

Sexism in Video Games: A Literature Review of Research in the Domains Game

Creation, Content, and Community/Culture

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Abstract

This literature review synthesizes 30 years of research on sexism in video games, focusing on three key areas: game creation, content, and community/culture. Based on an analysis of $n = 137$ academic publications, the review highlights the persistent underrepresentation and marginalization of women in the video game industry, both in workforce composition and leadership roles. It also examines the pervasive sexualization and stereotyping of female characters in games and explores the broader gaming community's exclusionary practices toward women. Despite some evidence of gradual improvement in female representation, sexist portrayals remain widespread. The review emphasizes the importance of understanding these dynamics to address gender inequality in video gaming. Future research should adopt intersectional approaches to investigate the experiences of marginalized groups beyond gender, while expanding the scope to different cultural contexts and gaming communities.

Keywords: sexism, video games, gaming culture, gaming industry, literature review

Short description: This review synthesizes 30 years of research on sexism in video games, analyzing game creation, content, and community. Based on 137 studies, it highlights women's underrepresentation in the industry, the sexualization of female characters, and exclusionary gamer culture. While some progress is noted, sexism persists, calling for intersectional and global research.

Sexism in Video Games: A Literature Review of Research in the Domains Game Creation, Content, and Community/Culture

In 2021, a sexual harassment lawsuit was filed against “Activision Blizzard,” known for franchises like *Diablo* and *Call of Duty* (Browning, 2021). Similar allegations of toxic workplace culture, driven by gender-based discrimination, were also made against “Bungie,” the developer behind *Halo* and *Destiny* (Valentine, 2021). These incidents exemplify the persistent sexism in the video game industry, which, despite being the world’s largest entertainment sector (Wijman, 2020), continues to grapple with gender inequality.

Although video games appeal to both men and women, the industry remains shaped by gendered norms that foster sexism in game production, content, and player communities (Kowert et al., 2017). Historically, video games have been positioned as a male-dominated domain, reinforcing harmful gender stereotypes and creating an exclusionary culture (ibid.). As a powerful cultural and commercial force, video games offer a critical lens through which to examine how media can perpetuate societal views on gender roles, sexism, and inequality. “Sexism” refers to a broad spectrum of attitudes, beliefs, and behaviors that sustain gender-based inequalities, often marginalizing women while upholding patriarchal norms (Glick & Fiske, 1996). To understand sexism in video games, it is necessary to examine three interrelated areas: the development and production of games (*creation*), the depiction of characters and narratives (*content*), and the broader gaming culture (*community/culture*).

These areas are interconnected and can create a feedback loop where sexist practices in the industry influence in-game representations, which in turn reinforce a male-dominated player base resistant to inclusivity.

This literature review synthesizes three decades of research on sexism in video games, analyzing 137 publications across these three areas. By mapping key findings and research

gaps, it aims to advance the understanding of gendered dynamics in the industry and provide a foundation for future scholarship in this constantly evolving field.

Method: Literature Review

Preliminary Considerations and Definitions

Before proceeding, it is necessary to define sexism in the context of this review and establish the relevance of video games. The patriarchy, ubiquitous in most human societies, describes “men’s structural control over political, legal, economic, and religious institutions” (Glick & Fiske, 1997, p. 120). As a result, the relationship between men and women is characterized by an imbalance of power (*ibid.*). This places women below men and a certain ideal of manliness above other men, as described by the concept of hegemonic masculinity (Connell & Messerschmidt, 2005). Sexism encompasses “attitudes, beliefs, or behaviors that support the unequal status of women and men” (Swim & Campbell, 2003, p. 219). It manifests through ambivalent sexism, which includes both hostile sexism, justifying male dominance and viewing women as inferior, and benevolent sexism, which idealizes women as subordinates who conform to traditional gender roles (Glick & Fiske, 1997). This mirrors the historical Madonna-whore dichotomy, where women are valued when compliant (benevolent) and disparaged when defiant (hostile) (Tanner, 2019). Although benevolent sexism appears less overtly harmful, it still limits women’s autonomy.

Sexist beliefs translate into gender stereotypes, while sexist behaviors involve discriminatory treatment of both women and men (Swim & Campbell, 2003). Additionally, rape myth acceptance (RMA) describes the endorsement of (refuted) assumptions about rape, such as the belief that blame should be placed on the victim, or that rape is sexually motivated instead of being a form of abuse (Burt, 1980). RMA has been associated with sexist behavior and beliefs and has thus been used in media research to establish a link between media use and sexism (Fox & Potocki, 2016).

Video games differ from traditional media through their interactivity, potentially intensifying their impact on players' beliefs and behaviors (Fox & Potocki, 2016). Historically conceptualized as a male-oriented medium (Alloway & Gilbert, 1998), video games provide a critical lens for examining sexism in the interrelated areas of media creation, content, and cultures.

Literature Search Procedures

A comprehensive narrative literature review was conducted to assess existing research on video games and sexism. The literature search was carried out in March 2024 and comprised three steps: (1) querying relevant databases via the Datenbank-Infosystem (DBIS) [1] (2) searching Google Scholar, and (3) applying a snowballing technique by reviewing citations in previously identified publications. Across all databases, the search term “video games and sexism” was used. The Google Scholar search yielded 63,400 results and was continued until diminishing returns were observed, defined as pages containing one or fewer relevant results. We originally identified about 2,192 publications.

To determine the final sample for the literature review, the following inclusion criteria were applied: publications had to directly address sexism and video games, be written in English, be peer-reviewed, provide full-text access, and have received at least ten citations. The citation threshold was used as a quality filter to prioritize publications with measurable academic visibility and engagement. After removing duplicates and applying the inclusion criteria, the search yielded a final sample of $n = 137$, as detailed in Figure 1. The resulting sample should not be interpreted as fully representative of global scholarship on sexism in video games, particularly given the exclusion of non-English publications and the use of citation-based filtering.

[Figure 1 about here]

Literature Categorization

To structure the review and establish a framework for mapping the research field, all identified publications were sorted into one of three categories: *creation*, *content*, and *community/culture*. This categorization is based on the theoretical model of exclusion and sexism in video game content and culture (Kowert et al., 2017), which defines three key areas contributing to exclusion and sexism in video games. The “male-dominated video game industry” is reflected in the first category *creation*, which indicates that a hegemonic game industry, largely consisting of (white) men, leads to a non-diverse game landscape (Fron et al., 2007). “Gender socialization process” relates to the second category *content*, which looks at the representation (or lack thereof) of female characters in video games. “Exclusionary gaming communities” are represented in the third category *community/culture*. It refers to an overwhelmingly male gaming community and male-biased culture surrounding video games. Publications were categorized based on their abstracts; if classification was unclear, the full text was reviewed. In most cases, the research goal was explicitly stated in the abstract and allowed identifying the primary focus of the publication. Key terms guided the categorization: *creation* was identified by references to “industry,” “development,” or “production”; *content* by mentions of “representation,” “portrayals,” “depictions,” or the “effects” of (sexualized) video games; and *community/culture* by terms such as “community,” “culture,” “players,” “gamers,” or “populations.” Seven publications focused on the Gamergate controversy and were assigned to the community/culture category. Two articles (Jenson & de Castell, 2010; Kowert et al., 2017) examined video game research at a meta-level and could fit multiple categories. To maintain consistency, they were placed in the community/culture category due to their broad discussion of gaming culture. Ultimately, 13 publications (9.49%) were classified under *creation*, 64 (46.72%) under *content*, and 60 (43.80%) under *community/culture*.

The quantitative analysis of the 137 publications examined: (a) the temporal distribution across the three categories, (b) publication outlets, (c) keywords as thematic indicators, and (d) author gender composition. The web-based tool *genderize.io* was used to infer the binary gender most commonly associated with the authors' first names, serving as an approximate measure of gender composition. For the qualitative analysis, the publications were carefully read and summarized in detailed excerpts. Each publication was examined for its key themes and findings, and the most common research findings were then identified and grouped together to provide a comprehensive overview of the research field within the categories of creation, content, and community/culture.

Results

Quantitative Analysis: Overview of the Research Field

The temporal distribution of all 137 identified articles, sorted by category, is illustrated in Figure 2. The publication dates range from 1993 to 2023, encompassing 30 years of publication history. The graph exhibits a left-skewed distribution: During the first decade (1993-2003), only nine publications were identified, whereas the last decade (2013-2023) saw 89 publications. The year 2018 marked a peak with 12 publications. On average, 4.42 publications were released annually, with a median of 4. The average number of citations per publication was 94.24, with a range spanning from 10 to 1,174 citations. Although the earliest identified publication dates back to 1993, publications focusing on the category creation did not appear until 2006.

[Figure 2 about here]

The majority of identified publications were published in peer-reviewed journals (93.43%). 18 of the journal articles were published in *Sex Roles*, nine in *Games and Culture*, six in *Computers in Human Behavior*, five in *New Media & Society*, four in *Aggressive Behavior*, *Cyberpsychology*, *Behavior and Social Networking*, and *Journal of Broadcasting &*

Electronic Media, and three in *Feminist Media Studies*, *Frontiers in Psychology*, *International Journal of Gender, Science and Technology*, *Journal of Communication* and *Psychology of Popular Media*. Seven publications are chapters in edited books (5.11%), and two articles were conference papers, both introduced at the Digital Games Research Association (DiGRA) Conference (1.46%).

An analysis of the 596 used keywords is presented in Table 1. Additionally to those listed, there were 204 unique keywords. Most keywords combine references to video games (e.g., video games, gaming culture, MMORPG, Lara Croft) with those related to sexism (e.g., gender, sexism, women, sexual harassment). Additional keywords include research methods (e.g., content analysis, interview) and theoretical frameworks (e.g., ambivalent sexism, cultivation theory, rape myths).

[Table 1 about here]

Of the 257 authors analyzed, 138 (53.69%) were most commonly associated with a female gender, and 119 (46.30%) with a male gender. Among the 105 multi-author publications, 58.10% of first-listed authors and 48.57% of last-listed authors were identified as most commonly associated with a female gender.

Qualitative Analysis: Research Themes & Findings

Creation: Sexism in the Video Game Industry

The video game industry exhibits structural misogyny, characterized by a bias in favor of male workers and systemic discrimination against female workers (e.g. Bailey et al., 2021; Blodgett & Salter, 2014; Jenson & De Castell, 2013; Prescott & Bogg, 2011). This bias is reflected in the underrepresentation of women across the industry (Prescott & Bogg, 2011). Vertically, women are severely underrepresented in leadership roles, with female directors and (executive) producers comprising only 0-9% of such positions (Bailey et al., 2021; Prescott & Bogg, 2011). Horizontally, women are less present in core development roles and

are instead concentrated in marketing, human resources, or support positions (Bailey et al., 2021; Prescott & Bogg, 2011). These disparities contribute to a pronounced gender pay gap and reinforce structural imbalances within the industry (Bailey et al., 2021).

Female workers in the video game industry frequently experience tokenization and antagonism. Sexist harassment, including threats of violence, rape and abuse, is a routine experience for many women, as evidenced by campaigns such as #1reasonwhy from 2011 (Blodgett & Salter, 2014; Jenson & De Castell, 2013). The underrepresentation of women exacerbates this issue; when women do speak publicly about video game development, their expertise is frequently overshadowed by a focus on their marginalization, further contributing to their tokenization (de Castell & Skardzius, 2019).

Various strategies have been proposed to improve working conditions for women in the video game industry, including individual resistance, legal action, media scrutiny, peer pressure, and unionization (Kivijärvi & Sintonen, 2022; Weststar & Legault, 2019). While initiatives exist to lower entry barriers for women, they are often designed from a male perspective, neglecting insights from feminist technology research. As a result, these efforts fail to address the unique challenges faced by marginalized groups, provide inadequate support services, and underestimate the skills of non-male developers (Cunningham, 2011; S. J. Fisher & Harvey, 2013; Harvey & Fisher, 2015).

Content: Sexism in Video Game Images and Narratives

Female characters in video games remain underrepresented, and when they do appear, they are frequently sexualized, stereotyped, and objectified. They are often relegated to subordinate roles, such as sidekicks or damsels in distress, reinforcing traditional gender hierarchies (e.g. Beasley & Collins Standley, 2002; Burgess et al., 2007; Dietz, 1998; Downs & Smith, 2010; Gestos et al., 2018).

Even when female characters are portrayed as strong or powerful, this strength is often defined through the lens of traditional male characteristics (Jansz & Martis, 2007), while still adhering to conventional beauty standards that emphasize sexual appeal (Grimes, 2003). In recent years, the frequency of female character appearances is increasing (Lynch et al., 2016), and their narratives are becoming more complex and less reliant on male counterparts (Perreault et al., 2018). The representation of female characters over time has shifted from fitting the framework of benevolent sexism, where women are depicted as needing rescue toward a more hostile sexism, marked by increased sexualization (Summers & Miller, 2014). Video games featuring women in primary roles tend to perform worse commercially unless these characters are depicted in a sexualized manner, particularly on the game's cover (Near, 2013). This underscores the enduring commercial appeal of sexualized imagery, even as the industry makes progress toward more equitable representation.

Reports on the effects of video games containing sexualized content on rape myth acceptance (RMA) remain a subject of considerable debate. Some studies suggest that exposure to violence against women, along with the objectification, sexualization, and stereotyping of female characters in video games, may influence RMA (Beck et al., 2012; Dill, 2009; Dill et al., 2008; Driesmans et al., 2015; Fox & Potocki, 2016). However, other research has not found such effects (Beck & Rose, 2021; Ferguson & Colwell, 2020), or even reported reductions in RMA when participants engaged in tasks involving a high cognitive load alongside exposure to such content (Read et al., 2018). Additionally, while some studies do identify a relationship between sexist video game content and RMA, these findings often involve small effect sizes and cannot be interpreted as evidence of causality (Fox & Potocki, 2016).

A correlation between playing violent video games and belief in traditional masculine roles has been identified in certain studies (Blackburn & Scharrer, 2019; Gabbiadini et al., 2016),

yet others found no evidence of cultivation effects linking video game play to sexist beliefs (Breuer et al., 2015). This has led some researchers to suggest that current data do not robustly support a cultivation approach for understanding the effects of sexualized content on sexist beliefs (Ferguson & Colwell, 2020). Instead, evidence indicating that sexualized content may lower RMA aligns more closely with a catalyst approach, wherein pre-existing attitudes are activated rather than cultivated (Beck & Rose, 2021; Kowert et al., 2017; Stermer & Burkley, 2015).

Furthermore, some studies have found a significant correlation between sexist beliefs and engagement with video games, suggesting that societal sexist ideals are mirrored through the behavior of virtual agents as ‘vamps’ or ‘virgins,’ triggering similar responses of hostile or benevolent sexism (e.g. Bègue et al., 2017; Fox & Bailenson, 2009; Stermer & Burkley, 2015). Sexualized video games can also have a priming effect, activating sexual thoughts and reinforcing sexist schemata, which may contribute to a higher self-reported tendency toward sexual harassment behavior (Burnay et al., 2019; Yao et al., 2010).

While some studies have found that sexualized female video game characters can negatively impact female self-concepts, self-efficacy, and self-objectification (Behm-Morawitz & Mastro, 2009; Fox et al., 2015; Gestos et al., 2018), other research presents a more nuanced picture. For instance, some studies have found no significant relationship between exposure to sexualized content in video games and body image concerns or self-objectification among female players (Lindner et al., 2020; Skowronski et al., 2021). Interestingly, one study reported that hyper-idealized body depictions in video games had differing effects on men and women, with negative effects observed in men and positive effects in women (Matthews et al., 2016). A recent meta-analysis further complicates the narrative, concluding that the overall evidence does not substantiate a strong link between sexualized video game content and well-being, body image, or attitudes toward sexism and misogyny. It suggests that the

effects observed in individual studies tend to be small and often not statistically significant, indicating that the impact of sexualized video game content on these outcomes may be less substantial than previously assumed (Ferguson et al., 2022).

Community/Culture: Sexism in the Broader Video Game Community

Seven publications have analyzed the Gamergate controversy of 2014, exploring its impact on the gaming community and beyond (e.g. Chatzakou et al., 2017; Gray et al., 2017; M. Salter, 2018). The controversy began with accusations that game journalists were providing favorable reviews for video games developed by women in exchange for sexual favors, sparking a widespread debate within the gaming community about the ethics of game journalism. However, many scholars argue that these accusations served primarily as a pretext, masking what quickly became an organized harassment campaign targeting women working in the industry and the broader gaming community (Chatzakou et al., 2017). It is crucial to recognize that the individuals targeted by this campaign, as well as subsequent research, emphasize that Gamergate was not an isolated incident but rather an extreme and highly publicized manifestation of the sexism, stereotyping, sexual harassment, and exclusion that female gamers and developers routinely face in a male-dominated gaming culture (Gray et al., 2017; M. Salter, 2018).

The culture surrounding video games has historically excluded individuals who do not conform to the contrived image of “geek masculinity” (e.g. Braithwaite, 2016; A. Salter & Blodgett, 2012). The masculine orientation of video game culture, often referred to as the “malestream” (Jenson & De Castell, 2013) is further reflected in physical spaces, in the naming of gaming consoles (e.g., *Game Boy*), in advertising, the press, and other media depictions (e.g. Alloway & Gilbert, 1998; Beavis & Charles, 2007; Cote, 2018). Outsiders to this culture include not only female gamers but also other marginalized groups, such as racial minorities, LGBTQ+ individuals, and anyone who challenges the perceived status quo,

including activists, developers, and academics (Braithwaite, 2014, 2016; Ruberg et al., 2019; M. Salter, 2018). Research has shown that conformity to masculine norms and a high social dominance orientation can predict sexist attitudes toward women who play video games (Fox & Tang, 2014). Furthermore, self-identification as a gamer has been found to be related to sexist harassment behavior (Tang et al., 2020). Other predictors of (sexual) harassment behavior in online gaming environments include hostile sexism, social dominance orientation, and personality traits such as machiavellianism and psychopathy (Tang et al., 2020; Tang & Fox, 2016). Female gamers face an underlying, gendered threat within this culture. They are often sexualized and underrated (Harrison & Drenten, 2016; Kelly et al., 2023) and exist only in a secondary position relative to male gamers (Nic Giolla Easpaig & Humphrey, 2017).

Female gamers face additional challenges within the gaming community, including gendered flaming and griefing, gendered exploitation and oppression, objectification, and sexist portrayals of female characters. These issues contribute to a pervasive desire among female gamers for a more inclusive community (Brehm, 2013). Even in environments where women feel welcomed, there often remains an underlying anxiety that their failures will be attributed to their gender rather than individual skill or circumstances (Fortim & Grando, 2013). Female video game streamers, in particular, are frequently objectified, with their gender making them prime targets for harassment. This harassment forces them to constantly prove their gaming skills, an expectation not typically placed on their male counterparts (e.g. Ruberg et al., 2019). In the realm of competitive video gaming, these gender-based disparities are even more pronounced. Female athletes are significantly underrepresented and underpaid, and they are generally assumed to be less skilled (e.g. Ratan et al., 2015; Taylor, 2003).

Female players find themselves unwelcome in a predominantly masculinized gaming culture. The effects of this exclusion on female players' identity and their subsequent coping

mechanisms are discussed in multiple publications. For one, many female players tend to perceive video games more as a secondary activity or a diversion rather than a primary hobby or passion, and hesitate to label themselves as “gamers” (e.g. Ratan et al., 2015; Royse et al., 2007; Schott & Horrell, 2000). Moreover, they seem to be more strongly motivated by social factors, preferring genres such as RPGs and MMORPGs, which emphasize community and collaboration (Eden et al., 2010; Schott & Horrell, 2000; Taylor, 2003; Williams et al., 2009). There is evidence that female gamers struggle with self-identification, as they are excluded from the gaming community for not being men, yet also do not fit the stereotype of helpless or unskilled female players (e.g. Beavis & Charles, 2007; Royse et al., 2007).

To cope with the challenges of a hostile gaming environment, female gamers employ various strategies. These include frequent group switching (McLean & Griffiths, 2019), adopting multiple social identities to mitigate stereotype threats (L. K. Kaye et al., 2017; L. Kaye & Pennington, 2016), and concealing their identities altogether (Cote, 2017; Fox & Tang, 2016; McLean & Griffiths, 2019). This concealment often involves avoiding verbal communication, using anonymization strategies, engaging in gender-bending and masking, or downplaying their own success to avoid drawing attention (e.g. Cote, 2017; Fox & Tang, 2016; McLean & Griffiths, 2019). While some female gamers seek support through reporting mechanisms in online games (Fox & Tang, 2016), there is evidence to suggest that these functions are often underutilized due to their perceived ineffectiveness (Choe et al., 2020). These coping strategies reflect the complex and often precarious position of female gamers in a culture that frequently marginalizes them.

Discussion

Video games have become a widely popular form of media entertainment, notable for their interactivity. While they are often regarded as a male-dominated medium (H. D. Fisher, 2015), data on player demographics reveal that women and men engage in gaming in nearly

equal numbers. Nonetheless, gender disparities are evident in various aspects of the video game industry, ranging from game development (*creation*) and the sexualization of female characters in games (*content*) to a predominantly male-biased gaming *community/culture*.

This literature review examined research on sexism in video games conducted over the past 30 years. A comprehensive literature search identified 137 relevant publications, which were analyzed using both quantitative and qualitative approaches. The reviewed literature suggests that sexism in video games should not be understood as isolated incidents within individual games or communities, but rather as a structurally interconnected phenomenon spanning production, representation, and player culture.

Synthesis of Key Findings

In the category of *creation*, a recurring theme is the underrepresentation and occupational segregation of women in the video game industry. This segregation occurs both horizontally, with fewer women in leadership roles, and vertically, with fewer in development and technical positions. As a result, female workers face lower salaries, limited career growth, and reduced autonomy, authority, and prestige. This imbalance also directly influences video game content, as the male-dominated industry shapes character design and narratives, often reinforcing formulaic tropes that primarily cater to male audiences (Tompkins & Martins, 2022).

The systematic underrepresentation and hypersexualization of female characters is one of the most consistent findings across studies analyzing game *content*. Many studies highlight the tendency to categorize female characters into simplistic dichotomies, such as the Madonna-whore complex, reflecting both hostile and benevolent sexism. At the same time, research on the effects of sexualized video game content remains inconclusive. While sexist representations are consistently documented, studies examining their measurable impact on

players often report only small or inconsistent effects and are frequently limited by methodological constraints.

In the domain of *community/culture*, the Gamergate controversy serves as a striking example of the tangible threats faced by individuals who critically engage with the gaming community. Female gamers, in particular, often avoid identifying as “gamers”—especially as *female* ones—and employ various coping mechanisms to navigate a community and culture that frequently marginalizes or actively excludes them.

Evaluation of the Research Field

The first publication identified in this review dates back to 1993, and since 2002, at least one relevant study has been published each year. Research on sexism in video games is dominated by studies focusing on content and community/culture, which together account for approximately 90% of the literature. Early research primarily examined representation and the prevalence of sexualized content in games, whereas more recent studies increasingly focus on media effects and online gaming culture. In particular, the Gamergate controversy marked a significant turning point in scholarly attention toward harassment, exclusion, and toxic gaming communities. Although some improvements in female representation can be observed over time, patterns of harassment and exclusion remain persistent.

Gender disparities in academic authorship remain a topic of ongoing debate. An analysis of communication journals reported an average distribution of 57% male and 43% female authors (Trepte & Loths, 2020). In contrast, the sample in this study showed a higher proportion of female authors, with approximately 54% of all authors identified as having a female name and 58% holding first authorship. This may indicate that the research area attracts disproportionate interest from female scholars and could be perceived within the broader academic community as a topic primarily associated with women.

Several limitations were identified across the body of research. Many studies did not involve actual gameplay as a stimulus (Dill & Thill, 2007; H. D. Fisher, 2015; Miller & Summers, 2007; Summers & Miller, 2014), despite the interactive nature of video games being central to their impact. Additionally, the highly individualized nature of video game experiences makes them difficult to accurately capture in controlled environments. Measuring sexism also proved challenging; definitions of sexist content varied across studies, and some relied on arguably outdated or limited scales, for which reliability and validity remain to be discussed (Bègue et al., 2017; Breuer et al., 2015; Prescott & Bogg, 2011). Another common methodological issue was the absence of pre-tests, which complicates determining the direction of causality (Behm-Morawitz & Mastro, 2009; Dill, 2009; Driesmans et al., 2015; Yang et al., 2014). This raises an important question: Does exposure to sexist content foster sexist attitudes, or do individuals with sexist beliefs gravitate toward games that reinforce their views? Furthermore, studies that did find effects often reported small effect sizes or failed to account for important covariates (Dill et al., 2008; Eden et al., 2010; Fox et al., 2015; Williams et al., 2009). Many studies used samples primarily composed of college students, limiting the generalizability of the findings to the broader population (Beck et al., 2012; Fox & Potocki, 2016; Read et al., 2018).

Key gaps in the current research landscape include the need for greater focus on the portrayal of idealized *male* characters and the potential effects of positive, non-stereotypical female characters. Another underexplored area is the impact of casual games, such as free-to-play mobile games, which attract a large player base and generate more revenue but have received less scholarly attention compared to core games.

Limitations of the Review

The category of creation had significantly fewer publications compared to the other two categories. However, this disparity may not accurately reflect the scope of the research field,

as the use of additional keywords during the search process (e.g., ‘industry’ and ‘game development’) might have yielded more relevant studies. Another limitation of this review is its exclusive focus on the representation (or lack thereof) of women, which overlooks the experiences of individuals outside the gender binary. This is further complicated by our creation of a binary gender distribution system based on first names, which might not accurately reflect the gender identities authors identify with. For future research, an intersectional approach is recommended that considers other intersecting factors, such as race, class, and sexual orientation, alongside a broader understanding of gender. This would enable a more nuanced exploration of how various identities impact representation and experiences within the video game industry, content, and community/culture.

Given that half of all video game revenue is generated in the Asia-Pacific region, the focus on English-language publications should be critically assessed as well (PwC, 2022). The vast majority of research has been conducted by scholars based in North American and European universities (59.53% and 26.46% respectively), with only 12.6% of scholars based in the APAC region (7.39% in Australia and 4.67% in Asia). Future studies should thus aim for better representation of different cultural gaming communities.

Conclusion

Although the evidence regarding the negative effects of sexist content and culture in video games is, at best, mixed, the observed tendencies should not be viewed uncritically. Even if playing video games does not have immediate or direct effects on sexist attitudes or negative views toward women, the majority of studies analyzing game content confirm that video games continue to reproduce sexist, stereotypical, and hegemonic representations. While there are signs of gradual improvement, the male-dominated gaming community often seems to resist these changes. The issue is not that women lack interest in being part of gaming culture, but rather that they are consistently and actively excluded from it. Video games still

perpetuate a traditional image of hegemonic masculinity, and while they may not directly exacerbate sexism, the portrayal of the world within these games undoubtedly influences societal norms and values. Therefore, understanding and addressing the dynamics of sexism in video games requires continued and rigorous academic research.

Endnotes

DBIS is a German state-funded directory platform that enables users to identify and use international academic databases. Currently, over 14,000 databases are available, divided by areas of expertise (Moßburger et al., 2021). For this literature review, the top databases in the fields of “Media and communication studies, journalism, film and theater studies” ($n = 6$) and “Sociology” ($n = 5$) were used. [1]

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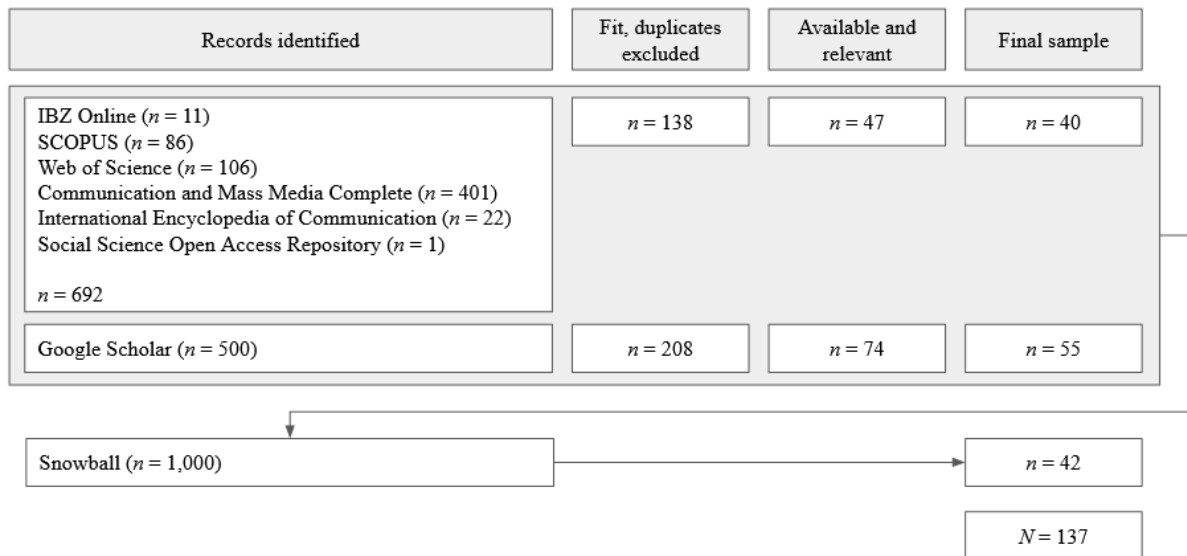
Figure 1*Overview of the 3-Step Search Process*

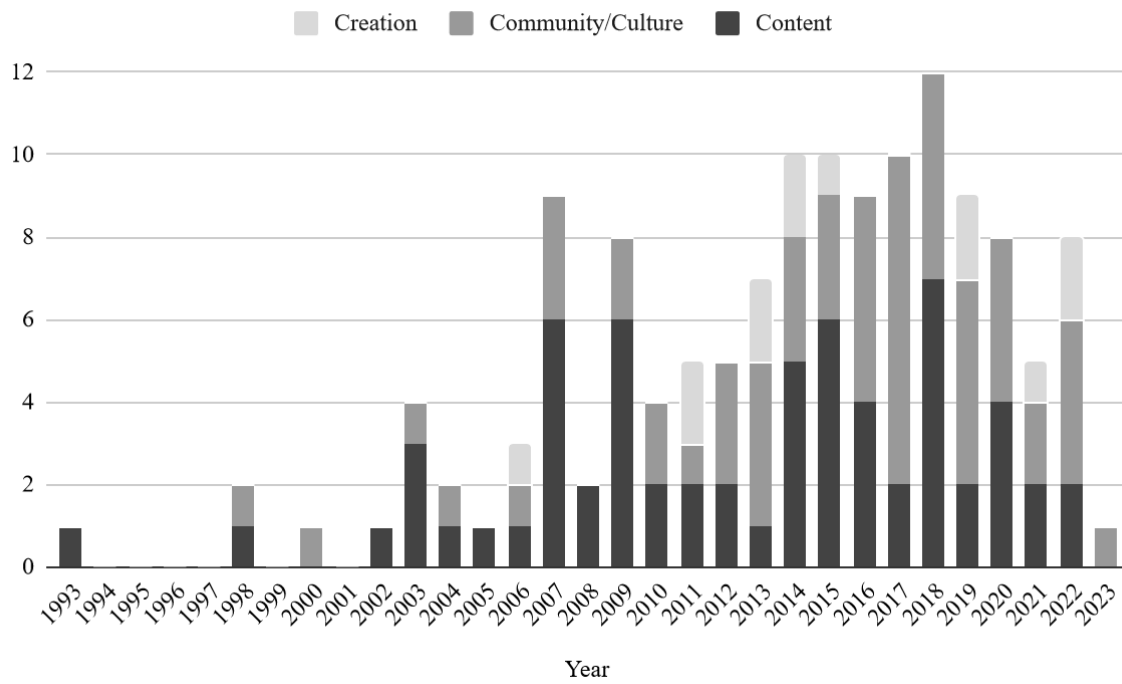
Figure 2*Number of Publications by Year and Category (n = 137)*

Table 1*Keywords by Number of Appearances*

<i>Keywords</i>	<i>N</i>
Video Game*	65
Gender	33
Sexism	18
Gender Stereotype*	10
Online Harassment	8
Digital Game*, Sexual Harassment, Stereotype*, Violence, Women	7
Content Analysis, Feminism, Media Effects, MMO*, Women in Games*	6
Aggression, Computer Games, Gaming Culture, Gender Role*, Masculinity	5
Gamergate, Identity, Media, Misogyny, Race, Technology	4

Note. The * indicates the inclusion of plural forms, e.g., video game* also includes the keyword video games.