



Bigger Isn't Always Better: An Assessment of the Use of Hypersexualized Video Game Character Models and Player Preference in Video Games

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Bigger Isn't Always Better: An Assessment of the Use of Hypersexualized Video Game
Character Models and Player Preference in Video Games

Sierra Marie Hall

A Thesis in the Field of International Relations
for the Degree of Master of Liberal Arts in Extension Studies

Harvard University

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Abstract

From television and movies to music videos and magazines, the media we consume has a significant impact on our attitudes, behaviors, social norms, and gender stereotypes. The sexualization of women in the media has been shown to lead to negative health outcomes such as anxiety, depression, body image issues, and eating disorders. While the impact of media such as television, movies, magazines, and social media sites have been explored previously, we have less of an understanding as to how video games as a media may affect players. This study evaluates the impact of hypersexualized character models on player preference for purchasing and playing a video game as well as the sociocultural attitudes towards appearance of the player. When given the choice between hypersexualized and normal proportioned character models, participants significantly preferred the normal character models. Furthermore, when given the choice between a male and female character model used on video game promotional art, the majority of participants preferred the female character model. No significance was found among participants' sociocultural attitudes towards appearance. These findings illustrate the need for increased realistic female representation in video games.

Author's Biographical Sketch

Sierra Marie Hall, MPH currently attends the Master of Liberal Arts program at the Harvard Extension School. She received her Master of Public Health in Epidemiology & Biostatistics from the Boston University School of Public Health in 2019. Her academic work focuses primarily on women's issues and the media's impact on health. Professionally, she has worked for many years as a Data Manager in Phase I-II Oncology studies. When not working on her next project, she can be found coaching youth volleyball, volunteering at the local library bookstore, or helping to organize fundraising events for a local women's shelter.

Dedication

This thesis and all my work is dedicated to my father, who encouraged my interests in epidemiology and video games. Without him, this project would not exist.

Acknowledgments

To my family, I am eternally grateful for your support every step of the way. Your love and encouragement have given me the motivation to never stop working.

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Chapter I.

Introduction

Sometimes a killer body just isn't enough.

—Tomb Raider, 1996

Now more than ever before, we are turning to technology to enhance our professional and personal lives. In 2020 and 2021 alone, more than 780 million additional people sought internet access (United Nations, 2021). According to United Nations Secretary-General António Guterres, “The COVID-19 pandemic has highlighted the life-changing power of the Internet...Digital technology has saved lives by enabling millions of people to work, study, and socialize safely online.” (United Nations, 2021, para. 4). Although there has been a rise in technology use for professional reasons, many people also use technology as a form of recreation. In 2023, more than 3.3 billion people globally were playing video games for reasons such as recreation, relaxation, competition, and socialization – an increase of more than six percent year on year (Newzoo, 2023, para. 4).

Historically, video games have been labeled and gendered as ‘toys for boys’ and have been marketed for male consumption. Video games are ‘created by men, for men’ with disregard to the preferences or considerations of women (Melzer, 2019). Although 48% of video game players in the United States are women, female characters are underrepresented in video games and are often portrayed with negative characteristics aimed at appeasing a male audience (Entertainment Software Association (ESA), 2022, p.

2). While some companies have claimed that female protagonists in games are detrimental to sales, the reasoning for the decreased sales in female-led compared to male-led games is likely not because of the gender of the main character, but because of the lack of support from the publisher. Games with a female protagonist have been shown to receive at most forty percent of the marketing budget of male-led games, putting them at a severe disadvantage when it comes to sales compared to their male-led games (Kuchera, 2012).

On the contrary, the use of female protagonists has been shown to increase sales of some games, as has been seen with game franchises such as *Metroid*, *Tomb Raider*, *Resident Evil*, the *Horizon* series, and the *The Last of Us* series (Carter, 2023; Clayton-Berry, 2020; LeBlanc, 2023). In 2020, among the new video games announced by companies such as Sony, EA, Microsoft, and Ubisoft, only 18% of protagonists were female – a shocking increase of 13% from 2019 (Sarkeesian, 2020, para. 1). Even the *Grand Theft Auto* series, which has been notorious for its negative portrayals of women, will feature a female protagonist in their upcoming release (Arroyo, 2023; Burgess et al., 2007; Tassi, 2013; Tu, 2023).

When asked why female playable character options weren't included in *Assassin's Creed Unity* or *Far Cry 4*, representatives from Ubisoft claimed that the female character models were too “workload intensive” and “a lot of production work” (Corriea, 2014; Farokhmanesh, 2014; LeJacq, 2014). Further explanations elaborated that the games did not have any female character model animations, so the character model would “walk and jump like a dude”. Jonathan Cooper, a previous animation director for Ubisoft, spoke out against Ubisoft's claims in support of more female representation

stating that “You can quite easily put male animations onto a female character” and that a skeleton for a female character model would take “a day or two’s work” (Corriea, 2014; Farokhmanesh, 2014). More recently, Ubisoft has come under fire for accusations of racism, sexual harassment, and sexism at the company (Gach, 2021; Schreier, 2020). A survey conducted in 2020 found that 25% of employees have seen or experienced workplace misconduct (Gartenberg, 2020, para. 2).

Unfortunately, when female characters are included in video games, they are often unplayable or only offer a supporting role to the male protagonist. Furthermore, many female characters reinforce traditional gender roles and are hypersexualized or sexually objectified (Downs & Smith, 2010; Lynch et al., 2016; Lopez-Fernandez et al., 2019). Although many game companies defend the hypersexualization of female game characters, claiming the images help boost sales to the male audience, an analysis of video game sales over a 31-year period found no association between sexualization of women and improved game sales (Lynch et al., 2016). Hypersexualization of female characters in games has not been linked to increased sales, but it has been shown to increase tolerance for sexual harassment and rape myth acceptance in men (Dill et al., 2008; Driesmans et al., 2015; Fox, Bailenson, & Tricase, 2013).

Women who play video games may face serious adverse outcomes when playing games both solo and online, even though playing video games has been shown to have cognitive and emotional benefits for women. Positive outcomes of playing video games among women include increased emotional creativity, reduced stress, and improved mood (Cábelková et al., 2020; Russoniello et al., 2009). Additionally, girls who co-play

games with their parents have shown decreased levels of internalizing and aggressive behaviors, and improved prosocial behavior (Coyne et al., 2010).

Women who play video games may be at an increased risk of both internalized and external adverse consequences. Internalized consequences may include a lack of connection to playable characters or the game's story, and exposure to the sexualized nature of female characters can lead to reduced self-esteem, reduced body-esteem, and depression (Barlett & Harris, 2008; Phan et al., 2012; Lopez-Fernandez et al., 2019). In addition to the negative internalized thoughts women may have about themselves, they are at risk for experiencing harassment from other players as well. 48% of women who played video games online reported experiencing harassment in 2023 (Center for Technology and Society, 2024, para. 5). Because of the harassment, players have reported being uncomfortable/upset after playing, had personal relationships disrupted, and had depressive/suicidal thoughts. In response to these experiences, players have changed how they played or even quit playing games they enjoyed entirely to avoid the harassment (Center for Technology and Society, 2024; Chawki & el Shazly, 2013; Consalvo, 2012). A respondent in the Center for Technology and Society's Report on Online Hate and Harassment (2024) stated:

I got to a point where I just stopped playing those games online anymore because, you know, it doesn't matter how strong of a person you are. Doesn't matter how confident you are. Doesn't matter how brave... You carry them with you and what do you think about it or not, whether you are OK with it or not in the moment and can just roll your eyes and go along with it. You get to a point where you just stop enjoying things that you used to enjoy...just to try to protect yourself.

Furthermore, women video game players are at a severe disadvantage if they try to become competitive players. Women have reported experiencing discrimination in the form of verbal harassment from competitors and teammates as well as unreasonably high

standards - it is not enough for women players to accomplish the same feats as their men counterparts, they need to be significantly better to be considered “serious gamers” (Cote, 2015; Doerr, 2022; Fox & Tang, 2016; McKinnon-Crowley, 2020). Jessica Estephan was the first woman to compete in the card game *Magic: The Gathering's* Pro-Tour. She explains what it is like to compete as woman in a male dominated game in an interview with Lauren Orsini for Forbes in 2018:

When women my age [23] grew up, we weren't really allowed to like 'boy things'. So if I started [playing games] through my own independent will at 19, but my male counterparts have been playing and thinking about games since they were young, there's a significant disadvantage there. Women are competitive, it's just hard to compete at something your opponents have a 10-year head start at...I'd love to be primarily known as a good player with my gender being secondary; unfortunately, that's not how it works.

Prolonged exposure to these negative experiences has been shown to lead to negative health outcomes such as low self-esteem, desire to blend in and not be seen, and depression (Fox, Bailenson, & Tricase, 2013; Lopez-Fernandez et al., 2019; McKinnon-Crowley, 2020).

Working concurrently with images of hypersexualized female characters, overly macho male characters in video games have been shown to have negative impacts as well. Hypermasculinity, or the use of exaggerated masculine cultural stereotypes, often presents itself in video games through the use of an overly macho male protagonist. Male characters in video games are often depicted as heterosexual, aggressive, stoic, and unnaturally muscular (Blackburn & Scharrer, 2019; Burgess et al., 2011; Shaw & Friesem, 2016). Exposure to images of macho, aggressive male characters and objectified female characters has shown encouragement of masculinity over femininity, and a preference for 'traditional masculine' traits such as physical strength, leadership,

aggression, and emotional indifference while affirming that ‘traditional feminine’ traits such as sensitivity, nurturing, passivity, and supportiveness are secondary, thus perpetuating these traditional gender roles (Blodgett & Salter, 2012; Kachel et al., 2016; Parrott & Zeichner, 2007; Vandenbosch & Eggermont, 2013). Endorsement of ‘traditionally masculine’ beliefs has been associated with a range of negative mental health outcomes and non-adaptive health behaviors (Jampel et al., 2020; Kilian et al., 2020; Mahalik et al., 2007). Furthermore, exposure to hypermasculinity in video games has also shown to be associated with an increased tolerance of sexual harassment and rape myth acceptance among male video game players (Blodgett & Salter, 2012; Dill et al., 2008).

While the existing scholarship has set the foundation for the current research, much of it is quite dated, as it is often more than 10 years old and has primarily focused on male video game players’ perspectives. Previous research conducted in the mid-2000s and early 2010s was generalizable at the time, but the demographics of video game players has evolved so much over the past decade that additional research with a broad range of participants is crucial. Improvements in video game technology have reduced barriers to playing video games among the general population. Players can now have expanded access through the use of consoles, personal computers, mobile phones, and virtual reality headsets; these technological improvements and cost reductions have made video games accessible to a broader audience than in previous decades. Furthermore, previous studies have focused primarily on images of hypersexualized female characters, thus the impact of macho male characters on men’s sociocultural attitudes towards

appearance has not yet been evaluated, despite a growing awareness of problems associated with subscription to certain masculine ideologies.

The purpose of this study is to evaluate the impact of hypersexualized characters, both male and female, in video games on consumer purchasing of video games and the potential negative health outcomes experienced by the players of games with hypersexualized character models. To answer these research questions, this thesis examines four primary hypotheses:

H1. The use of hypersexualized character designs on promotional art will not be preferred by participants

H2. Realistic character models will be preferred when choosing a character avatar

H3. The ability to customize a player's character model/avatar will be important to the player

H4. Video games will have a negative impact on the sociocultural attitudes towards appearance of the players

By assessing each hypothesis above, this study contributes to a better understanding of the impact of video games as a form of media on consumers. Previous research has shown the detrimental effects sexualization of characters in media such as television, movies, and magazines on consumers, but additional research is needed to evaluate if video games as a form of media display similar patterns.

Chapter II.

Background

The following sections provide an overview of current scholarship on sex, social behavior, and stereotypes in video games

Sex and Social Behavior: The Gendering of Social Roles

The formalized division of labor into “male” and “female” roles was first provided by Parsons and Bales in the mid-1950s. Parsons and Bales (1955) set the foundation for social role theory by dividing labor among married couples into tasks best suited to husbands and wives. It was suggested that males were best suited to task-oriented (instrumental) tasks, while females were best suited to socioemotional (expressive) behaviors. These divisions were based on the view that biologically, males tended to be larger and stronger than females, while females are biologically responsible for gestation. The roles for males and females were structured as complimentary, and it was believed that each partner needed to play their part for society to function (Parsons and Bales, 1955).

Social role theory posits that the sex differences in social behavior are due to the division of labor within a society. In an industrial society, such as the United States in the 1950s, men are likely to be primary providers who assume roles in leadership or the economy while women are more likely to be homemakers and caretakers (Eagly, 1997; Eagly & Wood, 2016). The division of labor which placed men in positions of higher power, status, and economic gain and women in positions of nurturing and caring has led

to gender stereotypes that continue to directly shape the actions of men and women in society today (Ridgeway, 2001).

As the United States has shifted into a position as a post-industrial society, Parsons and Bales' (1955) classification of social roles has begun to shift as well, albeit slowly (Crossman, 2011; Hentschel et al., 2019). While some traditional gender stereotypes have begun to shift, many men still view women as lacking the necessary attributes to excel in traditionally male fields. Furthermore, many women still see themselves as deficient to men in qualities of leadership, competence, and assertiveness – showing the grip that traditional gender roles still have on both men and women (Eagly & Sczesny, 2019; Hentschel et al., 2019).

Redefining gender roles is a difficult and lengthy process, often requiring multiple generations to see significant changes. This is because gender socialization begins at birth, with color-coded gender labels assigned to each sex (Encyclopedia on Early Childhood Development, 2014; Paris et al., 2021). Most people today would presume that blue is for boys and pink is for girls, but this was not always the case. Prior to the 1940s, pink was assigned as a boy color, while blue was chosen for girls (Paoletti, 2012; Russell, 2021). An excerpt from Maglaty's (2011) article in *Smithsonian Magazine* states:

A June 1918 article from the trade publication *Earnshaw's Infants' Department* said, "The generally accepted rule is pink for the boys, and blue for the girls. The reason is that pink, being a more decided and stronger color, is more suitable for the boy, while blue, which is more delicate and dainty, is prettier for the girl."

An infant's ability to recognize gender develops from birth to 15 months, as the infant begins to bond with their caregivers. Caregivers have complete control over an infant's gender expression, as they are responsible for choosing the clothing, hairstyles, and toys for the child; but by age three, children have begun to express their gender by

demonstrating preference for clothing, toys, and friend groups (Fausto-Sterling, 2021; Henrich et al., 2010; Todd et al., 2012).

According to Paris et al. (2021, p. 389), “Gender socialization occurs through four major agents: family, education, peer groups, and mass media. Each agent reinforces gender roles by creating and maintaining normative expectations for gender-specific behavior.” Considering the four main agents driving gender socialization, it is easy to see how video games may impact each one. Not only are video games an integral piece of modern-day media, but they are also used for education in schools, and can be topics of conversation among one’s family and peer groups (Bogost, 2011; Bowman, 2012; Faillaci, 2017; Okur & Aygenc, 2018; Ruggill & McAllister, 2011; Whitmer, 2022). For this reason, it is reasonable to conclude that depictions of gender roles in video games are contributing to gender socialization today.

Sexy Stereotypes: Gender Roles in the Media

A gender stereotype is a “generalized view or preconception about attitudes, or characteristics that are or ought to be possessed by women and men or the roles that are or should be performed by men and women.” (Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights, 2014). From television and movies to music videos and video games, the media have a significant impact on attitudes, behaviors, social norms, and gender stereotypes (Boundless, 2021; Council of Europe Gender Equality Strategy, n.d.; Ward & Grower, 2020; Wood, 2013). The negative depictions of women in media often fall under one of two extremes: either as wholesome, matronly characters or as hypersexualized objects (Boundless, 2021; Harwood & Anderson, 2002; Ward & Grower, 2020).

Specifically in the context of video games, women are often not included at all, but when they are, women are most often portrayed as secondary characters with oversexualized attributes, wearing sexually suggestive clothing or partially nude, and helpless and in need of rescue (Bell, 2017; Downs & Smith, 2010; Gestos, 2018; Williams, et al., 2009). Frequently created to satisfy a male fantasy, female characters in games are there to either be “locked and/or lulled”, meaning they are required to be saved by the male protagonist and then are also his reward for completing the quest (Dietz, 1998; Kurniawan et al., 2023).

Cultivation theory, first introduced by Gerbner (1998), postulates that regular exposure to television will lead viewers to adopt social attitudes that align with the content presented in the shows/movies. Shrum & Lee (2012) have expanded on cultivation theory to include other forms of media, such as video games. Recurrent depictions of male characters as heroic main characters with more power and abilities and female characters as sexy, innocent, and secondary will shape players’ perceptions of social normative gender roles (Dietz, 1998; Lynch et al., 2016; Miller & Summers, 2007). A study conducted by Beasley & Standley (2009) found that in a review of 597 video game characters, less than 14% of them were women and the majority of the female characters were dressed in clothing that exposed more skin than male characters.

For example, the game *SoulCalibur V* which released in 2012, is the fifth mainline title installment in the *SoulCalibur* series. A member of the fighting game genre, a genre which is known for hypersexualizing its female characters, *SoulCalibur V* took its character designs to the extreme (Downs & Smith, 2009; Inglis, 2022). A promotional image for the game (Figure 1) goes as far as to not even show the head of

Ivy Valentine, one of the game's main characters (Yusuke, 2012). Described as “a caricature of a pubescent boy's preposterously-proportioned ideal video game lady”, Ivy is considered to be one of the most overtly sexualized video game characters of all time, with her most defining characteristic being her “large amounts of jiggling cleavage” (Contributors to Soul Calibur Wiki, n.d.; D’Anastasio, 2018, para. 1; Entertainment Software Rating Board (ESRB), n.d.) (Figure 2). Beginning with the release of *SoulCalibur IV* in 2008, character armor would now break off as it was damaged – leaving characters exposed in only their underwear. In 2011, the director of the series, Daishi Odashima, posted on Twitter the requirements for the breast sizes of each female character in the series (Fahey, 2011) (Figure 3). All the *SoulCalibur* games are rated as appropriate for ages 13 and up (ESRB, n.d.).



Figure 1. Promotional art for *SoulCalibur V* (2012).

The image above was used as promotional art for the release of SoulCalibur V in Japan. The image depicts Ivy Valentine's breasts, the attribute her character is most known for. The text on her breasts reads “New Year's Full of Anticipation”.



Figure 2. Character model of Ivy Valentine from *SoulCalibur IV* (2008).

The image above is the character model for Ivy Valentine, a playable female character in the SoulCalibur fighting game franchise.

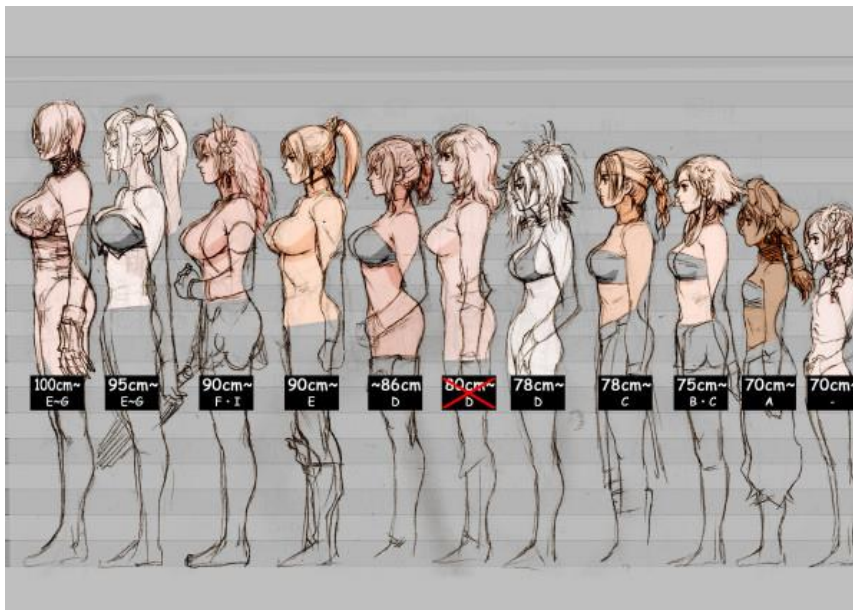


Figure 3. Required female character model breast size for characters in the *SoulCalibur* game series.

The image above shows the required character model breast sizes for each of the female characters included in the SoulCalibur series. Some of the characters' breast sizes have increased from their first appearance in the series.

Appropriately rating video games with sexualized characters as not suitable for children is crucial, as overtly sexualized representations of women in video games have been shown to be harmful to children. Children will learn to internalize these depictions of women, viewing them as weak, victims, and sex objects (Dietz, 1998). With consideration to cultivation theory, it is reasonable to posit that the current depictions of women in video games may perpetuate negative gender stereotypes among players of all ages (Bègue et al., 2017; Melzer, 2019; Ward & Grower, 2020).

Furthermore, overly macho male characters in video games have been shown to have negative impacts as well. Male characters in video games are often depicted as heterosexual, aggressive, stoic, and unnaturally muscular (Blackburn & Scharrer, 2019; Burgess et al., 2011; Shaw & Friesem, 2016). Dill (2007, p. 861) states, “the vision of masculinity video game characters project is that men should be powerful, dominant, and aggressive”. There is a recurring narrative in which male heroes are the protagonist in games, using their excessive strength to rescue the helpless, sexy damsel in distress (Kirkland, 2005).

This ‘hypermasculine ideal’ is often portrayed in media, reinforcing the likability of male protagonists who are strong, athletic, noncommunicative, and violent. Male protagonists who display negative traits like violence, avoiding emotions, and objectifying women are unlikely to experience consequences for these behaviors because they are the victorious hero of the story, which may provide a positive view of these traits to the audience, especially children (Arbour & Martin Ginis, 2006; Harriger et al., 2022; Muller et al., 2020). Prolonged exposure to the hypermuscular body ideal has been shown to significantly reduce body esteem and body satisfaction and increase depression among

men (Agliata & Tantleff-Dunn, 2004; Arbour & Martin Ginis, 2006). Furthermore, hypermasculine characteristics such as only expressing emotions through anger and unwillingness to seek help have been attributed to shorter life expectancy among men (Evans et al., 2011; The World Health Organization, n.d.).

Additionally, men who emulate hypermasculine gender roles show higher rates of aggression than those who do not emulate hypermasculine roles. Men who embody hypermasculine traits are more aggressive towards others who do not adhere to traditional gender norms, specifically homosexual men and women who display non-traditional feminine roles (Parrott & Zeichner, 2007; Reidy et al., 2009). Hypermasculinity has also been linked to increased cases of verbal, physical, and sexual aggression towards intimate partners (Alonzo & Guerrero, 2009). Considering video games specifically, the use of aggressive, hypermasculine male characters and objectified female characters in video games has been shown to increase tolerance of sexual harassment and rape myth acceptance among men video game players (Dill et al., 2008; Driesmans et al., 2015; Fox et al., 2013).

A History of Female Protagonists in Games

In 1980, Toru Iwatani found a gap in the market of arcade video games that had primarily been marketed solely to teenage boys. Some of the most popular games at the time, *Space Invaders* and *Galaxian* were violent shooter games that centered around conflict (Stuart, 2021). Iwatani wanted to create a game that could appeal to a broad audience. He hoped to transform arcades from dank dungeons into a place where women would also want to go, hoping arcades would be the perfect ‘date night’ - and thus *Pac-Man* was born (Peckham, 2015). Inspired both by a 17th century haiku as well as a slice

of pizza, the characters and controls were intentionally created with a simple design, allowing players to project their own feelings and perceptions on the characters and the story (Clayton-Berry, 2020; Park, 2020; Peckham, 2015). Due to the success of *Pac-Man*, *Ms. Pac-Man* was released in 1982, notably one of the first female protagonists in gaming. The desire to create games marketed towards women paid off, as *Pac-Man* is the highest grossing arcade game of all time, with *Ms. Pac-Man* being the fourth highest grossing arcade game of all time (Rignall, 2015).

Shortly after *Ms. Pac-Man* released, *Wabbit* released for the Atari 2600. The game focused on Billie Sue, a farmer who had to chase rabbits away from her crops. Not only is Billie Sue the first human female protagonist in video game history, but she was also designed and programmed by a Vietnamese woman named Van Mai. Unfortunately, the publishing company went bankrupt shortly after *Wabbit* was released, keeping *Wabbit* from having a bigger impact on video game culture (Bashir, 2022; Bunch & Willaert, 2022). Following *Wabbit*, games such as *Time Gal* (1985), *Ninja Princess* (1985), and *Athena* (1986) all featured strong, female protagonists (Potvin, 2022). These games showed that female protagonists could produce impressive sales, although the games were also some of the first to sexualize their female characters (Lowe, 2022). Both primary characters in *Time Gal* and *Athena* have been criticized as being sexualized, as *Athena* was stripped of her clothing and was left with only a bikini as soon as the game started. The greatest reward a player could achieve for *Athena* in the game was to unlock her special ‘red bikini’ (Lowe, 2022; Potvin, 2022).

Also released in 1986, *Metroid* shocked players everywhere when at the end of the game, it was revealed that the strong, independent, self-sufficient space bounty hunter

players had been controlling the entire time was actually a woman (Byrd, 2021).

Unfortunately, much like the player reward in *Athena*, depending on how you performed in the game, Samus's character model will appear in varying degrees of clothing at the end with the greatest reward being the least amount of clothing (Claiborn, 2016; Wikitroid, n.d.) (Figure 4).

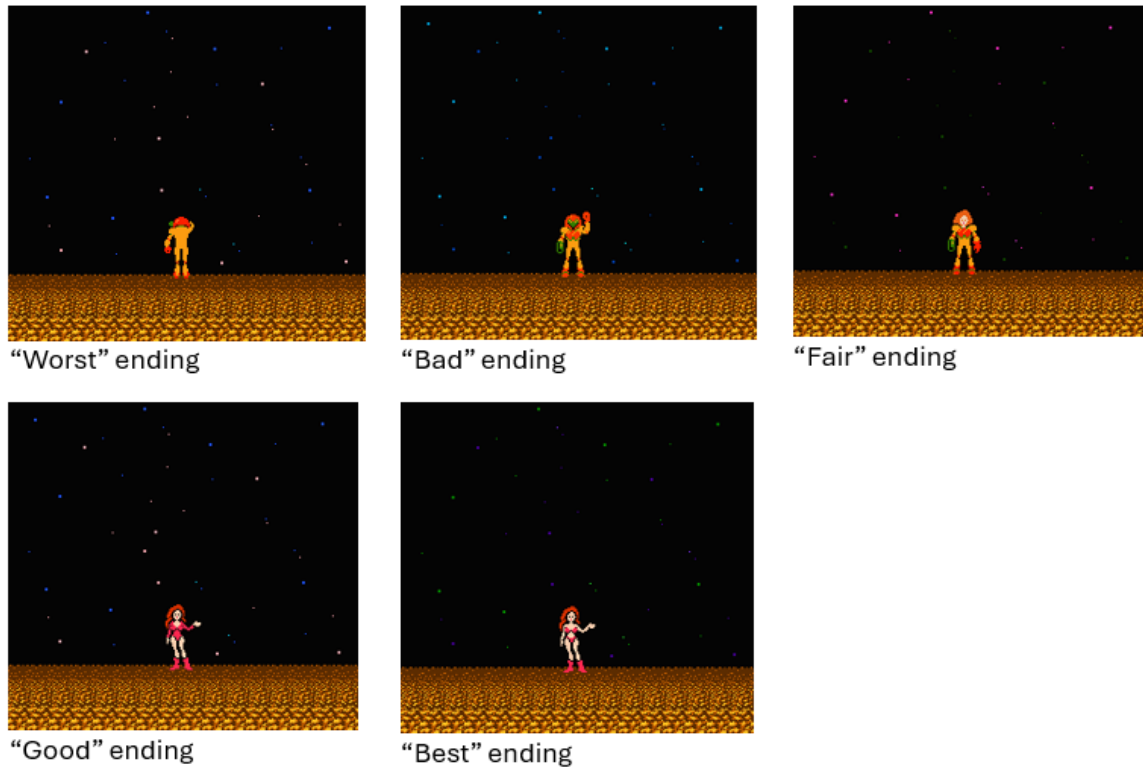


Figure 4. Samus outfit options based on ending in *Metroid* (1986).

Above are the five different outfit options a player could get as a reward for finishing the game Metroid. It was at this time that players who got the "Fair" or better ending learned that the protagonist, Samus, was a woman. The reward increases for players getting better endings was that Samus had less clothing on.

In 1996, the most popular female protagonist in video game history was created, Lara Croft from *Tomb Raider*. Holding a Guinness World Record for being the "best-selling videogame heroine", although Lara Croft can be seen as a powerful female

protagonist, she is most well known for her physical assets (Guinness World Records, 2024). Having sparked what is now known as the “Lara Phenomenon”, Lara is perpetually caught between two worlds – acting as both a feminist and sexual icon (Berger, 2002; Han & Song, 2014; Jansz & Martis, 2007; Kennedy, 2002). While Lara Croft did pave the way for game companies to utilize more powerful female protagonists – having taken on the role of heroine opposed to damsel in distress– she did so with “...fake polygonal breasts thrust defiantly forward, accompanied by breathless feminine pants and commentary” (Schleiner, 2001, p. 223).

More than just a playable character, Lara Croft has become an international sex symbol. In 2005, she appeared in *PlayStation Magazine*’s Swimsuit Special (Tomb Raider Chronicles, n.d.) (Figure 5). *PlayStation Magazine* was not alone in using female video game characters as sex objects. A study done by Fisher (2015) found that:

Magazines consistently treat digital women as vacant pinups to be ogled or irrelevant sidekicks to be tolerated, and real women as annoying interlopers to be bullied.

Edward Downs of the University of Minnesota describes the effect characters like Lara Croft have by saying “These characters show that despite having male characteristics and being dominant, women’s bodies are still their most important feature” (Strum, 2016).



Figure 5. *PlayStation Magazine Swimsuit Edition Featuring Lara Croft (2005).*

PlayStation Magazine's Swimsuit Edition (2005) featured three images of Lara Croft depicted in swimsuits on the beach.

Although Lara Croft led to *Tomb Raider's* success as a franchise, during development of Sony Entertainment's wildly popular *Horizon Zero Dawn* video game in 2010, some members of the production team voiced concerns that having a female protagonist would be "too risky". These concerns led Sony to conduct a focus group during development regarding the use of a female protagonist, the participants overwhelmingly preferring the female character model to a male character model (Crecente, 2015; Peterson, 2015). The main character, Aloy, provides a positive example of a female protagonist with traditionally male traits such as hunting and leadership, without overtly sexualized body proportions or clothing. Aloy serves as a prime example of a character that disrupts the prevalence of benevolent sexism found in games featuring female protagonists (Allen, 2023). With more than 33 million game copies sold in early 2023, more game development and production companies need to look at the success of

the *Horizon* Series and continue to use realistic female character models as their game's protagonist (LeBlanc, 2023).

In addition to the *Horizon* series, *The Last of Us* series has also had great success featuring powerful female protagonists (Carter, 2023). The second installment in the series, *The Last of Us Part II* features a diverse cast of female characters, with women occupying the roles of the lead characters. Players assume the role of not one but both female leads, and play as both Ellie and Abby, two young women who are famous for their realistic body types. Met with a lot of criticism, some players have spoken out against the 'muscular, masculine, and unrealistic' body type of Abby's character (Coles, 2020; Johnston, 2020; Tomkinson, 2022). Although Abby's character follows an 'unconventional' female body type, particularly as is often depicted in video games, her muscular form fits her character's motivations and story background, and was modeled after athlete Colleen Fotsch, showing that her body style is both possible and realistic (Blechman, 2020; Clayton-Berry, 2020). Despite the criticism, *The Last of Us Part II*'s recent remaster edition sold more than twice as many copies as the first installment of the game's remaster edition, which was led by a male protagonist (Parijat, 2024).

Impacts of Negative Depictions of Women in the Media

Consistent exposure to the negative images and depictions of women in video games has been shown to contribute to greater acceptance of views of women as secondary to men, increased self-objectification, negative body-image, and increased rape myth acceptance (Barlett & Harris, 2008; Dill et al., 2008; Fox et al., 2013; Harwood & Anderson, 2002; Melzer, 2019; Ward & Grower, 2020). As explained by objectification theory, this constant exposure to and social acceptance of the media's depictions of

women as sexualized and secondary leads women to internalize the observer's view. This internalization of objectification can lead to increased shame, anxiety, lower self-esteem, and eating disorders (Fredrickson & Roberts, 1997; Winn & Cornelius, 2020).

In a study by Simon & Hoyt (2013), women participants were separated into two groups: one group viewed media images of women in counter-stereotypical roles and the other group viewing women in stereotypical gendered roles. They found that the women who viewed the images of the counter-stereotypical gender roles reported stronger non-traditional gender role acceptance, less negative self-perceptions, and greater leadership aspirations than the women who viewed the stereotypical gender roles.

First proposed by Yee and Bailenson (2007), the Proteus effect proposes that one's embodiment of a video game character's avatar can lead to shifts in self-perception both online and offline. Participants who spend a substantial amount of time playing games have shown a significant level of attachment to their avatar, leading them to feel distressed when their avatar is harmed or assaulted by other players (Huff et al., 2003; Hunter & Lastowka, 2005; Wolfendale, 2007). Women who have played video games with a sexualized avatar have shown increased self-objectification and more body-related thoughts than those women who used a non-sexualized avatar. Additionally, women who have played video games with sexualized avatars reported higher rates of victim blaming, rape-myth acceptance, and lower self-efficacy (Behm-Morawitz & Mastro, 2009; Dunn & Guadagno, 2010; Fox et al., 2013).

Men who view images of sexualized female characters and play video games with sexualized female characters have greater tolerance for sexual harassment and rape myth acceptance (Beck et al., 2012; Dill et al., 2008; Fox et al., 2013). Although these negative

depictions of and actions toward women have been shown to cause detrimental effects to players, video game companies still claim that to sell games female characters should either be sexualized or not present at all (Corriea, 2014; Crecente, 2015; Schreier, 2020).

The Importance and Significance of Avatar Selection

When applicable, avatar selection/character creation is usually the first action one accomplishes when starting to play a new video game. A player's avatar is the digital representation of the player that is projected to other players. For many players, this step can be critical, as character creation may include not only physical characteristics, but define the character's traits for the gameplay as well. Players often have a wide range of choices when selecting the outward appearance of their avatar, giving them the option of creating a para-authentic avatar (an avatar that they believe looks somewhat like themselves) or an alter-self avatar (an avatar that looks how they wish they looked, or allows role-playing as a different character) (Barnes, 2018; Dunn, 2019, Green et al., 2020). Women are more likely to create an avatar with a smaller chest than men, as they do not wish for their avatar to be sexualized, while men are more likely to create larger avatars overall than women (Dunn & Guadagno, 2012). Character customization options are important, as a player who has a favorable view of their character or avatar's appearance, their theme, and their motives is more likely to have a better time playing the game and identify more closely with their character (Hefner et al., 2007).

For those who wish to make para-authentic avatars, sometimes character customization options are too limiting. Not only are customization options for female characters often more limiting than their male counterparts, sexual and racial minority groups have an increased difficulty when attempting to create a para-authentic avatar

(Chen et al., 2023; Passmore et al., 2018). Skin tones, voice options, and hair styles are often modeled solely off Eurocentric beauty standards, leaving those without light skin, straight hair, and ideal proportions with few options (Harding, 2017; Johnson, 2016; Rousseau, 2019). Because enjoyment of video games has been linked to character and avatar identification, game developers need to increase the representation of sexual and racial minority groups in games as well as include additional physical options in their character creators (Hefner et al., 2007; Stavropoulos, 2020; Wolfendale, 2007).

Alter- or ideal-self avatar creation allows players to express traits that may not find expression in their everyday lives. These traits can range from realistic (greater charisma and social skills, smaller waist size) to fantasy (ability to speak with animals or cast magical spells). Players are more likely to create alter-self avatars in online, multiplayer games than in single player games, because in multiplayer games one's avatar is their only representation to other players of the game. Game types such as MMOs or virtual worlds have a strong social component, which often leads players to create taller, thinner, and more conventionally attractive avatars than offline players in other game types (Dunn & Guadagno, 2012; Dunn, 2019; Green et al., 2021).

Gender-bending is a term used to describe when a player creates an avatar with a gender that does not match the gender they identify with outside of the game world (Bruckman, 1996; Huh & Williams, 2010; Trepte et al., 2011). A player may choose to gender-bend for a variety of reasons. Some players who are questioning their own gender have enjoyed the opportunity to engage in alternate gender identities; this type of play is referred to as gender-aligning (Crowe, 2012; Crowe & Watts, 2012; MacCallum-Stewart, 2008; Whitehouse et al., 2023). For others, gender-bending is used as a way to improve

their in-game social interactions and has no bearing on their thoughts on their gender outside of the game world (Clinnin, 2022; Martey, 2013; Martey et al., 2014; Yee, 2008).

In 2005, Yee took a subset of players of *World of Warcraft* and found that 55% of all female avatars in the game were played by men (para. 5). Men and women often have opposing reasons for creating different gendered avatars. Men play as female characters because they like the gifts, in-game currency, and aid they are given from male players or because they find the female character model and clothing options to be more visually pleasing (Bruckman, 1996; Clinnin, 2022; Hussain & Griffiths, 2008; Wright, 2000). Furthermore, players who identify as a member of the LGBTQ+ community are more likely to gender-bend in games than heterosexual players, based on the character model and clothing options they find most visually pleasing (Huh & Williams, 2010).

Women are more likely to play as a male character to avoid many of the interactions sought out by men who play as female characters. Women do not want male players to offer them gifts, in-game currency, or treat them differently in game – this special treatment implies they are weaker than their male counterparts and sometimes comes with an expectation of sexual favors in return (Bruckman, 1996; Linderöth & Öhrn, 2014; Zhou et al., 2022). Women who do not ‘properly’ return the un-requested favor bestowed upon them by a male character can face harassment and risk being kicked out of the game (Bruckman, 1996; Lopez-Fernandez et al., 2019).

In addition to using male avatars, women may also choose not to use voice-chat within games or use voice modification systems to make their voice sound more masculine to avoid harassment from male players (Blodgett & Salter, 2012; Mercante, 2023; NPR, 2012; O’Leary, 2012). Studies done comparing the reactions of players in

online games when using a masculine or feminine voice have shown increased harassment towards feminine voices, when skill was kept equal (Doerr, 2022; Kuznekoff, 2012; Women in Games Argentina, 2022). Unfortunately, constant online harassment based solely on gender is not uncommon in online multiplayer games, causing negative health outcomes such as depression, reduced self-esteem, and withdrawal (Fox & Tang, 2016). For these reasons, women often resort to conforming to masculine traits and social norms (Blodgett & Salter, 2012; Fox & Tang, 2014). Video game companies need to increase protections for women players, so they can feel safe and enjoy playing games online.

Chapter III.

Methods

To assess the attitudes and opinions of players on character models and design, a survey was developed and distributed to participants using Prolific software. Prolific is a survey hosting platform that connects researchers with survey participants. Survey participants are vetted prior to their participation on the platform to reduce the risk of bots.

Participants

Participants (N = 100; 50 males and 50 females; mean age 36 years) were users of Prolific survey software. A representative sample was selected using Prolific survey software, which guaranteed an even distribution across the sex of participants. Eligibility criteria included being aged at least 18 years of age at the time of taking the survey, being a current resident of the United States of America, and playing at least 3 or more hours of video games per week. Video game playing was assessed at the time of screening by asking the question: “How many hours per week do you play video games on average?” with participants who responded less than 3 hours being ineligible.

Procedure

After passing all screening criteria, participants were re-directed through Prolific software to the survey (Appendix I). Participants were shown a consent script detailing what to expect when taking the survey and informing them that the survey should take

about 15 minutes to complete. Participants were compensated for their time at a rate of \$8.00/hr. After completing the survey, participants were re-directed back to Prolific software, and their responses were reviewed for completeness prior to being included in the dataset.

Materials

A survey (Appendix I) was designed for this study to assess participants' views on character design in video games and video game promotional materials.

Video Game Promotional Art

Promotional images for a fictional video game were designed by the researchers. The images were created by researchers to avoid any potential biases that could occur by using pre-existing promotional images or character models. Promotional materials were created showcasing one of each a hypersexualized male, realistic male, hypersexualized female, and realistic female character model (Figure 6). Hypersexualized character models were designed with common hypersexualized characteristics such as increased muscle definition, extreme body proportions, and clothing options with less skin coverage than their realistic counterparts. The faces and hairstyles of the male and female character models were not adjusted between the hypersexualized and realistic models to keep focus on the body design.



Figure 6. Video Game Promotional Art Images.

Above are the four images participants were asked to choose from when selecting their preferred and least preferred video game promotional art. Images depict a hypersexualized male figure (top left), a realistic male figure (top right), a hypersexualized female figure (bottom left), and a realistic female figure (bottom right).

Character Design Preference

The character models from the promotional art images were adjusted to assess participants' preferences for a playable character model in a game. The images were created by researchers to avoid any potential biases that could occur by using pre-existing

promotional images or character models. Character models were created showcasing one of each a hypersexualized male, realistic male, hypersexualized female, and realistic female character model (Figure 7). Hypersexualized character models were designed with common hypersexualized characteristics such as increased muscle definition and extreme body proportions, and clothing was kept consistent to keep focus on the body design of the character model. Furthermore, the faces and hairstyles of the male and female character models were not adjusted between the hypersexualized and realistic models to keep focus on the body design. The only changes made to the character model design between the promotional art images (Figure 6) and character model images (Figure 7) was the removal of the clothing to see the character model more clearly.



Figure 7. Video Game Character Model Images.

Above are the four images participants were asked to choose from when selecting their preferred and least preferred video character model. Images depict a hypersexualized male figure (top left), a realistic male figure (top right), a hypersexualized female figure (bottom left), and a realistic female figure (bottom right).

Sociocultural Attitudes Toward Appearance Questionnaire – Internalization Subscale
(Adjusted)

The Sociocultural Attitudes Toward Appearance Questionnaire – Internalization Subscale was first developed by Heinberg et al. (1995). The 8-item questionnaire is used to measure self-objectification via internalization of the thin-ideal as portrayed in media. While the measure has been used in previous studies to assess society's emphasis on the thinness in media such as television, movies, music videos, and magazines, for the purpose of this study the subscale was updated to assess video games as the primary form of media. The complete list of updated questions can be found in Appendix I.

Chapter IV.

Results

Results from the survey are summarized below. Results are organized into three sections corresponding to each of the three primary hypotheses.

H1. The use of hypersexualized character designs on promotional art
will not be preferred by participants

Participants were asked to choose their preferred fictional video game promotional art from one of four total choices: one hypersexualized male figure, one realistic male figure, one hypersexualized female figure, and one realistic female figure (Figure 1). To determine if the study population preferred one promotional image over the others, a chi-squared test was performed. Results from the chi-squared test are summarized in Table 1. Table 1 indicates that there is a significant difference among participants' preference for promotional art, with the majority of participants (66%) preferring the realistic female character model.

Table 1. Video Game Promotional Art Preference

Variable	N	χ^2	p
Realistic Male	20	94.88	$< 2.2e-16$
Hypersexualized Male	4		
Realistic Female	66		
Hypersexualized Female	10		
Total	100		

Preference of the total study population for video game promotional art.

A two way chi-square analysis was performed to determine if there was a difference among participants' preference for promotional art based on their gender ($X^2 = 10.65$, $p\text{-value} = 0.91$), transgender status ($X^2 = 1.00$ $p\text{-value} = 0.99$), and sexual identity ($X^2 = 3.76$, $p\text{-value} = 0.29$) but no significant results were found. A two-way chi-square test performed which compared the participants' preference for promotional art based on their educational attainment did confirm a significant difference between the respondents (Table 2).

Table 2. Video Game Promotional Art Preference by Educational Attainment

Variable	N	High School Degree or Equivalent	Some college but no degree	Associate Degree	Bachelor Degree	Masters Degree	Doctoral Degree	X^2	p
Realistic Male	20	5 (29%)	6 (22%)	0	7 (23%)	2 (40%)	0	28.23	0.02
Hyper-sexualized Male	4	1 (6%)	0	0	2 (6%)	1 (20%)	0		
Realistic Female	66	6 (35%)	21 (78%)	16 (89%)	20 (65%)	1 (20%)	2 (100%)		
Hyper-sexualized Female	10	5 (29%)	0	2 (11%)	2 (6%)	1 (20%)	0		
Total	100	17	27	18	31	5	2		

Preference of the total study population for preferred video game promotional art based on educational attainment.

Reasons participants chose the video game promotional art that displayed the Realistic

Female character model included:

I typically like for my avatar to be female and clothed. Having a sexy looking avatar will sometimes cause undesired attention from male players. – 53 year old, Woman

As long as the woman is dressed properly I would choose her because we have always chosen a man with big muscles because for years that's always been the standard. – 50 year old, Man

Female representation is always great to see, especially if they aren't sexualized. – 25 year old, Transgender Woman

Furthermore, participants were asked to choose their *least* favorite video game promotional art from the same options as above (Figure 1). Again, a chi-squared test was performed, and the results are summarized in Table 3. Table 3 indicates that there is a significant difference among participants' least favorite preference for promotional art. Both promotional art options that used hypersexualized characters tied for least favorite among participants (39% each), while the art that used the realistic female character was most preferred among participants with only 8% of participants selecting this as their least favorite option.

Table 3. Video Game Promotional Art Least Preferred Option

Variable	N	χ^2	p
Realistic Male	14	32.08	5.03E-07
Hypersexualized Male	39		
Realistic Female	8		
Hypersexualized Female	39		
Total	100		

Preference of the total study population for least favorite video game promotional art.

Two-way chi-square analyses were performed to determine if there was a difference among participants' preference for least favorite promotional art based on their gender ($\chi^2 = 15.17$, p-value = 0.65), transgender status ($\chi^2 = 9.70$, p-value = 0.14), and sexual identity ($\chi^2 = 3.28$, p-value = 0.35) but no significant results were found. A two-way chi-square test performed again comparing the participants' least favorite

promotional art based on their educational attainment did confirm a significant difference between the responses (Table 4).

Table 4. Video Game Promotional Art Preference by Educational Attainment

Variable	N	High School Degree or Equivalent	Some college but no degree	Associate Degree	Bachelor Degree	Masters Degree	Doctoral Degree	X ²	p
Realistic Male	20	4 (24%)	2 (7%)	2 (11%)	5 (16%)	1 (20%)	0	27.28	0.03
Hyper-sexualized Male	4	7 (41%)	12 (44%)	11 (61%)	7 (23%)	0	2 (100%)		
Realistic Female	66	3 (18%)	1 (4%)	0	2 (6%)	2 (40%)	0		
Hyper-sexualized Female	10	3 (18%)	12 (44%)	5 (28%)	17 (55%)	2 (40%)	0		
Total	100	17	27	18	31	5	2		

Preference of the total study population for least favorite video game promotional art based on educational attainment.

Based on the information provided in Table 1 and Table 3, we conclude that Hypothesis 1 is supported by the data and that there was a significant difference in preference between the video game promotional art options. While there was no difference found among participants based on their gender, transgender status, or sexual identity, a significant difference in participants' preference was found based on the educational attainment of participants for both their favorite and least favorite video game promotional art options.

H2. Realistic character models will be preferred when choosing a character avatar

Participants were asked to choose their preferred character model in a series of comparison images. Participants were asked to select their preferred character model as a playable avatar in a video game between a realistic male and realistic female, a realistic male and a hypersexualized male, and lastly between a realistic female and a hypersexualized female. The first comparison between a realistic male and a realistic female was given to determine if players prefer to play as one sex over another and to see if players prefer to play as a character that most closely matches their gender. A chi-square test was performed, and the results summarized in Table 5 show that participants preferred to play as the female character.

Table 5. Video Game Character Model Preference

Variable		N	χ^2	p
Realistic Male		24	26.273	2.96E-07
Realistic Female		75		
Total		99		

Preference of the total study population for video game character model.

When we compare the responses of respondents based on their gender, we find that there is a significant difference between respondents' preference for character model (Table 6). We can see in Table 6 below that while respondents who identify as men had similar preferences between the male and female character models, respondents who do not identify as men or genderqueer/gender fluid preferred the female character model. No difference was shown between respondents based on transgender status ($\chi^2 = 0.51$, p-

value = 0.78), sexual identity ($X^2 = 3.46$, p-value = 0.06), or educational attainment ($X^2 = 6.52$, p-value = 0.26).

Table 6. Video Game Promotional Art Preference by Gender

Variable	N	Agender / Demigender	Genderqueer / gender fluid	Man	Non-binary	Woman	Questioning or unsure	Additional gender category / identity	X^2	p
Realistic Male	24	0	1 (50%)	22 (47%)	0	1 (2%)	0	0	27.23	0.0001
Realistic Female	75	1 (100%)	1 (50%)	25 (53%)	1 (100%)	45 (98%)	1 (100%)	1 (100%)		
Total	99	1	2	47	1	46	1	1		

Preference of the total study population for character avatar they would choose to play with between Male and Female based on gender.

Reasons participants chose the female character avatar included:

I like to play as a girl, I am a girl and you don't always get this option, at least in the past it's been that way. – 34 year old, Woman who identifies as lesbian, gay, bisexual, pansexual, asexual, or another sexual minority identity

I usually play female characters when given the choice. I find they usually have the better customization options. It's hard to not make my character a self insert clone of myself if I pick males. – 29 year old, Man who identifies as lesbian, gay, bisexual, pansexual, asexual, or another sexual minority identity

Because I usually only play with a female character if there is a choice. In this instance that was more important to me than design – 41 year old, Woman

Next participants were shown images comparing the realistic male and hypersexualized male and then the realistic female and hypersexualized female. These questions were used to determine if participants preferred to play as realistic or hypersexualized characters and if that decision differed between character sex. When participants were asked for their preference between a realistic male and a

hypersexualized male as their character avatar, no significant difference was found ($X^2 = 0.36$, p-value = 0.55). When we further compared responses by gender ($X^2 = 7.06$, p-value = 0.32), transgender status ($X^2 = 3.16$, p-value = 0.21), sexual identity ($X^2 = 0.91$, p-value = 0.34), and educational attainment ($X^2 = 7.52$, p-value = 0.18) no significant differences were found.

Comparing preferences between the realistic female and hypersexualized female characters showed a significant preference for the realistic female character (Table 7). When we further compared responses by gender ($X^2 = 5.83$, p-value = 0.44), transgender status ($X^2 = 0.61$, p-value = 0.74), sexual identity ($X^2 = 0.64$, p-value = 0.43), and educational attainment ($X^2 = 4.06$, p-value = 0.54) no significant differences were found.

Table 7. Video Game Character Female Model Preference

Variable		N	X^2	p
Realistic Female		94	80.01	< 2.2e-16
Hypersexualized Female		5		
Total		99		

Preference of the total study population for video game female character model.

Reasons participants chose the female character avatar included:

Her body is way more realistic, proportional and looks like a real women could have her body type while the other gives of plastic surgery and underweight. – 37 year old, Woman who identifies as lesbian, gay, bisexual, pansexual, asexual, or another sexual minority identity

She has a more natural waist and healthy figure. – 56 year old, Man

I feel like I relate more to image 1 (The Realistic Female image) and image 2 (The Hypersexualized Female image) would make me feel bad about myself – 18 year old, Woman who identifies as lesbian, gay, bisexual, pansexual, asexual, or another sexual minority identity

While our results do not show support for our hypothesis among the male character model, participants significantly preferred the realistic female character model (Table 5 and Table 7), thus hypothesis 2 is also supported.

H3. The ability to customize a player's character model/avatar will be important to the player

Participants were asked to answer a series of questions pertaining to character model/avatar customization in video games. Participants were asked how much they agreed with the phrase “Character customization in video games is limiting” and were asked to respond using a 5-point Likert Scale (Appendix I). A chi-square test was performed, and it was found that there is a significant difference between participant responses (Table 8).

Table 8. Character customization in video games is limiting

Variable	N	X ²	p
Strongly disagree	14	29.7	5.63E-06
Disagree	33		
Neither agree or disagree	20		
Agree	30		
Strongly agree	3		
Total	100		

Participant agreeableness to the statement “Character customization in video games is limiting”

Two way chi-square analyses were performed to determine if there was a difference among participants' agreeableness to the statement "Character customization in video games is limiting" by transgender status ($X^2 = 8.81$, p-value = 0.36), sexual identity ($X^2 = 1.19$, p-value = 0.88), and educational attainment ($X^2 = 19.50$, p-value = 0.49), but no significant results were found. A two way chi-square test performed which compared the participants' responses based on their gender did confirm a significant difference between the respondents (Table 9).

Table 9. Character customization in video games is limiting by gender

Variable	N	Agender / Demigender	Genderqueer / gender fluid	Man	Non-binary	Woman	Questioning or unsure	Additional gender category / identity	X ²	p
Strongly disagree	14	1 (100%)	0	5 (10%)	0	6 (13%)	1 (100%)	1 (100%)	56.42	0.0002
Disagree	33	0	1 (50%)	19 (40%)	0	13 (28%)	0	0		
Neither agree or disagree	20	0	0	8 (17%)	0	12 (26%)	0	0		
Agree	30	0	1 (50%)	16 (33%)	0	13 (28%)	0	0		
Strongly agree	3	0	0	0	1	2 (4%)	0	0		
Total	100	1	2	48	1	46	1	1		

Participant agreeableness to the statement "Character customization in video games is limiting" based on gender.

Furthermore, participants were asked about their agreeableness to the statement "The ability to customize my character is important". Again, a chi-squared test was performed, and the results are summarized in Table 10. The results shown in Table 10 indicate that there is a significant difference among the importance of character customization to participants.

Table 10. The ability to customize my character is important

Variable	N	X ²	p
Strongly disagree	2	43.33	8.80E-09
Disagree	8		
Neither agree or disagree	16		
Agree	30		
Strongly agree	44		
Total	100		

Participant agreeableness to the statement “The ability to customize my character is important”

Two-way chi-square analyses were performed to determine if there was a difference among participants’ desire to customize their character by their gender ($X^2 = 26.70$, $p\text{-value} = 0.32$), transgender status ($X^2 = 6.63$, $p\text{-value} = 0.58$), and educational attainment ($X^2 = 24.98$, $p\text{-value} = 0.20$) but no significant results were found. A two-way chi-square test performed comparing the participants’ responses based on their sexual identity did confirm a significant difference between the responses (Table 11).

Table 11. The ability to customize my character is important by sexual identity

Variable	N	Identify as lesbian, gay, bisexual, pansexual, asexual, or another sexual minority identity	Do not identify as lesbian, gay, bisexual, pansexual, asexual, or another sexual minority identity	X ²	p
Strongly disagree	2	1 (3%)	1 (2%)	9.77	0.04
Disagree	8	0	8 (13%)		
Neither agree or disagree	16	3 (8%)	13 (21%)		
Agree	30	11 (31%)	19 (30%)		
Strongly agree	43	21 (58%)	22 (35%)		
Total	99	36	63		

Participant agreeableness to the statement “The ability to customize my character is important” by sexual identity

Based on the information provided in Table 10, we conclude that Hypothesis 3 is supported by the data and that the ability to customize a player's character/avatar is important to the player. While there was no difference found among participants based on their gender, transgender status, or educational attainment, a significant difference in participants' preference was found based on the sexual identity of participants, with more respondents who identify as lesbian, gay, bisexual, pansexual, or another sexual minority identity agreeing with the statement than expected.

H4. Video games will have a negative impact on the sociocultural attitudes towards appearance of the players

Participants were given a modified version of the Sociocultural Attitudes Towards Appearance Questionnaire – Internalization Subscale. The questionnaire was modified to include video games as a form of media (Appendix I). Participants were asked how much they agreed with the statement “People who appear in TV shows, movies, and video games project the type of appearance that I see as my goal” and were asked to respond using a 5-point Likert Scale (Appendix I). A chi-square test was performed, and it was found that there is a significant difference between participant responses (Table 12).

Table 12. People who appear in TV shows, movies, and video games project the type of appearance that I see as my goal

Variable	N	χ^2	p
Definitely disagree	13	38.3	9.72E-08
Mostly disagree	36		
Neither agree or disagree	20		
Mostly agree	30		
Definitely agree	1		
Total	100		

Participant agreeableness to the statement “People who appear in TV shows, movies, and video games project the type of appearance that I see as my goal”

Two way chi-square analyses were performed to determine if there was a difference among participants’ agreeableness to the statement “People who appear in TV shows, movies, and video games project the type of appearance that I see as my goal” by gender ($\chi^2 = 23.21$, p-value = 0.51), transgender status ($\chi^2 = 10.15$, p-value = 0.25), sexual identity ($\chi^2 = 1.26$, p-value = 0.87), and educational attainment ($\chi^2 = 8.30$, p-value = 0.99), but no significant results were found.

Furthermore, participants were asked about their agreeableness to the statement “I do not wish to look like the character models in video games”. A chi-squared test was performed, and the results are summarized in Table 13. The results shown in Table 13 indicate that there is a significant difference among the important of character customization to participants.

Table 13. I do not wish to look like the character models in video games

Variable	N	X ²	p
Definitely disagree	4	34	7.45E-07
Mostly disagree	22		
Neither agree or disagree	28		
Mostly agree	36		
Definitely agree	10		
Total	100		

Participant agreeableness to the statement “I do not wish to look like the character models in video games”

Two-way chi-square analyses were performed to determine if there was a difference among participants’ desire to customize their character by their transgender status ($X^2 = 14.17$, p-value = 0.08), sexual identity ($X^2 = 0.66$, p-value = 0.96), and educational attainment ($X^2 = 10.55$, p-value = 0.96) but no significant results were found. A two-way chi-square test performed comparing the participants’ responses based on their gender did confirm a significant difference between the responses (Table 14).

Table 14. I do not wish to look like the character models in video games

Variable	N	Agender / Demigender	Genderqueer / gender fluid	Man	Non-binary	Woman	Questioning or unsure	Additional gender category / identity	X ²	p
Strongly disagree	4	1 (100%)	0	2 (4%)	0	1 (2%)	0	0	40.46	0.02
Disagree	22	0	0	13 (27%)	0	8 (17%)	1 (100%)	0		
Neither agree or disagree	28	0	0	14 (29%)	1 (100%)	12 (26%)	0	1 (100%)		
Agree	36	0	1 (50%)	14 (29%)	0	21 (46%)	0	0		
Strongly agree	10	0	1 (50%)	5 (10%)	0	4 (9%)	0	0		
Total	100	1	2	48	1	46	1	1		

Participant agreeableness to the statement “I do not wish to look like the character models in video games” based on gender.

When asked about their agreeableness to the statement “I often play video games and compare my appearance to the character models”, a significant difference between participant responses was found (Table 15). Further analysis done to confirm if participant responses differed by gender ($X^2 = 20.10$, p-value = 0.33), transgender status ($X^2 = 5.53$, p-value = 0.48), sexual identity ($X^2 = 3.51$, p-value = 0.32), and educational attainment ($X^2 = 18.76$, p-value = 0.23), but no significant results were found.

Table 15. I often play video games and compare my appearance to the character models

Variable	N	X ²	p
Definitely disagree	38	40.4	3.58E-08
Mostly disagree	28		
Neither agree or disagree	18		
Mostly agree	16		
Definitely agree	0		
Total	100		

Participant agreeableness to the statement “I often play video games and compare my appearance to the character models”

Based on the information provided in Table 13 and Table 15, we conclude that Hypothesis 4 is not supported by the data and that video games did not have a negative impact on the participants. Significance was found among participants who were asked on their agreeableness to the statements “I do not wish to look like the character models in video games” and “I often play video games and compare my appearance to the character models” with participant responses of “Mostly agree” occurring more often than expected to the statement “I do not wish to look like the character models in video games” and with participant responses of “Definitely disagree and Mostly disagree” occurring more often than expected to the statement “I often play video games and compare my appearance to the character models”. Based on these results, video games have not had a significant negative impact on the Sociocultural Attitudes of participants.

Chapter V.

Discussion

This thesis investigated the impact of hypersexualized character models on player preference for purchasing and playing a video game as well as the sociocultural attitudes towards appearance of the player. Results indicate support for H1 that participants did not prefer the use of hypersexualized character models in video game promotional art. Participants overwhelmingly preferred the promotional art that used the character models with realistic proportions. Furthermore, participants preferred the female character model when compared to the male character model in promotional art. These findings are important, as video game companies should consider creating promotional art that features more female characters with realistic body proportions to appeal to a wider audience.

Complimentary to H1, H2 was also supported confirming that participants preferred to play as character models with realistic proportions over character models with hypersexualized proportions. As with the promotional art character models, when given the choice between a male and female character model participants preferred to play with the female character model significantly more than the male character model. This information is particularly important in single player story games where the player does not have the ability to create their own avatar and must play with the character provided by the game developers. Previously, video game companies have primarily created male character models as the game's protagonist but should begin to utilize female character models more frequently based on these results. Our findings suggest that

consumers would prefer to play a game that utilizes a female protagonist with realistic body proportions.

Although not all video games allow the player to customize their character model for a variety of reasons, our results found that the ability to customize the player's character model/avatar, when possible, is important to the player. Whether creating a para-authentic or alter-self avatar, the ability to customize one's avatar is important to the player, especially among those players who identify as lesbian, gay, bisexual, pansexual, asexual, or another sexual minority identity. When applicable, video game companies should include a wide variety of character customization options to be more inclusive and appeal to those who belong to minority communities.

The results found in this study directly contradict the belief held by some video game production companies that consumers want to play as overly muscular, male protagonists with an unrealistic female sidekick and show that players prefer to play as strong, realistic female characters. Furthermore, previous studies have shown that hypersexualized and minimized female characters in video games can cause negative health impacts such as greater acceptance of views of women as secondary to men, increased self-objectification, and increased rape myth acceptance (Dill et al., 2008; Fox et al., 2013; Harwood & Anderson, 2002; Melzer, 2019; Ward & Grower, 2020).

Considering the results found in this study in conjunction, with the results found in previous studies, video game developers and production companies need to create games with more realistic female characters and include a wide range of character customization options when applicable. Not only are some of the current depictions of female characters in video games potentially harmful, but they are also *not preferred by*

players. The concept that video games are designed ‘by men, for men’ is outdated and detrimental to sales. Video game companies should look at the success stories of characters such as the *Horizon* series’ Aloy and Ellie from *The Last of Us* series. These series which feature female protagonists are some of the highest grossing PlayStation games of all time (Carter, 2023; LeBlanc, 2023).

Furthermore, our results found that the Sociocultural Attitudes Towards Appearance of participants do not appear to have been significantly negatively affected by video games. It is important to note that this finding does not mean that the sociocultural attitudes towards appearance of some players have not been affected by video games, it only means that video games have not *significantly* negatively impacted player attitudes in this study population. This distinction is important, and future studies should continue to modify the Sociocultural Attitudes Towards Appearance Questionnaire – Internalization Subscale used in this study to include the entire questionnaire instead of only the Internalization Subscale to expand on these results.

While this study did include a representative sample of participant gender (50% of respondents identifying as male, 50% of respondents identifying as female) the sample size of 100 respondents should be expanded to include more participants who identify as belonging to a sexual, gender, or racial minority. Additionally, this study only included participants from the United States, therefore these results cannot be generalizable to other global regions. It is of particular importance to include participants from other regions, as other countries such as Japan and South Korea have shown a different approach to character sexualization than some western countries.

Anime and video game character models created by Japanese and South Korean companies, both male and female, are ridiculously hypersexualized by western standards, but are common in their respective countries (Arpan et al., 2020; Paxton, 2022; Savage, 2015; Winston & Trinidad, 2021). An example of the difference in design among regions can be seen when Amazon made the South Korean game *Lost Ark* available to play in the United States, but not before censoring some of the outfits to “better fit western norms” (Bergin, 2022; Ingram, 2022, Kotaku International, 2022). *Lost Ark* has come under scrutiny not only in the United States but in South Korea where it was originally developed as well.

The overtly sexist design decisions made by the developers include locking female characters into clothing options, gender-locking character traits, and gender-locking classes that promote conventional gender stereotypes. Additionally, game companies have gone as far as to remove illustrations from the game created by artists who publicly voice support for Korean feminist groups (Agence France-Presse, 2018; Francis, 2022). Although these art styles are common in these regions, it is important to survey players to confirm if these character models are still truly preferred by players, or if they are simply ‘the norm’. It is reasonable to hypothesize that game companies’ views are supported by confirmation bias, and that players would enjoy playing the game even if the sexualized characters were not included, but since they were included from the start, the company believes they played a part in the game’s success. Players who have spoken out about against the way women are portrayed in games in Korea have often faced backlash, and future studies should expand on their opinions and experiences (Kang, 2018; Lee, 2022; Paxton, 2022).

Future studies should focus on the preferences of video game players in different regions, as the social norms and preferences in those regions may differ from the opinions expressed by the participants in this study. Overall, video game developers and publishers should focus on including a wide range of character models, designs, and body customization and clothing options in their games to appeal to the broad audience that is video game players today.

Appendix 1.
Survey Questions

Pre-Screening Questions:

Participants were asked the following question: How many hours per week do you play video games on average?

- 0-3 hours
- 3-6 hours
- 6-9 hours
- 10-12 hours
- 13 hours or more

Participants who selected 0-3 hours were not selected to participate in the survey, as this was exclusionary criteria.

Demographics

1. What is your age in years? Please note this survey should only be completed by participants aged 18 and older. [Short text]
2. With which gender identity do you most identify?
 - Agender/Demigender
 - Genderqueer/gender fluid
 - Man
 - Non-binary
 - Woman
 - Questioning or unsure

- Additional gender category/identity (short text to specify)
 - Prefer not to disclose
3. Do you identify as transgender or consider yourself to be a person of transgender experience?
- Yes
 - No
 - Don't Know
 - Prefer not to disclose
4. Do you identify as lesbian, gay, bisexual, pansexual, asexual, or another sexual minority identity?
- Yes
 - No
 - Don't Know
 - Prefer not to disclose
5. With which racial origin/lineage do you most identify?
- Asian
 - Black
 - European/White
 - Hispanic
 - Indigenous
 - Pacific Islander
 - Multiethnic
 - Don't know
 - Other, specify
 - Prefer not to answer
6. What is the highest level of school you have completed or the highest degree you have received?
- Less than high school degree
 - High school degree or equivalent (e.g., GED)
 - Some college but no degree

- Associate degree
- Bachelor degree
- Masters degree
- Doctoral degree

7. What was the total combined income of all members of your household last year?

- \$0 to \$24,999
- \$25,000 to \$49,999
- \$50,000 to \$74,999
- \$75,000 to \$99,999
- \$100,000 to \$149,999
- \$150,000 and up
- Prefer not to answer

Video Game Use

8. About how many hours per week do you typically spend playing video games?

(This includes games on a PC, console, or mobile device such as your cell phone)

[Short text]

9. About how long have you been playing video games? (This includes games on a PC, console, or mobile device such as your cell phone)

- Less than 1 year
- 2 – 3 years
- 4 – 6 years
- 8 – 10 years
- More than 10 years

10. What device do you use to play video games most often?

- PC (Personal Computer – this includes desktop and laptop computers)
- Console (ex. Xbox, Playstation, Switch)
- Handheld/Mobile (ex. Mobile phone, Tablet)

11. Do you prefer to play games:

- Solo
- Online with other players

- I enjoy both solo and online with other players equally

12. In the past 7 days, how many days would you say you played video games for any amount of time?

13. For each of the following video game genres, please select the option that is most accurate in describing how often you play each type of game

Game Genre	Descriptor Text	Likert Responses
Social type video games	Social type video games are those games that allow or require social interactions. Examples of Social type video games include Farmville, Words with Friends, MafiaWars, Animal Crossing.	1. Never play and/or Uninterested in trying 2. Have tried this game type but do not enjoy it 3. Have never tried this game type but interested in playing someday 4. Occasionally play 5. Regularly play
MMORPG (Massively multiplayer online role-playing game) type video games	MMORPG type video games are those games that take place online in worlds that continue to exist and develop even when the individual player is not actively participating. These games may have up to millions of players and often encourage social interactions among players in-game. Examples of MMORPG games include World of Warcraft, Final Fantasy XIV, Lost Ark, Elder Scrolls Online).	1. Never play and/or Uninterested in trying 2. Have tried this game type but do not enjoy it 3. Have never tried this game type but interested in playing someday 4. Occasionally play 5. Regularly play
Role Playing (RPG) type video games	RPG type video games are those games where the player engages with the game world through strongly developed characters and story elements. These games may be played solo or	1. Never play and/or Uninterested in trying

	with other players and encourage the player to develop their character through consistent upgrades and development. Examples of RPG type games include Baldur's Gate, Dark Souls, the Diablo series, Dragon Age, Elder Scrolls, the Fallout series, Final Fantasy, Secret of Mana, Skyrim, the Wasteland series, The Witcher 3.	2. Have tried this game type but do not enjoy it 3. Have never tried this game type but interested in playing someday 4. Occasionally play 5. Regularly play
Shooter type video games	Shooter type video games are those games where the player battles against enemies using a multitude of in game weapons. Shooter type video games may be played solo or with other players. Examples of Shooter type video games include Apex Legends, Call of Duty, Destiny 2, Doom, Dusk, Fortnite, Gears of War, Halo, Overwatch.	1. Never play and/or Uninterested in trying 2. Have tried this game type but do not enjoy it 3. Have never tried this game type but interested in playing someday 4. Occasionally play 5. Regularly play
Sports type video games (not fitness games)	Sports type video games are those games where the player engages in team athletic games that can be fictional or representative of actual sports and their players. Sports type video games may be played solo or with other players. Examples of Sports type video games include Madden NFL, Football Manager, MLB the Show, Rocket League.	1. Never play and/or Uninterested in trying 2. Have tried this game type but do not enjoy it 3. Have never tried this game type but interested in playing someday 4. Occasionally play 5. Regularly play
Racing type video games	Racing type video games are those games where the player competes against other opponents on a course with the aim of being the first to the finish. Racing type video games may be played solo or with	1. Never play and/or Uninterested in trying 2. Have tried this game type but do not enjoy it

	other players. Examples of Racing type video games include Forza, Mario Kart, Need for Speed, SSX, Star Wars Pod Racer.	3. Have never tried this game type but interested in playing someday 4. Occasionally play 5. Regularly play
Music and Rhythm type video games	Music and Rhythm type video games are those games where the player interacts with the game through musical elements. Some Music and Rhythm type video games may require additional hardware or physical movement, while other games encourage the player to move their character in time to the beat. Examples of Music and Rhythm type games include Beat Saber, Crypt of the NecroDancer, Guitar Hero, Hi-Fi Rush, Just Dance, Metal: Hellsinger.	1. Never play and/or Uninterested in trying 2. Have tried this game type but do not enjoy it 3. Have never tried this game type but interested in playing someday 4. Occasionally play 5. Regularly play
Platformer type video games	Platformer type video games are those games where the player navigates their character through an environment overcoming various obstacles. Examples of Platform type video games include Castlevania, Celeste, Cuphead, Dead Cells, Hollow Knight, Ori and the Blind Forest, Super Mario 64, Sonic the Hedgehog.	1. Never play and/or Uninterested in trying 2. Have tried this game type but do not enjoy it 3. Have never tried this game type but interested in playing someday 4. Occasionally play 5. Regularly play
Strategy, Puzzle, and Card type video games	Strategy, Puzzle, and Card type video games are those games where the player's decision-making has a high significance in determining the outcome of the game. Strategy, Puzzle, and Card type video games may be played solo or against other players. Examples of Strategy, Puzzle, and Card type video	1. Never play and/or Uninterested in trying 2. Have tried this game type but do not enjoy it 3. Have never tried this game type but

	games include Age of Empires, Bab is You, Civilization, Dwarf Fortress, Escape Academy, Hearthstone, Magic Arena, Picross, Portal, RimWorld, Slay the Spire, Starcraft, XCOM.	interested in playing someday 4. Occasionally play 5. Regularly play
MOBA (Multiplayer Online Battle Arena) type video games	MOBA type video games are those games where the player competes with other players as a team against an opponent team on a predetermined battlefield. Examples of MOBA type video games include DoTA2, League of Legends, Smite.	1. Never play and/or Uninterested in trying 2. Have tried this game type but do not enjoy it 3. Have never tried this game type but interested in playing someday 4. Occasionally play 5. Regularly play
Simulation type video games	Simulation type video games are those games where the player participates in activities that are designed to closely simulate real-world activities. Examples of Simulation type video games include Gas Station Simulator, House Flipper, PowerWash Simulator, The Sims.	1. Never play and/or Uninterested in trying 2. Have tried this game type but do not enjoy it 3. Have never tried this game type but interested in playing someday 4. Occasionally play 5. Regularly play
Roguelike and Roguelite type video games	Roguelike and Roguelite type video games are those games where the player navigates through randomly generated environments focusing on defeating enemies and discovering new items and areas, with the threat of permanent death of the character. Examples of Roguelike and Roguelite type video games include Darkest Dungeon, Hades, Rogue	1. Never play and/or Uninterested in trying 2. Have tried this game type but do not enjoy it 3. Have never tried this game type but interested in playing someday 4. Occasionally play

	Legacy, The Binding of Isaac, Vampire Survivors.	5. Regularly play
Horror type video games	Horror type video games are those games where the player navigates story elements and environments that are often designed to scare the player. Examples of Horror type video games include Alien Isolation, Outlast, Resident Evil, Silent Hill, Soma.	1. Never play and/or Uninterested in trying 2. Have tried this game type but do not enjoy it 3. Have never tried this game type but interested in playing someday 4. Occasionally play 5. Regularly play
Asymmetrical and Party type video games	Asymmetrical and Party type video games are multiplayer games where each player may work solo or as a team to reach a goal. In Asymmetrical type games, each player begins the game differently than the other players. Examples of Asymmetrical and Party type video games include Among Us, Dead by Daylight, Keep Talking and Nobody Explodes, Mario Party, Overcooked, The Jackbox Party Pack.	1. Never play and/or Uninterested in trying 2. Have tried this game type but do not enjoy it 3. Have never tried this game type but interested in playing someday 4. Occasionally play 5. Regularly play
Gambling type video games	Gambling type video games are those games where the player wagers something of value with the intent of winning something else of value, after considering the risks and potential gain of the wager. This can be done with in-game (fake) or real currency. Gambling type video games may be played solo or against other players. Examples of Gambling type video games include Blackjack, Poker games, and Virtual slot machines games.	1. Never play and/or Uninterested in trying 2. Have tried this game type but do not enjoy it 3. Have never tried this game type but interested in playing someday 4. Occasionally play 5. Regularly play

Video Game Promotional Art

Below are four images, each of which are potential promotional images (e.g. box art, posters, Steam thumbnail) for a game you are interested in playing. The following questions will ask your opinion on the images. Please respond to the following questions with only the character model used in the image as your focus – the background of the image should not impact your decision.

Image 1



Image 2



Image 3



Image 4



14. Which image shown above would you prefer to see used as promotional art for a video game?

- Image 1
- Image 2
- Image 3
- Image 4

15. Please explain why the image you chose is your favorite image option

16. Which image shown above is your least favorite image?

- Image 1 (Realistic Man)
- Image 2 (Macho Man)
- Image 3 (Realistic Woman)
- Image 4 (Hypersexualized Woman)

17. Please explain why the image you chose is your least favorite image option

Character Design Preference

For the following questions, please imagine you are playing a video game and the options for character selection are as follows (Image 1 and Image 2). Both designs are equal in skill and ability, and your character selection will have no impact on game play.

18. Which character design would you choose to play with?

- Image 1



- Image 2



19. What appealed to you about the design you chose? Why did you prefer the design over the other option?

For the following questions, please imagine you are playing a video game and the options for character selection are as follows (Image 1 and Image 2). Both designs are equal in skill and ability, and your character selection will have no impact on game play.

20. Which character design would you choose to play with?

- Image 1



- Image 2



21. What appealed to you about the design you chose? Why did you prefer the design you chose over the other option?

For the following questions, please imagine you are playing a video game and the options for character selection are as follows (Image 1 and Image 2). Both designs are equal in skill and ability, and your character selection will have no impact on game play.

22. Which character design would you choose to play with?

- Image 1



- Image 2



23. What appealed to you about the design you chose? Why did you prefer the design you chose over the other option?

Character Customization Preferences

24. The following statements pertain only to video games that allow for player avatar customization. For each of the following statements about player avatar customization, please select the option that is most accurate in describing your thoughts on character customization in video games.

Statement	Likert Responses
Character customization in video games is limiting	1. Strongly disagree 2. Disagree 3. Neither agree or disagree 4. Agree 5. Strongly agree
I try to create my character avatar based on how I look	1. Strongly disagree 2. Disagree 3. Neither agree or disagree 4. Agree 5. Strongly agree
I try to create my character avatar based on how I wish I looked	1. Strongly disagree 2. Disagree 3. Neither agree or disagree 4. Agree 5. Strongly agree
The ability to customize my character is important	1. Strongly disagree 2. Disagree 3. Neither agree or disagree 4. Agree 5. Strongly agree

Sociocultural Attitudes Towards Appearance Questionnaire – Internalization subscale –

Video Game Specific Modified

For each item, please choose the answer that best characterizes your attitudes or behaviors.

25. People who appear in TV shows, movies, and video games project the type of appearance that I see as my goal

- Definitely disagree
- Mostly disagree
- Neither agree nor disagree

- Mostly agree
- Definitely agree

26. I believe that clothes look better on thin models

- Definitely disagree
- Mostly disagree
- Neither agree nor disagree
- Mostly agree
- Definitely agree

27. Video games that show thin models make me wish that I were thin

- Definitely disagree
- Mostly disagree
- Neither agree nor disagree
- Mostly agree
- Definitely agree

28. I do not wish to look like the character models in video games

- Definitely disagree
- Mostly disagree
- Neither agree nor disagree
- Mostly agree
- Definitely agree

29. I tend to compare my body to people on TV and in video games

- Definitely disagree
- Mostly disagree
- Neither agree nor disagree
- Mostly agree
- Definitely agree

30. Character designs of thin or muscular people make me wish that I were thin or muscular

- Definitely disagree
- Mostly disagree
- Neither agree nor disagree

- Mostly agree
- Definitely agree

31. I wish I looked like video game characters

- Definitely disagree
- Mostly disagree
- Neither agree nor disagree
- Mostly agree
- Definitely agree

32. I often play video games and compare my appearance to the character models

- Definitely disagree
- Mostly disagree
- Neither agree nor disagree
- Mostly agree
- Definitely agree

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