

Perception of Female Video Game Characters in Relation to Gender Stereotypes and Sexism

Сприйняття жіночих персонажів відеоігор у контексті гендерних стереотипів та сексизму

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Greta Raboczki*

Master's Student in Psychology,
Institute of Psychology,
University of Debrecen, Hungary
<https://orcid.org/0009-0003-5794-4838>

Balazs Orsi

PhD in Psychology, Lecturer,
Institute of Psychology,
University of Debrecen, Hungary
<https://orcid.org/0000-0002-9701-5983>

Грета Рабоцкі*

магістрант з психології,
Інститут психології,
Університет Дебрецена, Угорщина
<https://orcid.org/0009-0003-5794-4838>

Балаж Орсі

доктор філософії з психології, викладач,
Інститут психології,
Університет Дебрецена, Угорщина
<https://orcid.org/0000-0002-9701-5983>

Abstract

The aim of this study was to investigate how individuals engage with games and whether their views reflect or challenge gender stereotypes. We examined opinions about female characters appearing in currently published popular video games using the ideological systems of old-fashioned and modern sexism. **Methods.** The study was conducted on a sample of 15, using a one-on-one interview design. Sexism scores were assessed by using the Old-Fashioned and Modern Sexism Scale, which contains 10 questions, measuring both overt and covert manifestations of sexist thinking. Individuals watched 5-minute videos featuring female characters ($n = 8$) and chose 5 out of 40 personality traits and then explained their choices in a few sentences. Traits were carefully chosen based on stereotypes about men (e.g., brave, aggressive) and women (e.g., sensitive, romantic). The list also contained neutral traits (e.g., intelligent, stingy). Participants also scored characters' physical traits and likability. Content analysis was performed on participants' answers, which determined whether they contained infor-

* Corresponding Author: gretaraboczki@gmail.com

Анотація

Метою цього дослідження було з'ясувати, як люди ставляться до ігор і чи відображають їхні погляди гендерні стереотипи або ж суперечать їм. Досліджено думки про жіночих персонажів, що з'являються в популярних відеоіграх, які виходять зараз, використовуючи ідеологічні системи старомодного та сучасного сексизму. **Методи.** Дослідження проведено на вибірці з 15 осіб, використовуючи формат індивідуальних інтерв'ю. Сексизм оцінено за допомогою шкали старомодного та сучасного сексизму, що містить 10 питань і вимірює як явні, так і приховані прояви сексистського мислення. Учасники переглянули 5-хвилинні відеоролики з жіночими персонажами ($n = 8$) і вибрали 5 із 40 рис характеру, а потім пояснили свій вибір кількома реченнями. Риси були ретельно підібрані на основі стереотипів щодо чоловіків (наприклад, сміливий, агресивний) і жінок (наприклад, чутлива, романтична). Список також містив нейтральні риси (наприклад, розумний, скупий). Учасники також оцінювали фізичні риси персонажів та їхню привабливість. Проведено контент-аналіз відповідей учасників, який визначив, чи містять вони ін-

* Автор-кореспондент: gretaraboczki@gmail.com

mation linked to gender stereotypes. Statistical analysis featured T-tests and correlation matrices to assess how individuals view female characters and whether sexist attitudes influence the perception of physical traits, personality, and in-game roles. **Results.** Based on the findings, modern sexist views were more prevalent in the sample ($p = .002$) for female and male participants alike. Character descriptions were most likely influenced by gender stereotypes rather than sexism, as no clear correlation was found. Higher adherence to beauty standards was associated with greater sympathy ($p = .034$; $r_s = .55$) but did not correlate with perceived story relevance. Assigned traits were majority masculine ($n = 9$), which differs from past studies' findings. **Conclusion.** Our findings conclude that female characters in today's video games deviate from pre-established stereotypical gender representations, with appearance not being the primary factor in forming opinions about sympathy or plot relevance. Results indicate that the connections between sexist views and opinions regarding female characters are currently ambiguous and would benefit from further studies.

Keywords: female representation, video games, old-fashioned sexism, modern sexism, beauty standards.

Introduction

In our current society, the influence of digital media is present in all aspects of life. We talk to our friends online, we read the news on our phones, and we watch videos or play video games to relax at the end of a long day.

The Impact of Video Games. Despite their relative infancy compared to more established entertainment media, such as film and television, video games have a considerable impact on pop culture and society and therefore warrant a critical analysis of the sociological effects that the representation of female characters has had and may continue to have going forward.

According to 2022 data from the European Commission, over 50% of Europeans (237 million people) play video games regularly, and that number continues to grow each year. In terms of

формацію, пов'язану з гендерними стереотипами. Статистичний аналіз включав Т-тести та кореляційні матриці для оцінки того, як люди сприймають жіночих персонажів і чи впливають сексистські погляди на сприйняття фізичних рис, особистості та ролей у грі. **Результати.** На основі отриманих даних встановлено, що сучасні сексистські погляди були більш поширеними в вибірці ($p = .002$) як серед жінок, так і серед чоловіків. Описи персонажів, найімовірніше, були під впливом гендерних стереотипів, але не сексизму, оскільки чіткої кореляції виявлено не було. Більша відповідність стандартам краси призводила до більшої симпатії ($p = .034$; $r_s = .55$), але не корелювала зі сприйняттям релевантності сюжету. Присвоєні риси були переважно чоловічими ($n = 9$), що відрізняється від результатів попередніх досліджень. **Висновок.** Наші висновки свідчать, що жіночі персонажі в сучасних відеоіграх відхиляються від заздалегідь установлених стереотипних уявлень про гендер, а зовнішність не є основним фактором при формуванні думки про симпатію або релевантність сюжету. Результати показують, що зв'язки між сексистськими поглядами та думками щодо жіночих персонажів наразі є неоднозначними і потребують подальшого дослідження.

Ключові слова: жіноче уявлення, відеоігри, старомодний сексизм, сучасний сексизм, стандарти краси.

the gender of the player base, data from the EU and the US show that male and female players' quantity and involvement are around equal (Entertainment Software Association, 2021; European Commission, 2023), although they usually prefer different genres of games (Liu, 2024; Rehbein et al., 2016).

Psychological Effects of Video Game Usage. Jansz (2005) hypothesized that playing a video game requires critical thinking because the player must be familiar with the game's mechanics and story to progress. This differentiates video games from films and traditional television because these types of media continue even without our input or attention; therefore, we can just let them run as background noise while we do other things. Video games uniquely influence our thinking because we have to participate actively. Players can immerse

themselves in the world and drive the game's story with their decisions often affecting how the game concludes (Jansz, 2005).

Furthermore, they might form stronger attachments to the characters in games because they interact with them more frequently and engage with their stories for longer periods, with the average playtime of an AAA game being around fifteen hours (Geek Culture, 2020; Jansz, 2005). These characteristics of video games are important to assess when considering their psychological impact. In this sense, video games offer a more personalized and immersive experience than passively watching a film or TV series (Jansz, 2005). This effect has only become more pronounced since Jansz's study found that many people watch television/videos while looking at other screens e.g., messaging their friends or browsing social media on their phone (Segijn et al., 2017).

Various theories exist about how digital entertainment affects our attitudes about gender representation and gender roles. Bandura's Social Learning Theory (2001) presents the idea that others serve as models while children are learning to socialize, which could be comparable to characters featured in digital media as well (Bègue et al., 2017) This idea was backed by Gerbner's Cultivation Theory (1999), arguing that prolonged consumption of media may alter an individual's perception of reality. As a result, the consumer's perceptions of social scenarios begin to converge with media representations, even if those representations and experiences are far from objective reality (Gerbner, 1999). Cultivation Theory has been thoroughly researched in the past, producing varying results, especially with the ever-changing state of media and online algorithms (Hermann et al., 2023; Turel, 2024).

Since it is common to come across sexualized and repressed female representations in media, interactions with them could also influence our attitudes towards gender ideologies. This could reinforce traditional gender roles and sexism; a connection that has been established in Fredrickson & Roberts' 1997 study, although sufficient data argue against this claim (Cross et al., 2024; Ferguson et al., 2022).

It is important to note that the way one reacts

to messages seen in digital media is mediated by various characteristics, such as age, socioeconomic status, sexual identity, and other personal traits. To conclude, regularly interacting with sexualized representations can have a negative impact on women's self-perception and mental health (Barlett & Harris, 2008; Fredrickson & Roberts, 1997), but short-term exposure can be mediated by other factors (Cross et al., 2024; Sarda et al., 2022)

Old-fashioned and Modern Sexism. With sexism being a multi-faceted ideology, we need to differentiate between various forms of sexism, which led many social scientists to create their own definitions. Swim et al. (1995) defined old-fashioned and modern sexism, with old-fashioned sexism encompassing more aggressive forms of sexism, such as propagating negative stereotypes about women or outright discrimination e.g., denying women's right to vote.

On the other hand, modern sexist ideology is characterized by the illusion of equality (Swim et al., 1995). This belief states that regulations ensuring women's inclusion in all facets of society or further advocating for women's rights are unnecessary because women are already equal to men in most parts of the world. This ideology also raises the idea that women do not face discrimination in our society anymore. Inequalities between men and women (e.g., the wage gap or persisting negative stereotypes) stem from individual shortcomings rather than from systematic beliefs hindering women's progression (Szabó, 2008). Individuals with this belief may disapprove of women's success in the workplace or initiatives that aim to increase women's involvement across all fields of society, especially politics, with a primary example being gender quotas in the Parliament (Krivoshchekov et al., 2023; Swim et al., 1995).

In summation, old-fashioned sexism perpetuates the idea that men and women should stay unequal and stick to traditional, rigid roles. At the same time, modern sexist ideology chooses to ignore the psychological influences and biases that are still present in people's cognition, therefore making women's progression for actual equality difficult (Doolard et al., 2022; Krivoshchekov et al., 2023; Off et al., 2022).

Whether video games can perpetuate sexist behavior is unclear. This is a much less investigated topic with a small quantity of studies seeking evidence about how they might correlate, with certain studies supporting the claim (e.g., Bègue et al., 2017; Stremer & Burkley, 2015) while others finding the relation insufficient (e.g., Cross et al., 2024; Ferguson et al., 2022). Regardless, we must pay attention to the quality of representations players encounter frequently while engaging with games, as these may influence how they perceive their surroundings and navigate social situations (Bègue et al., 2017; Hermann et al., 2023).

Female Representations in Video Games.

The first significant study in the field of female representation in games was conducted by Dietz (1998), which focused on gender roles and the depiction of violence, including interactions between the two. The findings were quite shocking: 43% of the games had no female characters. Where female characters were present, they were usually seen as sexual objects (28%) or stuck in other disadvantageous situations, waiting for a male hero to save them (21%). Females as heroes were present in only five games, which was 15% of the total games analysed (Dietz, 1998).

In terms of physical appearance and clothing, female characters were often depicted as stereotypically feminine. More than one-fourth of the games featured violence as a core element of the story, with violence directed at female characters in 21% of the analyzed games (Dietz, 1998).

Others have yielded comparable results. B. Beasley and T. Standley (2002) studied forty-seven games, further strengthening Dietz's findings. Burgess et al. (2007) analyzed 225 console games in a manner similar to the previously mentioned authors. Video games featuring female characters have increased considerably (47%); however, the quality of representation has not shown significant changes (Burgess et al., 2007).

The Changing State of Female Representation. T. Lynch et al. (2016) decided to further analyze video games released between 1983 and 2014. Their primary focus was on the degree of sexualization for female characters and how these representations changed over time. They inspected characters' clothing, body types

and proportions, e.g., unnaturally large busts and buttocks. Sexual or suggestive behaviours were measured as well. The featured games (571) were categorized by four time periods based on when they were released. Their results were as follows: characters released between 2007 and 2014 were less sexualized than earlier games and the most sexualized characters appeared around the 2000s. Games from the second (1992–1998) and the third (1999–2006) period featured the most sexualized characters. These characters were designed to have unrealistic body proportions and wear a minimal amount of clothing (Lynch et al., 2016). It is important to mention that graphics were much less defined in the early days of video game production than they are now. Therefore, character models were also simpler, leading developers to make vastly different character design choices compared to current industry processes (Wang & Zhong, 2024).

Today's video games are being designed to be more realistic every single year, and technology is advancing at an incredible speed (Lynch et al., 2016; Wang & Zhong, 2024). This prompted T. Lynch et al. (2016) to conduct a similar study in 2024, which yielded comparable results. They proposed that sexist views may influence the portrayal of women in video games by showing them in stereotypical roles and limiting the diversity of physical characteristics to follow beauty standards (Lynch et al., 2024). These findings were supported by Sanz-Marcos & Meléndez González-Haba (2025), who analyzed sports-related video games.

Meanwhile, other recent studies suggest (Allen, 2024; Devčić & Sabol, 2024) that female characters are gradually becoming to be less sexualized, which is a welcome change.

Taking the previously detailed findings into account, we must pay attention to how players interact with female characters in video games, especially considering the constantly growing number of female video game players (Rodriguez-Barcenilla & Ortega-Mohedano, 2022) and the increasing demand for diverse representation across entertainment media (De la Torre-Sierra & Guichot-Reina, 2025; Denia et al., 2026; Lynch et al., 2025; Philips, 2025). This is perfectly illustrated by Steam, an online store for digital

software featuring a platform for players to discuss and review video games. The site's "female protagonist" tag appears on over 14,000 games (as of September 12, 2025) in their vast game library, ready to be downloaded and enjoyed by players all over the world.

Aim. This study's main goal is to provide a closer look into the player's mind: how they perceive female characters in games, how they form opinions about them, and to provide context in this newly forming area of research.

Hypotheses. Since modern sexism is a more covert form of sexist beliefs, we hypothesized that participants are more likely to subscribe to these ideas.

H₁: Modern sexism compared to old-fashioned sexism is more prevalent in the sample.

While prior findings show that sexist attitudes are more prevalent in men, women are also likely to hold modern sexist beliefs (Watkins et al., 2006).

H₂: Men and women show similar rates of modern sexism.

The rest of our hypotheses seek to establish connections between sexist views and perceptions of female video game characters based on currently available findings (e.g., Lynch et al., 2016). Connections between sexism, sympathy, and story relevance are based on Swim's Theory of Old-fashioned and Modern Sexism (Swim et al., 1995).

H₃: Higher rates of sexism correlate with a higher chance of choosing traditionally feminine traits when describing characters.

H₄: An individual with higher rates of sexism is more likely to sympathize with stereotypically feminine characters and less likely to sympathize with stereotypically masculine characters.

H_{5a}: Characters that fit into traditional beauty standards are more likely to be perceived as more sympathetic.

H_{5b}: Characters that fit into traditional beauty standards are more likely to be perceived as less important to the story.

H₆: The quality of traits (feminine/masculine/neutral) assigned to characters matches the quality of descriptions given by the individual.

Methods

Participants. The study was conducted with Hungarian participants aged 18 or older who were proficient in English (minimum B2 level).

The sample consisted of 15 participants: 9 women (60%) and 6 men (40%) aged 19 to 22, with an average age of 20.93 years (SD = .96).

Recruitment began in November 2023 by sharing the link to the online document containing the study description and the consent form on Facebook. Later, the individuals who participated in the study also shared the link on Facebook.

The requirements for participation in the study were being at least 18 years of age and being proficient in English, since the research materials were in English.

Willing participants completed the consent form and submitted their email addresses. All 22 people who filled out the consent form received an email to arrange an online interview. With 18 people responding to our interview invitation and some applicants cancelling their appointments, we ended up with a sample of 15 participants.

Variables. The main dependent variables were as follows: a character's (1) assigned traits; (2) trait description; (3) sympathy; (4) story relevance; (5) adherence to beauty standards.

Grouping variables: gender, old-fashioned and modern sexism scores. The variables were operationalized using appropriate scales, which made it possible to measure the intensity of sexist views. Character descriptions were quantified through content analysis.

Procedures and Instruments. Volunteering participants were interviewed online, each interview lasting 1.5 to 2 hours. The interview process went as follows: (1) The participant stated their age and gender. (2) The statements of Swim's Old-Fashioned and Modern Sexism Scale were read out and the participant answered to what extent they agreed with them. (3) A brief description (1–2 minutes) was given about one of the four video games included in the study. (4) The participant then watched a 5-minute video about one of the characters in the game described. (5) Any follow-up questions about context or the character were answered. (6) The participant assigned exactly five traits to the character they had seen using the Character Analysis Questionnaire

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and briefly described the reasons behind each of their choices. (7) The participant answered the three follow-up questions about the character's appearance, perceived sympathy, and importance in the story. (8) These steps were repeated with the remaining three video games, describing eight female characters in total throughout the interview process. The conversation was audio-recorded, to which the participants gave their written consent when filling out the consent form.

Content Analysis. The audio recordings were transcribed and evaluated through content analysis by a male and a female coder, who independently scored the participants' responses. The analysis determined the extent to which the answer was feminine or masculine in quality. This meant the extent to which the response was perceived to fit into stereotypically feminine or masculine roles. Scoring was done using a Likert scale ranging from 1 to 5, with 1 meaning "not at all" and 5 meaning "completely".

Procedures and Instruments. 1. *Hungarian version of the Old-fashioned and Modern Sexism Scale* (Swim et al., 1995), which was derived from the doctoral dissertation of Mónika Szabó (2008). It measures two factors, old-fashioned and modern sexism as defined by Swim et al. (1995), both with five items. The items are statements, and the participant responds to what extent they

agree with the contents on a Likert scale ranging from 1 to 5, where 1 means "I disagree completely" and 5 means "I agree completely". The higher the number, the greater the degree of sexism we can conclude, except in the case of statements 2, 4 and 7, as these are reversed items; a higher value indicates lower sexism. By summing the scores, we obtained the total sexism score, which ranged from 10 to 50. The questionnaire demonstrated sufficient reliability in our study (Cronbach $\alpha = .465$).

2. *5-minute videos of each female character* (n = 8). Videos were edited together from publicly available content online. Scene selection was carefully based on the following guidelines: scenes are featured from throughout the game, preferably including the first and last scene, where each character can be seen or interacted with. The featured scenes should follow each other in order. Participants should be able to identify each character's motives, relationships, and overall character development. Table 1 lists the games and characters featured in this study (see Table 1).

Since the featured games had English voiceovers and most did not have an official Hungarian translation at the time of this study, we decided to add English subtitles to avoid mistranslations.

Table 1. Titles of featured games (in bold), pictures and names of featured characters

Death Stranding		Detroit: Become Human		Ghost of Tsushima		Sekiro: Shadows Die Twice	
							
Amelie	Fragile	Amanda	Kara	Tomoe	Yuna	Divine Child	Emma

3. *The Character Analysis Questionnaire.* This contains two different tasks. In the first task, participants choose 5 out of 40 traits (see Table 2) and then explain their choices in a few sentences. We selected the 40 traits based on Eagly et al.

(2020). In addition to stereotypically masculine (e.g., brave, aggressive) and feminine (e.g., sensitive, romantic) traits, the list also contains neutral (e.g., intelligent, stingy) traits. The traits were distributed as follows: 13 stereotypically masculine,

13 feminine, and 14 neutral traits.

In the second task, participants answer three different questions: (1) To what extent does the character’s appearance fit the traditional ideal of beauty? (2) To what extent did you find the character likeable? (3) Based on the scenes you have

seen, how important do you feel the character is to the story? Participants respond using a Likert scale from 1 to 5, with 1 meaning “not at all” and 5 meaning “completely”.

Table 2. List of traits used (alphabetical order, grouped by quality)

Masculine Traits (n = 13)	Feminine Traits (n = 13)	Neutral Traits (n = 14)
aggressive	compassionate	creative
ambitious	generous	fair
arrogant	impressionable	helpful
calm	honest	intelligent
confident	nurturing	irreverent
courageous	outgoing	level-headed
critical	patient	negligent
daring	polite	nonchalant
independent	romantic	open (to new ideas)
insensitive	sensitive	reserved
proud	submissive	stingy
selfish	timid	thorough
stubborn	unselfish	unfair
		unintelligent

Organization of Research. The study was conducted between October 2023 and March 2024. Sequence of research stages: (1) preparation of tools and designing the Google Form; (2) recruitment; (3) communication with participants and organizing interviews; (4) data collection and content analysis; (5) carrying out statistical analysis in Jamovi.

Statistical Analysis. Jamovi was used for statistical data processing. Normality was tested and followed by the appropriate T-tests and correlation analyses to test hypotheses.

Table 3. Descriptives for the factors “Old-Fashioned Sexism” and “Modern Sexism” for the entire sample and gender groups

Sample and gender groups	n	M	Me	SD
old-fashioned – sample	15	7.80	8	1.86
modern – sample	15	11.53	11	2.39
modern – men	6	13.0	12.5	3.03
modern – women	9	10.6	10	1.24

As the data on modern sexism did not follow normal distribution ($W = .86$; $p = .027$), the Wilcoxon test was used to determine whether there is a difference in the intensity of modern

and old-fashioned sexism. According to the test results ($W = 2.50$; $p = .002$; $rbc = -.952$), there is a significant difference with a strong effect size in favor of modern sexism (as defined by Swim et al.).

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Therefore, our first hypothesis is confirmed.

The data on modern sexism gathered from men and women (see Table 3) followed normal distribution (men: $W = .96$; $p = .798$; women: $W = .85$; $p = .082$), and the variants did not show homogeneity ($F = 4.91$; $p = .045$). We conducted an independent-samples T-test to determine whether there is a difference in the intensity of sexism regarding the two genders. The test results (Welch's $t = 1.87$; $p = .109$; $d = 1.06$) showed a non-significant difference of modern sexist beliefs between men and women. Therefore, our second hypothesis is confirmed.

We measured the correlation between the sexism factors and the quantity of feminine traits chosen for each participant. First, we investigated whether the values of old-fashioned/modern sexism and the quantity of chosen feminine traits followed a normal distribution, then proceeded with the Correlation Matrix. Two factors did not follow normal distribution (quantity of feminine traits: $W = .315$; $p < .001$; modern sexism: $W = .864$; $p = .027$), which prompted us to use the non-parametric correlation test. The test results showed a non-significant difference for the quantity of feminine traits and both factors of sexism (quantity of feminine traits – old-fashioned sexism: $df = 13$; $p = .448$; quantity of feminine traits – modern sexism: $df = 13$; $p = .249$). Therefore, our third hypothesis is rejected.

We measured how participants viewed each character regarding masculinity and femininity. Each participant assigned five traits to the characters, which could be stereotypically feminine, masculine, or neutral. If three of the five traits belonged to the same category,

we considered the character to be feminine, masculine, or neutral. If the traits were selected in a two-two-one distribution (e.g., two feminine, two masculine, one neutral), the character was also assigned a neutral label. We then calculated the average sympathy of the characters labelled as feminine, masculine, and neutral for each participant. Finally, Repeated Measures ANOVA was used to compare scores on sympathy and sexism. The test results did not support our hypothesis (sympathy – old-fashioned sexism: $df = 2$; $p = .095$; sympathy – modern sexism: $df = 2$; $p = .574$). Therefore, our fourth hypothesis is rejected.

Data from all participants was compiled into three cumulated measures for each character: (1) Fit beauty standards ($M = 25.9$; $Me = 26.0$; $SD = 3.83$); (2) Sympathy ($M = 29.3$; $Me = 30.0$; $SD = 3.49$) and (3) Perceived importance ($M = 32.7$; $Me = 34.0$; $SD = 4.64$). All three factors followed normal distribution (Fit beauty standards: $W = .97$; $p = .796$; Sympathy: $W = .96$; $p = .606$; Perceived importance: $W = .92$; $p = .182$). According to our hypothesis, an individual would find characters that fit beauty standards more sympathetic. To test our theory, we measured the correlation between Fit beauty standards and Sympathy, which was confirmed ($df = 13$; $p = .034$) with a moderate positive correlation ($r_s = .55$) (see Table 4).

We also hypothesized that a character would be perceived as less important to the story if her appearance conformed to beauty standards which would present a negative correlation between these two factors. This was not confirmed ($df = 13$; $p = .357$) (see Table 4). Therefore, our fifth hypothesis is partially confirmed.

Table 4. Correlation matrix comparing scores for the “Sympathy” and the “Perceived importance” factors with the “Fit beauty standards” factor

	r_s	Fit beauty standards	
		df	p
sympathy	.550	13	.034
perceived importance	.256	13	.357

We assessed the quality of descriptions by using content analysis. Analysis was conducted by two independent coders who measured the extent of stereotypically feminine or masculine information in the participants’ descriptions.

This meant the extent to which the response was perceived as fitting stereotypically feminine or masculine roles. Scoring was done using a Likert scale ranging from 1 to 5, with 1 meaning “not at all” and 5 meaning “completely”. Consistency of

the raters' responses was assessed. According to the results ($ICC = .743$; $p < .001$), their consistency showed a moderately strong correlation, allowing us to continue our analysis. We used the data of the two most frequently chosen traits per character ($n = 16$). Paired-samples T-tests were used to examine whether there was a significant

difference between the values of feminine and masculine information present in the descriptions. For neutral traits, the value difference was expected to be non-significant. Out of the sixteen traits examined, data for thirteen traits conformed to our expectations (see Table 5); therefore, our sixth hypothesis is partially confirmed.

Table 5. Statistics for all 16 most picked traits

Character name	Trait name	Trait quality	Information score M (masculine; feminine)	Statistic	Significance (p)	Confirmed
Amanda	ambitious	masculine	4.92 1.17	W = 78.0	< .001	Yes
	confident	masculine	4.77 1.18	W = 55.0	.001	Yes
Amelie	sensitive	feminine	1.43 4.64	W = 1.00	< .001	Yes
	unselfish	feminine	3.71 3.07	t = 1.49 df = 6.00	.906	No
Divine Child	calm	masculine	2.65 2.65	t = .00 df = 9.00	.500	No
	submissive	feminine	1.67 3.33	W = .00	.004	Yes
Emma	intelligent	neutral	1.63 1.92	W = 1.00	.197	Yes
	reserved	neutral	4.56 1.31	W = 28.0	.020	No
Fragile	ambitious	masculine	4.83 1.17	W = 45.0	.003	Yes
	stubborn	masculine	4.63 1.56	W = 36.0	.006	Yes
Kara	courageous	masculine	4.95 1.60	W = 55.0	.003	Yes
	nurturing	feminine	1.77 4.69	W = 3.50	.002	Yes
Tomoe	arrogant	masculine	4.63 1.13	W = 28.0	.005	Yes
	daring	masculine	5.00 1.00	W = 28.0	.005	Yes
Yuna	courageous	masculine	4.67 1.56	W = 36.0	.006	Yes
	nurturing	feminine	1.96 4.75	W = 5.50	.004	Yes

Note: "Information score M" indicates the mean of the scores for masculine and feminine information present in the descriptions given by participants, as determined by raters as a result of the content analysis process. The mean of the scores for "masculine information" is presented first, and the mean of the scores for "feminine information" is presented underneath.

Discussion

Considering the statistical analysis, we found that the acceptance of modern sexist views (Swim et al., 1995) was higher in the examined sample, with no significant difference in terms of gender.

The extent to which a participant identified with old-fashioned or modern sexist views influenced how they perceived female video game characters, but the findings are unsatisfactory. We conclude that a higher degree of sexism did not show a clear correlation with choosing stereotypically feminine characteristics. While the participants' reasons behind their choices were likely to be based on stereotypes, this phenomenon cannot be linked to sexism.

Unexpected results were also obtained in the case of sympathy for the examined characters: the formation of a positive opinion was correlated with the degree of conformity to the traditional European beauty ideal, but this did not lead to a devaluation of the role played in the story.

When assessing the most frequently chosen traits for characters, most traits ($n = 9$) were considered stereotypically masculine, followed by feminine traits ($n = 5$) and neutral traits ($n = 2$). This indicates that female representations are becoming less stereotypically feminine, suggesting that video game companies are striving to create more diverse and modern characters.

There were many opposing opinions regarding characters attributed with masculine traits, as some participants considered Amanda's (Detroit: Become Human, 2018) ambition inspirational, while others disapproved of her insensitive comments. A comparable situation occurred with the character Tomoe (Ghost of Tsushima, 2020), whose betrayals elicited ambivalent reactions.

Exclusively feminine traits were attributed to only one character, Amelie (Death Stranding, 2019), who played a key role in the story. Interestingly, displaying stereotypically feminine characteristics evoked similarly opposing reactions from the participants, resulting in frustration alongside sympathy.

Limitations. The primary limitation was the small sample size, as it is not possible to draw conclusions about a large population with the inclusion of 15 people. The gender ratio in the sample was also unbalanced, so the data may have been

distorted by the majority of female participants.

The English language skill requirement certainly limited the number of potential participants, as there was no official Hungarian translation available for most of the games featured in the study.

Participants' choices might have been influenced by the limited number of traits present in the Character Analysis Questionnaire, as some noted that it lacked the "wise" and "manipulative" traits. Several participants expressed difficulty answering the question "Does this character fit into traditional beauty standards?", as they were unsure what traditional beauty entails and whether they could evaluate characters of Asian descent based on those criteria. Some gave an answer such as "her looks don't suit European standards, but they certainly suit Asian ones."

Conducting a similar study in the future could benefit from a different experimental design or shorter video material, as several participants reported that the interview was long.

Considering these limitations, the study material and research tools need to be refined, but given our findings, we obtained acceptable results in this study, thereby increasing the available information on gender representation in media.

Conclusion

The primary goal of this study was to explore how women are portrayed in currently popular video games while investigating how players perceive and respond to them.

There is sufficient evidence detailing how the representation of women in media has undergone radical changes over the past decades (e.g., Allen, 2024; Devčić & Sabol, 2024; Forni, 2020; Leach & Dehnert 2021; Lynch et al., 2016) and our findings further support this idea.

It is important to consider that representations of women can never be separated from sexist ideologies, because social phenomena that maintain traditional ideas and expectations associated with them (e.g., beauty standards) are deeply embedded in people's consciousness and culture (Cabeza-García et al., 2019; Chung, 2022).

While globalization and digital media seem to have greatly transformed the way we view gender roles in recent decades (Cabeza-García et al., 2019), the effects of modern sexism are

still present in our everyday lives (Doolard et al., 2022; Krivoshchekov et al., 2023; Off et al., 2022), including the representation of female characters in our favourite video games (Jansz & Martis 2007; Roberts, 2012; Rodrigues da Silva Neto, 2020; Tompkins et al., 2020).

Based on our findings, we conclude that the representation of women in video games has undergone significant changes, although conforming to beauty standards will remain important – or at least for the foreseeable future (Forni, 2020; Leach & Dehnert, 2021). However, seeing female characters who present diverse qualities and skills and fulfil numerous vital roles is a major step forward from the archetype of the “damsel in distress” (Allen, 2024; Devčić & Sabol, 2024; Forni, 2020; Leach & Dehnert, 2021).

By comparing results on perceived sympathy, we found that one’s alignment with sexist views does not lead to a clear formation of positive or negative opinions.

In summation, our findings show that the characters examined in our research were described in an extremely diverse way by the participants. From the reactions to the characters, we conclude that sexist views can be considered influential, but the relationship is not clearly established. It would be of importance to examine the topic in terms of other sexist ideologies, for example, through the lens of ambivalent sexism (Glick & Fiske, 1996).

In the future, we would like to conduct further research involving male characters to gain a more detailed picture of gender representations in modern video games while examining possible connections with external and internal factors, such as culture and sexuality.

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