

UNDERSTANDING THE EFFECTS OF LOCAL ESPORTS SCENES ON THE EMOTIONAL  
MATURITY OF YOUNG ADULTS

AP Research

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### Introduction

While new communities and flourishing scenes tend to bring happiness and joy to all, they come with a multitude of problems. Issues such as no supervision, abuse of power, and corruption tend to occur. This is exactly what is happening in the world of Esports. Esports, or short for Electronic Sports, is a form of competition in which players compete in sports-like tournaments through the use of video games. Esports first finding its origins around 1972 has shown explosive growth fielding hundred to thousand man tournaments, even selling out large venues such Madison Square Garden in New York. The growth of Esports is absolutely beautiful. One of the beauty of Esports is the unique and wide array of games available, from games such as League of Legends, to StarCraft 2, to Super Smash Bros Ultimate, almost any game that fields any competitiveness can be turned into an Esport. The University of New Haven states that the industry has reached 1.08 billion by the end of 2021, growing an outstanding 14.5% from 2020. Esports tournaments come in all sorts of shapes and sizes. Esports, similar to sports, have multiple games available, which allows for different types of tournaments. Games such as “Super Smash Brothers Ultimate” “Street Fighter” and “Tekken 7” have local scenes in which competitors can meet up locally and globally to compete. The ease of access to these tournaments have helped create a flourishing scene. But this accessibility has come with a strict cost.

In June of 2020, multiple Esports scenes underwent what has been dubbed a “Me-Too movement.” Over 100 people came forward with stories of sexual misconduct and harassment that they have suffered over the multiple years in the scene. Stories of abuse of power rained

rampant rapidly, and many of the biggest names in the industry found themselves exposed. The issue arrives when multiple people come forward, leading to an industrial problem. Brooke Thorne, a big streamer and gamer in Esports, who went under the pseudonym, “PressHeartToContinue” states in a New York Times article, “When there’s a ton of call-outs, it’s a problem with the industry.” While this mass exodus is healthy for the industry as it creates standards and better policies on these issues, it has become normalized and very apparent, which then brings us to the question. How does this affect our youth, who have looked up to these Esports players and competitors?

Esports competitions have one thing that traditionally differs them from normal sporting competitions. Ease of access. The ability to go to a tournament and immediately fight the best player in the world as your second round is something not seen in many other communities. The issue with this is how integrated children and young adults become into the scene. Joining social media such as twitter to discuss and talk about their community. When situations such as the “Me-Too movement” kids at a young age are introduced to these world issues and terrible situations. How would it affect their emotional maturity as they grow up through the scene?

### Literature Review

Four major works in this literature review overall talk about the background of highschool Esports, the Me-Too movement, the effects of drug and alcohol on the development of youth, and finally the perception of sexual abuse in youth sports. University of California - Irvine Students, Jason G. Reitman, Alexander Cho, and Constance Steinkuehler create and research into the analysis of High School Esports in the United States. They write about how established the collegiate scene is and explain the fundamental principles of how colleges run Esports teams. “Those interviews found that collegiate esports program creators in the US strategize around “(1)

structure and resources, (2) imagery and branding, and (3) alignment with existing values of athletics” (Reitman 7). They explain how this mindset and structure has gone on to affect and impact the high school scene. The main difference between the high school scene and collegiate scene is establishment. The high school Esports scene is currently vehemently underdeveloped. Reitman and co. briefly talk about the benefits fleetingly adding, “Schwartz (2018) noted that the North America Scholastic Esports Federation (NASEF) “has seen a decrease in school absenteeism among participants,” in addition to explaining some of the career opportunities these programs can lead to for students (Reitman 7)”. Now while Esports does have its benefits for highschool students the question is what type of Esports achieves this. There are two main types of Esports tournaments out there, national organized tournaments vs grassroots tournaments. The former are usually run by the company that creates the game and the latter are run by people who are simply passionate about the game, and are not contracted with the company. Reitman and co, find their discoveries for the current amount of highschool Esports programs below on Table 1.

**Table 1.** Overview of HS Esports Programs in the US

|                                                     | Top-down/<br>Bottom-up | Local/<br>National<br>Focus | # of<br>Member<br>Teams | League<br>Structure | Total<br>Season Prize<br>Purse<br>(across all<br>games) | Student Roles                        |
|-----------------------------------------------------|------------------------|-----------------------------|-------------------------|---------------------|---------------------------------------------------------|--------------------------------------|
| Current High School Starleague                      | Top-down               | National                    | –                       | –                   | –                                                       | –                                    |
| High School Esports League                          | Top-down               | National                    | 502                     | Seasons & playoffs  | 50,000 USD                                              | Internships                          |
| Youth Esports of America                            | Top-down               | National                    | 59                      | Seasons & playoffs  | 20,000 USD                                              | Internship, community managers       |
| Electronic Game Federation (EGFH)                   | Top-down               | Local                       | 81                      | Seasons & playoffs  | –                                                       | Coaches, analysts, managers          |
| North America Scholastic Esports Federation (NASEF) | Top-down               | Local                       | 38                      | Seasons & playoffs  | 4,750 USD                                               | Casters, community board members     |
| PlayVS                                              | Top-down               | National                    | 5,000                   | Seasons & playoffs  | –                                                       | –                                    |
| Eastern Pennsylvania High Schools (PA)              | Bottom-up              | Local                       | 1                       | –                   | –                                                       | –                                    |
| Guilford High School (IL)                           | Bottom-up              | Local                       | 1                       | –                   | –                                                       | –                                    |
| High School Esports Training Camp (TX)              | Bottom-up              | Local                       | 1                       | Invite tournaments  | –                                                       | –                                    |
| Racine Unified School District (WI)                 | Bottom-up              | Local                       | 15                      | Seasons & playoffs  | –                                                       | Coaches, managers, analysts, casters |
| Early High School Starleague                        | Hybrid                 | National                    | 750                     | Seasons & playoffs  | 20,000 USD                                              | Event organizers                     |

The knowledge gap that this article misses is more so the benefits and also negatives that high school Esports has on the grassroots local level. The tournaments were run by individuals and not companies. How those seem to affect emotional maturity, and how it benefits the individual competitor.

Researchers John T Holden, Thomas Baker, and Marc Edelman instead of discussing the positives of Esports instead discuss the “E-Too Movement.” They talk about the culture that gaming and Esports have had for many years writing, “It is thus not surprising that the historic anonymity of online gaming has fostered the growth of antisocial behavior where upwards of onethird of female gamers reported abuse or discrimination by male gamers, and ten percent of female gamers who participated in the study claimed to have been threatened with rape by male players during online play” (Holden 9). Overall, they discuss the negative effects the culture has had on women and the severe degree to what has been done to the community. An amplitude of things have been done to fix this, such as creating rules, regulations, and conducting panels. Grand Esports organizations such as “The League of Legends World Championships” have taken action to fix this, but other grassroots organizations have failed to do so. Holden later writes, “Online harassment is one of the most indelible aspects of the Internet. Even organizations that promote online freedom such as the Electronic Frontier Foundation have expressed concern about the effects of online harassment. The Foundation suggests that one of the major issues with combatting online harassment has not been a lack of law enforcement power, but rather an unwillingness to enforce existing laws against online harassers” (Holden 21). Holden here shows how integrated online harassment and harassment in general is in the gaming and online culture. While many organizations have attempted to stop this, not all can successfully do so. Grassroots organizations don't have the rules and backing to effectively deal with these, and the knowledge

gap with this article comes into play with no results on the issues that minors and the youth undergo. It solely talks about women.

Brian M Hicks later writes about the issue of drugs and alcohol on minors and young adults. Alcohol and drug abuse are one grand issue that persists in these Esports communities. Understanding and seeing how alcohol can affect the growth of young adults is perfect for my study as I want to see if there is a correlation between the Esports scene and introduction of alcohol. I want to understand how that affects their maturity emotionally and how detrimental it is for them growing up in a scene like that if they're more likely to be exposed to alcohol. Hicks writes in his article his findings regarding adolescent alcohol usage, "An adolescent onset of AUD (n = 57) was associated with severe deficits across multiple domains of psychosocial functioning in adolescence. Measures of behavioral disinhibition in adolescence were strong predictors of a persistent course of AUD (n = 93). Nearly 40% of men with an adolescent onset were able to desist by age 29, and were similar, but not identical to men who never experienced an AUD in terms of adult functioning. Men with an adolescent onset and persistent course of AUD exhibited the most severe deficits in functioning" (Hicks). Overall this showed that the introduction and use of alcohol for minors has lasting effects on them that changes their growth and maturity.

Lastly, Thomas Baker writes in his article about the perception of sexual abuse in youth sports about this issues and more. This is similar to Esports but also addresses a knowledge gap for the reason that many of the big names and faces that had been exposed for grooming and abusing minors were in fact coaches and public figures. In Bakers article, he describes how coaches sexually abuse their pupils. To do this they used different factors, they first looked and used the perceived prevalence of sexual abuse committed by pedophilic youth sport coaches, the

perceived likelihood that a coach is a pedophile, perceptions on how youth sport organizations should manage the risk of pedophilia, and media influence on participant perception. Researchers then ran two tests to test their hypothesis.

In conclusion, these articles analyze the overall description of Esports and issues of alcohol, drug, and sexual harassment on the youth, the current gap in research allows for understanding how these situations affect the emotional maturity of youth Esports players. Furthermore, it will provide a good insight into the effect of a grassroots scene vs a national established scene.

### Methodology:

The method of my study asks the question, “How do local Esports scenes affect the emotional maturity of young adults growing up in the scene.” I hypothesized that emotional maturity is affected and growth is affected by local Esports scenes in our youth. I have vehemently pondered on questions that could be asked to understand more of this data. As someone that has grown up respectively in a local Esports scene, I have seen much change in myself and I wanted to see if the correlation was due to being in the Esports scene. I hypothesize that there is an impact to this and it does affect emotional maturity. For my research I decided to do correlational research.

### Correlational Research

It is important to understand the type of research and investigations I did for my research. I decided to do correlational research. Correlational research as explained by Euclid Seeram, is “A type of nonexperimental research that facilitates prediction and explanation of the relationship among variables” (Seeram 1). In other words it is taking two variables and finding a

connection between the two. With my research and experimentation, I decided to find and explore a correlation between one's emotional maturity and whether or not they have grown up in an Esports scene. In order to achieve this I needed to give a survey to four different groups. First was the adults older than 18 that have grown up not participating/competing in an Esports scene, second the adults that did participate. Third, I wanted to gain perspectives of kids that are currently not growing up in an Esports scene and lastly kids that are currently growing up in an Esports scene. The children were asked to complete a parent permission form if they were under 18, which they did. All questions and the survey were then answered on Google Forms. The questions varied from Likert scale questions to own interpretation descriptive answers. I did this because I wanted to see the range of certain questions but also the participants' knowledge and full understanding about certain concepts. A ton of these concepts included emotional and life issues such as sexual assault, rape, and other serious elements. Through this I analyzed the data and came to correlate the two based on the knowledge and situations answered and given to me. I'll have a data sheet on google sheets to help organize my data and see and understand patterns from the four groups. Finally connections will be made to see how local Esports scenes will affect the emotional maturity of teens growing up in our day and age.

#### Hypothesis:

Originally starting off in my research question, I hypothesized that Esports has an affect on the emotional maturity of young adults and children. I believed that it will help people understand concepts such as sexual assault, gaslighting and many other terms. I suspected that kids growing up in the scene were being introduced to these concepts through the infamous Esports “Me-Too” movement, and other situations like substance abuse. It is crucial to recognize that through my research question I had made a claim, asking, “How does a Local Esports Scene affect the

emotional maturity” shows that I believe that local Esports scenes affect the maturity of the youth. Not Esports in general but the involvement of local Esports scenes.

### Background Questions:

To first start my survey and truly gain a grasp on everything, I needed to sort my participants and survey goes into four different groups. First I split into two different categories: Adults and Children. From there I split those two groups into two other groups, whether the adult/children is currently or has lived in an Esports scene. This would put them in different groups in which it would make it easier for me to collect data and answers.

Overall I collected around 56 responses, and the separation of groups went as follows as shown by Figure 1.

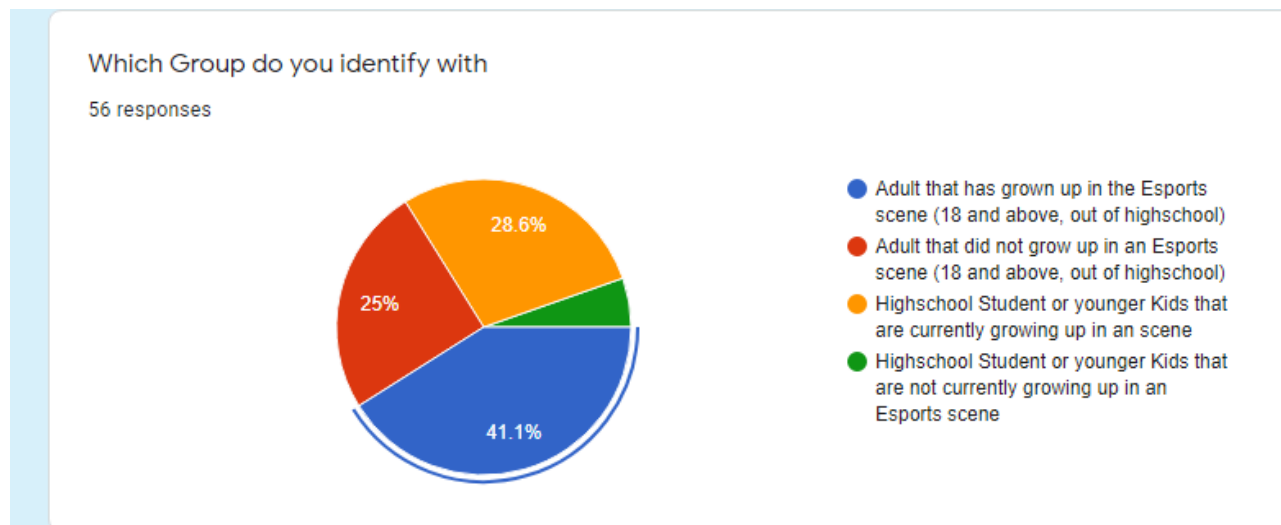


Figure 1. Total Group Respondents

Of my participants were Adults that did grow up in the scene, boasting a grand 41.1% of participants. High School students that are currently growing up, made up 28.6% and Adults that did not grow up make up 25%. Unfortunately 3% were highschool students that are not currently

growing up in an Esports scene. From here I was able to ask questions that would give me answers and create graphs of information in which I can see the different patterns between the groups.

### Likert Scale Questions:

To properly gauge the emotions and feelings of the participants of how certain situations in life would make them feel, I used Likert scale questions. The questions asked the participants to rank their answers from one to ten, where one would disagree/never whereas ten would agree/always. My chosen statements are as follows:

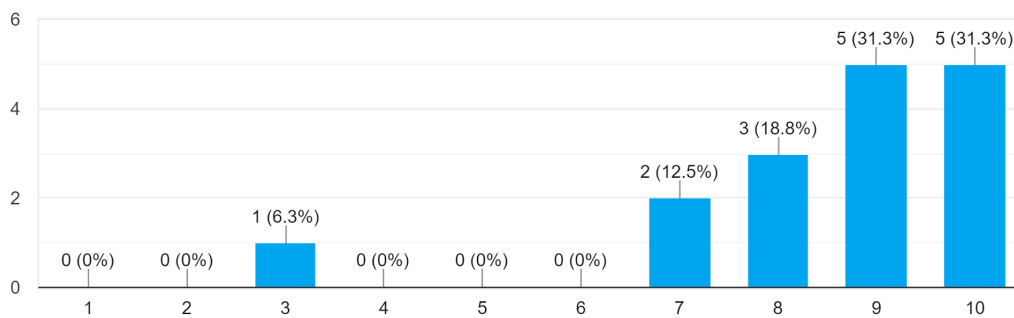
- If given life changing news how would you view that?
- If your significant other were to cheat on you, how would you take it?
- How familiar are you with the concept of sexual assault and the dangers of it?
- How do you feel when somebody challenges you to something you feel strongly about?
- How likely are your peers to know about your emotional state?
- How much does someone liking you/not liking you affect you?
- How readily do you admit mistakes and apologize?
- How likely are you to show empathy and match your feelings with another person in an interaction?
- How mature do you feel compared to your peers?

One of the more important questions, *How familiar are you with the concept of sexual assault and the dangers of it?*, tended to show small patterns in the difference of familiarity. Below are

the two graphs that show both children groups asked about their familiarity with the concept, where the first chart is the group that is growing up in Esports. The average person ranges around an 8.5 familiarity, whereas the other group ranged around a 7. One important note to add is the outliers for both groups have a 3, and a 4. The 3, belonging to the children growing up in the Esports scene. This shows that while on average kids in Esports are more likely to understand the concept it doesn't mean each and every one of them do.

*Figure 2. How Familiar Are You With the Concept of Sexual Assault Results (Children in Esports).*

How familiar are you with the concept of sexual assault and the dangers of it? (1-Not familiar, 10-Extremely familiar)  
16 responses



How familiar are you with the concept of sexual assault and the dangers of it? (1-Not familiar, 10-Extremely familiar)  
3 responses

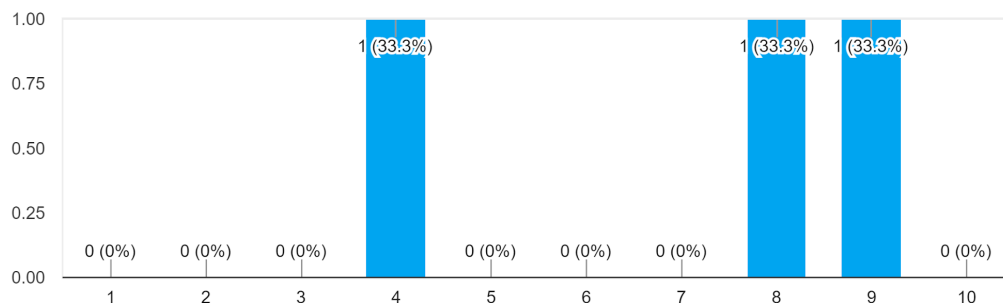
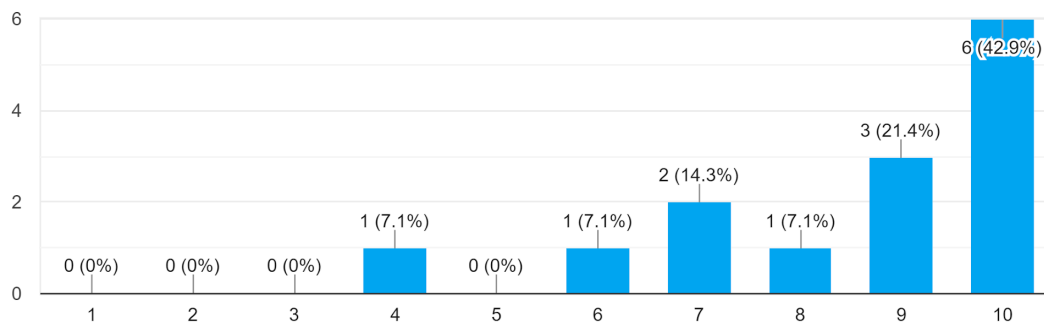


*Figure 3. How Familiar Are You With the Concept of Sexual Assault Results (Children not in Esports).*

We must also look at this trend with the adults as well. Below are the charts for the same question, with Figure 4 being adults that did not grow up in Esports. Similarly to the results before the adults in Esports, as shown in Figure 5 have a higher average of understanding the concept of sexual assault and dangers, having an average of 8.525 whereas the other group of adults has 8.5. The difference, while tremendously small, is still there. All in all, this shows that children in the Esports scene tend to be exposed to these concepts earlier and understand it while children not growing up in the scene end up understanding it later on. This directly affects perception of emotional maturity, as it exhibits the difference in average answers between the children groups and the change into adulthood.

*Figure 4.* How Familiar Are You With the Concept of Sexual Assault Results (Adult not in Esports).

How familiar are you with the concept of sexual assault and the dangers of it? (1-Not familiar, 10-Extremely familiar)  
14 responses



How familiar are you with the concept of sexual assault and the dangers of it? (1-Not familiar, 10-Extremely familiar)  
23 responses

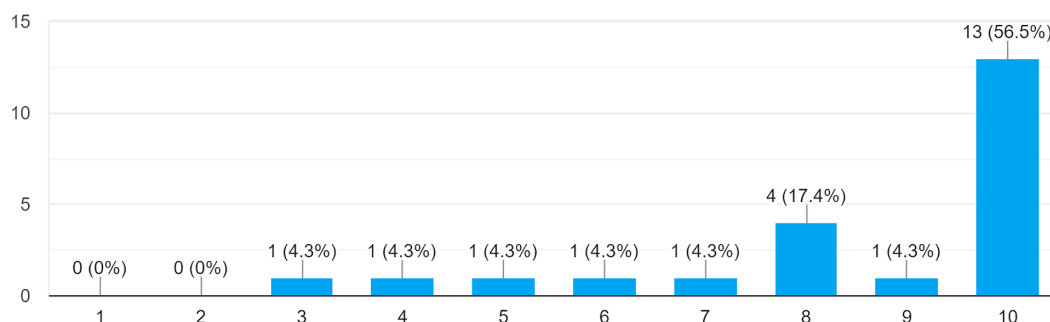


Figure 5.

How Familiar Are You With the Concept of Sexual Assault Results (Adults in Esports).

### Free-Response Questions

Following the Likert Scale questions, I also asked my participants short free response questions on how they feel about a certain situation. I did this to understand how they truly feel and their thought process on ideas. This would help me understand if they know what they are talking about rather than “feeding” their ego with a quick number. The questions asked are as follows:

- In your own words describe the term “gaslighting”?
- If you were given an opportunity to make yourself succeed, but in turn it would negatively affect your best friend, how would you react?
- In your own words describe sexual harassment.

To gauge patterns, I will take one question and look at the answers and build patterns on the type of answers given. Merriam-Webster defines gaslighting as, “psychological manipulation of a person usually over an extended period of time that causes the victim to question the validity of their own thoughts, perception of reality, or memories and typically leads to confusion, loss of confidence and self-esteem, uncertainty of one's emotional or mental stability, and a dependency

on the perpetrator.” There was a drastic quality of answers between the Children that participated and those that did not participate in Esports. Below are three answers given by Children that did not participate in Esports; “Manipulating someone into thinking that they said/did something they didn't do, Undermining someone to gain power, Idk.” These answers are not close to the definition, albeit the first one. Looking at one of the average answers of the children that did participate in Esports, they wrote, “harmful form of psychological manipulation leading an individual to develop trust issues with others along with not being as confident in themselves as they used to be.” The previous response is much more similar, and exact. The quality of answers between this group and Children that did participate in Esports is astronomical. All in all, this presents that being in the Esports scene has a correlation to kids and children's understanding of emotional situations.

### Limitations

Although my research was able to grab correlations between children growing up and those in the Esports scene, there were still a few limitations as to what I can properly answer. For example, my survey was only able to collect responses from 56 participants. Secondly, I was only able to gain access to 3 kids who are currently not growing up in the scene. If I had collected more answers from this group I can definitely come to a better, more resolute conclusion.

Another limitation that I faced is not taking into account how one's personal life could also affect their emotional maturity. For example, one may not grow up in an Esport scene but could have had trauma that affected them and their growth emotionally. Life in general is extremely inconsistent and while one may grow up in an Esports scene they could also have a

tremendously normal life that could stunt their emotional growth. Overall, this is a factor I did not take into account.

### Implications

The implications my research provides is that Esports scenes have the ability to raise the emotional maturity of kids at a young age and introduce them to concepts that many of them might not understand normally. This evidence and research will help adults and parents understand whether or not they want to have their kids join an Esports scene due to arising concerns. Understanding the implications that you may have by allowing your child to compete and participate in an Esports scene, is quite important for parents to have.

### Conclusion

I decided to focus on the research question, “How do local Esports scenes affect the emotional maturity of young adults and teenagers?” I had decided to focus on this due to being in a local Esports scene myself and wondering how this has affected me. There is a knowledge gap in research regarding the Esports scene on the growth of children. The four sources that I have included in my literature review provide great and necessary insight into much contextual evidence related to sports and the growth of Esports. There is a knowledge gap regarding the implications and effects of Esports on kids' growth emotionally. In conclusion, the evidence I have gathered from my research points to a view that Esports may have an affect on the emotional maturity of kids. Introducing them to many concepts and ideas that an abundance of the time highschool kids are not directly exposed to. For most of my evidence, it was in accordance with each other. For the most part they all agreed with each other in the sense of most kids in Esports tending to be more emotionally mature than those not. One big key though is that adults both growing up in Esports/Not Growing up in Esports, showed around the same level of

understanding of emotional situations. All in all, this shows that on average Esports could have a correlational effect on emotional maturity but does not change one's end growth emotionally overall.

### Future Directions

Overall my research helps contribute to a large conversation of Esports discussion in the future. If we want to help explore and help grow Esports in Sports, we need to see the effects it has. Some future directions I would give to someone attempting to answer a similar question or expanding upon mine would be, changing the questions and focusing on more personal experiences, especially if there were some done in the scene. The questions I chose to ask delved into a general idea of understanding of how mature the participant was emotionally. One other thing I would recommend to a future researcher would be to have more participants. More sample size can always be a positive to correlational research.

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