostile nature of interactions in MLBB.

This study reveals that toxic communication behavior in Mobile Legends: Bang Bang is not only prevalent but also significantly influenced by strong gender stigma. Based on interviews with several informants, there is a clear tendency towards discrimination against female players, evident in the way they are treated by male players.

Gender Discrimination

Toxicity in communication within the game not only impacts the gaming experience but also creates an unfriendly and unsafe environment for female players. Women often become targets of unpleasant behavior due to their small numbers, including sexual harassment, gender-based insults, and discrimination. This is illustrated by numerous cases shared by informants in this study, where they frequently encounter degrading and inappropriate actions from male players. Amestoso (2023) discusses gender bias in the Philippines, where male players are perceived as more aggressive and dominant, thus placing them in a superior group compared to female players in Mobile Legends: Bang Bang.

This gender inequality also creates additional pressure for female players. They have to work harder to gain recognition in the game and often face negative stereotypes that suggest they are less competent than male players.

Interviews are supported by observational data from conversations within the MLBB online game, which shows toxic behavior expressed towards female players, as seen in terms such as "cewek go***k legend 5" and "cewek go***k." In the context of MLBB, the term "cewek go***k legend 5" is an insult or derision directed at a female player ranked at Legend V. "Cewek" refers to female players, "go***k" is a derogatory Indonesian term meaning "stupid" or "unintelligent," and "legend 5" refers to the Legend V rank, one of the ranks in MLBB. This phenomenon is also observed in the Philippines, where female players experience unwanted threats, rude behavior, and even harassment related to their abilities. There is a stereotype that female players are considered less competent by male players in Mobile Legends.

Such phrases can be interpreted as demeaning remarks aimed at a female player perceived as incapable at Legend V rank. Terms like these are examples of toxic behavior frequently encountered in the online gaming community.



Figure 2. Forms of Insults by Mobile Legends Players Towards Female Players

All female players who were interviewed for this study reported experiencing unpleasant toxic communication behaviors, ranging from insults on intelligence to the use of derogatory language related to animals, genitalia, ethnicity, and race, as well as sexual harassment and forms of intimidation and threats.

SFA, one of the interviewees, revealed that she often becomes a target of gender-based taunts. As she explained:

"There's a lot of gender discrimination, with people calling female players 'stupid girls,' 'dumb girls,' saying they can't play ML. It gets frustrating sometimes when they bring gender into it. Maybe at that time, I wasn't playing seriously, so I got that kind of treatment, but I don't accept it when they bring up being a woman." (Interview with SFA, 2023).

This statement illustrates that female players are often demeaned solely because of their gender, being perceived as unsuitable or less competent in gaming, particularly in Mobile Legends: Bang Bang.

Female players in the Philippines also face stereotypes such as being labeled as lesbians or homosexuals, as explained in Amestoso (2023). These stereotypes arise from the notion that female players are intruding into a space supposedly reserved for male players.

A similar experience was shared by ER, who often receives insults when choosing heroes that are considered masculine, which, according to community norms, are deemed inappropriate for her gender. She explained:

"When I use Zilong, I usually get insulted with comments like, 'Zilong is ugly, you're a girl, you should use Nana. No girl doesn't use Nana,' or remarks like, 'Why is a girl playing Mobile Legends? Are you looking for a guy? Can you even play, being a girl?'" (Interview with ER, 2023).

In this case, ER faced discrimination not only due to her choice of hero but also for the assumption that she might be playing the game just to attract male attention, rather than out of genuine interest in the game itself.

GA, another interviewer, highlighted how gender stigma affects others' perceptions of her role in the game:

"I play mid or mage, so some players know I'm female because of the role I use, which is mid. They often insult me technically, saying things like 'Just a mage,' or 'Basic CBM, only can play mage,' and 'CBM' is quite common." (Interview with GA, 2024).

This shows that female players who choose specific roles in the team are often reduced to demeaning stereotypes, such as being seen as only capable of using heroes considered "easier" or less "technical."

SM, in her experience, also faced discrimination from her peers regarding her game tier. SM explained in her interview:

"Usually, with my classmates, their tier is always higher, so I get left behind and often lose when playing solo. Sometimes they say things like, 'Where's medy, not yet mythic?'" (Interview with SM, 2024).

This indicates that, in addition to gender factors, game level also serves as a basis for discrimination, where players deemed less competitive are frequently targeted by toxic behavior.

Sexist and Racist Behavior

Women in the Mobile Legends: Bang Bang online gaming community frequently experience gender discrimination and sexual harassment, both verbally and through other actions. Interviews revealed that female players often encounter verbal sexual harassment, such as insults and sexual comments. While toxic behavior is not limited to a specific gender, female players report frequent sexual harassment. ER described her experience with sexual harassment as follows:

"Discrimination or harassment can involve requests for acquaintance that ultimately lead to insults when I refuse. It even escalates to sexual harassment, such as 'you're easy to use,' and other sexually oriented

questions like 'how much last night?' which is extremely offensive." (Interview with ER, 2023).

ER is not alone; CPD, SFA, SM, and TA also reported various forms of harassment. CPD's experience, as shared in the interview, highlights a form of sexual harassment occurring on online platforms. This harassment includes not only direct verbal abuse but also messages with sexual connotations without clear grounds, such as comments about her profile photo, which was not vulgar. This reflects how harassers exploit online platforms to assert dominance by objectifying women. CPD's discomfort indicates an awareness of the inappropriateness of such behavior, emphasizing the need for education and awareness about digital sexual harassment. She stated:

"I experienced sexual harassment, like being asked to moan, receiving hourly rate inquiries, and when I set a profile photo showing just my face, someone messaged me saying, 'I can see your cleavage.' I found this unusual since the photo was not revealing, yet they could describe cleavage." (Interview with CPD, 2024).

SFA, SM, and TA provided testimonies of various forms of sexual harassment on the Mobile Legends platform. SFA reported experiencing catcalling after games, indicating that harassment extends beyond gameplay into personal communication. She explained:

"I've received catcalling while on mic, usually after the game ends. People often message me to get acquainted." (Interview with SFA, 2023).

SM described encountering indecent requests and sexual exploitation, revealing that verbal sexual exploitation remains a significant issue within the gaming community:

"When I play well, enemies would ask me to moan or give personal contact. They would even message in Mobile Legends asking for my WhatsApp number and making inappropriate requests. I've also heard of a fellow Mobile Legends player being publicly harassed and invited to inappropriate places." (Interview with SM, 2024).

TA's experience highlights serious threats of sexual harassment related to her female in-game identity, illustrating how sexual threats are used to intimidate and control victims:

"In 2016 and 2017, using a personal photo and female gender in-game, I faced harassment such as threats of rape and other severe remarks." (Interview with TA, 2024).

This phenomenon indicates that communities like Mobile Legends still present unsafe environments for women, where toxic behavior is not only prevalent but often ignored or normalized within the community itself. CPD's testimony reveals racial insults experienced on the Mobile Legends platform, where she was demeaned and called 'chindo' with derogatory connotations. This demonstrates how ethnic identity can become a target for insults in the gaming community, aiming to undermine both her abilities as a player and her dignity as an individual. CPD chose

to remain silent after the racial insults, possibly reflecting a sense of powerlessness or inability to challenge such behavior in an unsupportive environment:

"Someone messaged me through ML DM, saying 'no wonder you're chindo,' calling me names like 'selfish Chinese,' and saying if I'm not good, I shouldn't play. This was extremely racist, but I just let it go." (Interview with CPD, 2024).

This discrimination shows how women are often treated unfairly compared to male players, with such behavior extending beyond the gaming environment to virtual chat platforms.

Differences in Perception of Toxic Behavior Based on Communication Context

Toxic behavior in online games, particularly in Mobile Legends: Bang Bang (MLBB), is widely recognized by players from various backgrounds. Perceptions of this behavior vary depending on the communication context and the individuals involved.

Some interviewees indicated that toxic behavior is considered normal or even necessary within the MLBB community. For example, ER stated, "If it's not toxic, it's not fun." This suggests that toxicity is seen as an integral part of the gaming experience, almost as if it's a social norm to meet community expectations. Similarly, SFA remarked, "If you play Mobile Legends and aren't toxic, you might be the odd one out," reflecting how toxic behavior has been normalized to the extent that not participating is viewed as unusual. GA also acknowledged that while this behavior is "not normal," it is prevalent within the MLBB community. Regina's (2023) research supports this, showing that toxic behavior, including harsh animal insults, is common among Mobile Legends players and often results from factors like teamwork issues and potential losses. According to Dan Brennan (2020), toxic players exhibit traits such as mood instability and drama, creating conflicts.

On the other hand, some players view toxic behavior with concern. CPD described the negative impact of toxic behavior on her younger sibling, who displays aggressive behavior and excessive anger after losses, such as throwing his phone. This indicates that while toxicity may be normalized among adults, its effects on younger, impressionable players are troubling. YL emphasized that toxic behavior "should be reduced and not normalized," noting its potential negative impact on younger players. This highlights awareness of the long-term consequences of toxic behavior, especially for younger or less experienced players who may not fully grasp the implications of damaging verbal interactions.

Perceptions of toxic behavior are greatly influenced by the communication context. For some players like ER and SFA, toxic behavior is seen as part of the game's social dynamics, making interactions "interesting" or "challenging." They may view it as a form of self-expression or a way to stand out in competition. Conversely, players like CPD and YL see toxic behavior as having more serious consequences, particularly when it affects real-life attitudes and behaviors. This is especially significant for interactions involving younger players, who might struggle to separate in-game behavior from socially acceptable behavior outside of the game.

Significant differences in perceptions of toxic behavior based on communication context have been revealed. In virtual interactions, especially with unknown or anonymous players, toxic behavior is often seen as a serious and disturbing attack. However, in face-to-face situations or when conducted by known friends, the same behavior is frequently perceived as teasing and not taken seriously, as ER noted:

“Usually, the toxicity comes from being too familiar. For example, male friends might say, ‘You’re such a dog, you’re playing badly,’ but because we’re close, I take it as playful teasing and respond in kind.” (Interview with ER, 2023).

SFA, TA, and BFH also indicated a tendency to tolerate or even view toxic behavior as a joke when it comes from close friends in face-to-face situations. Despite encountering toxic behavior, they tend to "justify" it or not dwell on it, feeling it is part of gaming culture or not wanting to appear "weak." This shows how real-world norms, such as attitudes towards women who are too harsh or not "sweet," can influence responses to toxic behavior in games. It highlights how interpersonal relationships and familiarity can alter one's perception of behavior that might otherwise be considered inappropriate or offensive.

Some interviewees, such as CPD and SM, experienced emotional distress from toxic behavior, despite some viewing it as a joke. CPD, for instance, felt stressed and chose to distance herself from friends after experiencing verbal and physical harassment. This demonstrates that while some may regard toxic behavior as humor, it can cause emotional harm and damage relationships for others:

“I’ve had an experience with friends at a café where, if you play poorly, they would physically hit and insult you, saying things like ‘You’re such a dog, uninstall the game.’ It hurt, and I ended up ignoring them for a month before reconciling.” (Interview with CPD, 2024).

SM revealed that toxic behavior could even trigger conflicts in romantic relationships, such as arguments with a partner focused on "win rate":

“With friends, insults like ‘You’re an idiot’ or questioning if you can play well are common. I also argue with my partner over the win rate; if we lose, he often criticizes me.” (Interview with SM, 2024).

This indicates that toxic behavior not only affects individuals directly but can also damage interpersonal relationships, whether among friends or partners.

Some interviewees, like CPD, choose to distance themselves from toxic situations or individuals, either by avoiding interactions temporarily or by emotionally isolating themselves. This reflects self-defense mechanisms used to protect against the negative effects of such behavior. Responses to toxic behavior are influenced by the social and cultural environment in which they occur. This means that toxic behavior can have varying impacts depending on the context and interpersonal relationships involved. While some may tolerate or overlook such behavior in familiar settings, for others, it can cause emotional pain and affect their relationships. This underscores the complexity of toxic behavior in communication and the importance of understanding context and relationship dynamics.

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Interviewees also indicated that there is social pressure on women not to exhibit toxic behavior due to concerns about negative perceptions from male players. Although toxic behavior is common in games, women exhibiting such behavior often face negative stigma both within and outside the game. This reflects a double standard where the same behavior is accepted or even expected from men but not from women.

Discriminatory and harassing behavior that starts in the game often continues and even worsens when interactions move to other platforms, such as chat apps. Behavior that begins in the game is not always confined to the virtual space. When interactions extend beyond the game, toxic behavior can become more personal and offensive, particularly in the context of sexual harassment. The shift from “sweet” behavior in-game to more abusive or demeaning behavior on other platforms indicates how anonymity and platform transitions can exacerbate discriminatory behavior.

Female Players' Responses to Toxic Behavior in Mobile Legends: Bang Bang

Before starting a game of Mobile Legends: Bang Bang, some female players, such as GA, prepare their mental state and mood. GA explains that this preparation is crucial for maintaining calm and avoiding toxic behavior, especially when feeling unwell. By preparing mentally, GA aims to avoid situations that could trigger negative emotional reactions. This indicates that for some players, a stable mental state is key to handling potential toxic behavior in the game. Conversely, other interviewees, such as ER, do not feel the need for specific preparation before playing. ER considers the in-game environment as something normal and not requiring special preparation, despite being aware of the potential for toxic behavior. ER also noted that one way to mitigate the effects of toxic communication is by turning off the microphone (off mic) or using the blacklist feature to block certain players. This reflects a more relaxed but still cautious approach to potential disruptions.

Female players in Mobile Legends: Bang Bang use various methods to handle toxic behavior. The majority of interviewees, like BFH and YL, opt to turn off communication features (off mic, mute chat) and blacklist players displaying toxic behavior. They take these actions to create a more conducive gaming environment and reduce distractions that could affect their concentration.

BFH not only turns off the mic and chat but also chooses not to react to toxic behavior encountered. According to BFH, the most effective approach is to avoid responding or getting emotionally involved, thus preventing the escalation of conflicts. YL also adopts a similar approach, emphasizing the importance of remaining calm and not reacting to provocations.

Other interviewees, such as SM, prefer a more confrontational approach to toxic behavior. SM admitted to frequently reprimanding other players who display toxic behavior in a firm but polite manner. She tries to remind offenders to be respectful, especially if the behavior is coming from friends or male players:

“When dealing with friends, I might say something like, ‘Can you watch your language?’ or with guys, I usually ask them politely if they can behave better.” (Interview with SM, 2024).

SFA, TA, and CPD also take similar approaches, opting to respond to toxic behavior with appropriate words as a form of self-defense. For instance, SFA feels that responding to insults is a way to maintain self-respect and demonstrate that she will not passively accept mistreatment.

Additionally, CPD revealed that she took further action after experiencing sexual harassment in the game. She chose to remove her profile photo to avoid further harassment. This action demonstrates that toxic behavior, particularly sexual harassment, can impact how female players choose to present their identities in the game, with some opting to hide their identities for safety:

"They insulted me, often with harassment, so I reported it as harassment and removed my profile photo. I no longer use a profile picture." (Interview with CPD, 2024).

One common response among nearly all interviewees is the use of the report feature provided by the game developers. This feature is used to report players who exhibit inappropriate or unsportsmanlike behavior. TA explained that they frequently report toxic players directly to the Mobile Legends: Bang Bang developers. GA also utilizes this feature, especially when dealing with players who perform poorly or display disruptive behavior. By utilizing the report feature, the interviewees aim to maintain the integrity and safety of the gaming environment.

Co-Cultural Communication Approach

Mark Obe's co-cultural theory focuses on marginalized or oppressed groups, examining how they interact with dominant groups through three approaches: assimilation, accommodation, and separation, with varying degrees of non-assertive, assertive, and aggressive behaviors. This study aims to analyze the communication approaches used by female players in Mobile Legends: Bang Bang.

Interviewees generally perceive toxic behavior as something they have little power over and prefer to ignore it. For instance, YL describes her view on toxic communication as follows:

"There are many inappropriate words, and you can't just ignore them because they can impact other players. I can't really intervene too much; I focus on playing the game and having fun. But toxic communication in MLBB should indeed be avoided for the common good." (Interview with YL, 2024).

YL feels uneasy about toxic behavior and fears its impact, but she feels powerless to address it. TA shares a similar perspective:

"At first, I was mentally shaken, usually because of losing and then not wanting to play again, but it didn't last long. It's not worth traumatizing people, just frustrating." (Interview with TA, 2024).

Both YL and TA have similar views on the impact of toxic communication. BFH, an influencer in the eSports industry, explains the concern about the effects of such behavior on individuals who are mentally vulnerable, easily stressed, or even at risk of serious harm:

"In Mobile Legends, it's severe. For someone receiving toxic behavior, someone like me who can stay indifferent might not find it too troubling, but

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for those who react, it can cause stress, make them anxious, or affect their mental health and even threaten their well-being.” (Interview with BFH, 2024).

As BFH explains, reactions to toxic communication vary. The researcher found that GA attempts to adapt to and adopt the toxic communication behaviors herself:

“Maybe because I adapt easily, it becomes common. I admit I often insult other players. I do it because I’ve been treated that way and don’t want to back down, so I retaliate. When insulted, I stay silent, but if my team’s performance is lacking, I usually start with insults, and when I dominate in gameplay, I often taunt the enemies by typing provoking comments.” (Interview with GA, 2024).

GA tries to adopt toxic communication behaviors. In contrast, CPD had a different reaction and even stopped playing Mobile Legends: Bang Bang for six months due to toxic communication:

“In 2021, I took a break from ML for about six months because of the behavior. Sometimes, playing with friends, they would be rude. When asked why I stopped playing ML, I’d say I didn’t want to get emotional with them. I’d avoid using the mic when not playing with friends or when playing with strangers to avoid being insulted again. Now, I understand that almost all guys who play ML are toxic, so I’ve come to accept that.” (Interview with CPD, 2024).

CPD describes her fear of toxic communication, which led to a six-month hiatus and a defensive reaction towards friends. Differences in perspectives and reactions to toxic communication lead female players to adapt in various ways. They need to develop effective communication strategies to play in a conducive environment.

Based on roles, views, preparations, and actions taken by the interviewees, the researcher analyzes their communication approaches. The findings suggest that most female players use an assertive accommodation approach. Out of six interviewees, five fit the assertive accommodation approach, while two others exhibit traits of both aggressive assimilation and non-assertive separation alongside assertive accommodation. Female players in MLBB attempt to use the dominant group’s network to survive, treating toxic communication among real-life friends as mere teasing and being open and genuine in communicating with the dominant group. This is evident from their confidence in accurately presenting their virtual identities.

Assertive accommodation is also seen in the interviewees reporting toxic behavior to game developers. Additionally, SFA attempts to educate the dominant group by challenging gender discrimination in Mobile Legends: Bang Bang.

SM also shows a tendency towards assertive accommodation by trying to educate the dominant group about norms within the co-cultural group, as seen in how SM communicates with close friends. TA shares a similar tendency, addressing toxic communication by reporting it to the developers, while BFH remains open about her identity and genuine in communicating with the dominant group, disregarding toxic behavior.

Other approaches include CPD and YL, who lean towards non-assertive separation. CPD isolates herself after experiencing toxic behavior from friends and avoids playing for six months. Similarly, YL focuses on strengthening her mental state to continue playing Mobile Legends and avoids joining groups or communities in the game.

In contrast to previous interviewees, GA demonstrates an aggressive assimilation approach, adapting to and adopting dominant group behaviors. GA mirrors toxic communication behaviors and conceals her virtual identity to avoid the dominant group, thereby blending in with them.

These differences in roles, views, preparations, and actions lead to various co- cultural communication approaches among the interviewees, illustrating how they adapt to the phenomenon of toxic communication in different ways.

Discussion

The goals and motivations for playing Mobile Legends Bang Bang include seeking entertainment, filling leisure time, joining a community, and expanding networks, with the excitement of the game being a primary motivation. The game is seen as a source of enjoyable entertainment that attracts players, and some informants are actively involved in tournaments and esports events, adding a competitive dimension to their motivation. Although playing Mobile Legends Bang Bang is viewed as a leisure activity, the informants exhibit a high level of dedication, with many playing frequently, some even for 4-5 hours a day. This indicates a high level of engagement and commitment among female players in Mobile Legends Bang Bang.

The informants demonstrate a high level of skill and achievement in Mobile Legends Bang Bang, as reflected by their ranks, which are generally at the highest levels, such as Epic, Legend, and Mythical Glory. In this highly competitive game, ranks determine the level of play, and the informants consider communication roles crucial for winning each match. However, opinions on the importance of communication vary depending on the game mode, whether Classic or Ranked. Virtual identity in Mobile Legends Bang Bang is significant for female players, who often face toxic behavior and gender-based discrimination in the gaming environment.

The decision to disclose or conceal virtual identity is a strategy used by female players to protect themselves in a male-dominated gaming community. In the Mobile Legends Bang Bang (MLBB) gaming community, female players frequently encounter toxic communication driven by gender discrimination. This study reveals various forms of toxic communication experienced by female informants in Mobile Legends Bang Bang, including (1) derogatory behavior (insults and slurs), (2) gender and sexist discrimination, and (3) racism that often occurs in interactions between players, both virtually and in real life.

Sexual harassment is a common form of toxic communication, with testimonies from informants highlighting instances of flirting or coercion through chat or voice messages, including invitations to meet, comments based on profile The Co-Cultural Ommunication Approach of Female Players in Facing Toxic Communication Behavior in Mobile Legends Bang Bang

photos and hero selection, and sexual threats and intimidation through personal messages in Mobile Legends Bang Bang. Racism and gender discrimination are also reported, with insults, intimidation, and threats impacting the mental well-being of the informants. These findings align with Pramesty's (2021) research, which explains that entrenched social roles for women contribute to male players discriminating against female players.

The deep-rooted understanding that women should be confined to domestic roles, rather than participating in gaming, results in female gamers being treated differently. Reasons for toxic communication behaviors, according to the informants, include: 1) informants being aware of their poor gameplay, 2) incorrect hero or role selection, and 3) external factors such as content creators and public figures on social media exhibiting similar behaviors, which are then adopted by players in Mobile Legends Bang Bang.

Female players often need to manage perceptions and stigma related to their presence in the gaming community. Interview data show that they face challenges in proving their competence and overcoming negative stereotypes. Female players frequently seek support from female-only communities or create safer spaces for themselves, which may involve joining women-specific communities, participating in inclusive events and tournaments, or supporting each other through social media and other platforms.

Intercultural communication discusses interactions between individuals or groups from different cultural backgrounds, including ethnic, gender, social, and other subcultures. Mark Orbe's co-cultural communication theory (Littlejohn, 2009) is adopted from intercultural communication to address the gap between majority and minority groups, where minority groups often need to develop communication strategies to interact with the majority, due to the majority's values being considered normal or ideal.

Orbe's co-cultural communication theory helps understand how minority groups, in this case, female players, interact and survive in environments dominated by the majority, namely male players. According to the Co-Cultural Communication Theory, minority groups like female players in Mobile Legends Bang Bang must negotiate with norms and power established by the majority. The Co-Cultural Theory also explains how minority groups often occupy lower power positions. Female players face pressure to prove themselves in a male-dominated MLBB environment, feeling the need to demonstrate competence beyond what is required of male players to gain recognition and acceptance within the community.

Orbe identifies various strategies that co-cultural groups can use to communicate and interact in potentially hostile environments. In the context of this research on Mobile Legends Bang Bang, several strategies used by female players to adapt to the game culture and conceal their identities can be categorized as "non-assertive separatism" (Non-assimilation aggressive).

Non-assertive separatism is a strategy in Co-Cultural Communication where non-dominant group members choose to keep their distance from the dominant group passively or non-confrontationally. In this case, female players who conceal their virtual identities (e.g., not disclosing their real names, gender, or using anime pictures) do so to avoid potential discrimination, harassment, or toxic behavior from

other, more dominant players (e.g., male players who often display rude or derogatory behavior).

Assertive separation: Players firmly refuse to assimilate with dominant norms that marginalize them but do not fully leave the community. They respond to insults as a form of self-defense and to show that they will not submit to such treatment. Avoidance by turning off the mic in Mobile Legends Bang Bang (MLBB) falls under the category of "non-assertive separation" in Co-Cultural Communication Theory. Non-assertive separation is a strategy where individuals avoid interaction or engagement with dominant groups or unsafe environments without direct confrontation. In this case, turning off the mic is a form of avoidance that allows female players to distance themselves from potential toxic behavior or unwanted communication without directly confronting the offenders. By turning off the mic, they reduce the likelihood of engaging in negative interactions and protect themselves from potential disruptions while continuing to play the game without completely withdrawing from the gaming community.

Assertive accommodation is a strategy where individuals actively and assertively advocate for change or equality in interactions with dominant groups while still attempting to participate and navigate within that environment. In this context, responding assertively to insults is an effort to maintain self-respect and assert one's position without avoiding or completely separating from the situation. This indicates that female players not only endure toxic behavior but also strive to confront it directly, hoping to alter the dynamics of interaction or at least assert that they will not passively accept such treatment. Strategies used by informants in the MLBB online game are presented in Table 3.

Table 3. Communication Strategies of Informants

No	Name	Strategy	Response/Action
1	BFH	Assertive Accommodation	Chooses to address toxic behavior politely, is open about their identity with the dominant group, and utilizes their network to communicate and endure toxic communication phenomena.
2	YL	Non-assertive Separation & Assertive Accommodation	Chooses to yield and adapt to the preferences of team members, reflecting an effort to avoid conflict by conceding, despite feeling that their skills in the role are superior.
3	SM	Assertive Accommodation	Chooses to remain silent about toxic communication behavior, utilizes the report and block features, and addresses the behavior politely while being open about their identity with the dominant group.
4	SM	Assertive Accommodation	Responds to toxic behavior with appropriate words, reports through features, and adapts to the phenomenon of toxic communication.
5	TA	Assertive Accommodation	Responds to toxic behavior with appropriate words, educates and addresses the dominant group, reports through features, utilizes their network to adapt to toxic communication phenomena.

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6	CPD	Non-assertive Separation & Assertive Accommodation	Chooses to isolate themselves when encountering such behavior from friends in real life, responds to toxic behavior with appropriate words, deletes profiles when encountering such behavior virtually, prepares mentally when playing, and has an understanding of toxic behavior towards male gender.
7	GA	Aggressive Assimilation & Assertive Accommodation	Chooses to conceal their identity and adopt the dominant group's culture (toxic behavior). If insulted, prefers to stay silent but will retaliate if playing well. Deletes identity from the bio profile and utilizes the dominant group's network when playing in real life.
8	ER	Assertive Accommodation	Prefers to use their network to normalize toxic communication behavior when conducted by peers in real life and does not hide their identity in Mobile Legends Bang Bang as a form of sincere communication with the dominant group, utilizes block features, and educates the dominant group

CONCLUSION

The study reveals that female players experience toxic behavior while playing Mobile Legends Bang Bang. This behavior manifests as trashing, including sexual harassment, racism, insults, intimidation, gender discrimination, and trolling (contextually inappropriate threats). Examples of such toxic communication in online games include insults like n**b, jnck, bngst, and cewek gblk. Female players in the study are fully aware of the reasons behind toxic communication, including poor gameplay, inappropriate hero and role selection, and the influence of public figures on social media.

The findings show that female players employ various co-cultural communication strategies, such as assertive accommodation, non-assertive separation, and aggressive assimilation. The most commonly adopted approach among female players is assertive accommodation, which involves responding firmly to toxic behavior. Female players address toxic behavior with appropriate words, educate and reprimand the dominant group, and use the report and block features. This demonstrates the strength and courage of female players in facing challenges, maintaining their dignity, asserting their position in community interactions, and striving to create a fairer and more inclusive environment. Female players adopting the non-assertive separation strategy respond to toxic behavior by isolating themselves, avoiding direct interaction with players exhibiting toxic behavior, and preferring non-confrontational strategies. The aggressive assimilation approach is adopted by female players by concealing their virtual identity to adapt to the dominant group.

These findings reflect the complexity of gender interactions within the gaming community, where female players often navigate male-dominated spaces filled with toxic behavior. This underscores the need for stronger interventions from game developers and the community to create a more inclusive and supportive environment.

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