



EveryBodies issue?

Analysis of Female Body Representation and Characters in the Fortnite -video game

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Bachelor's Thesis

Degree Programme in Digital Culture, Landscape and Cultural Heritage

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May 2026

The originality of this thesis has been checked in accordance with the University of Turku quality assurance system using the Turnitin Originality Check service.

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Number of pages: 48 pages

Abstract (suomeksi)

Tutkimus pyrkii keräämään tietoa Fortnite –videopelin naishahmojen suunnittelusta, tarkemmin siitä, miltä nämä hahmot näyttävät ja miten he ovat edustettuina pelissä; sisältääkö se seksistisiä ihanteita tai stereotyyppioita. Tarkoituksena on esittää, paljastaa ja purkaa joitakin suunnitteluprosesseja ja syitä, pelin naishahmojen mahdollisiin seksistisiin ja kapeisiin kuvauksiin.

Peli, peli-tilat ja ala itsessään ovat miesvaltaisia, joten feministinen näkökulma Fortniteen ja sen hahmojen tarkasteluun on uusi. Se kertoo videopeleihin vaikuttavista asenteista. Tutkimus toteutettiin keräämällä pelistä dataa, josta tarkastellaan, kuinka naishahmot ja nais-vartalo on edustettuina pelissä, ja miten ilmiöt ja piirteet mahdollisesti esitetään. Tarkemmin pohdittiin, miten nais-vartaloa kuvataan, miten seksismi ilmenee ja onko nais-hirviöitä todisesti olemassa.

Tutkimus osoitti, että Fortnitessä esiintyy seksismiä, hahmojen suunnittelussa sekä sukupuolittuneissa ennakoasenteissa. Yleisen naishahmo on laiha, nuori ja kaunis. Lähes puolella kys. hahmoista on päällä seksikkäitä tai “vihjailevia” vaatteita (kuten tiukkoja crop toppeja, jotka paljastavat merkittävän osan keskivartaloa, tai hyvin lyhyitä, tiukkoja hameita). Lisäksi naishahmoilla on ihoa näkyvillä lähes viisi kertaa todennäköisemmin kuin mieshahmoilla. Myös mieshahmojen kasvot ovat puolet useammin peitettyinä kuin naishahmojen, ja naispuolisilla hirviöillä/olennoilla on lähes aina muita muotoja (ihminen), kun taas mieshahmoilla ei.

Tutkimusta, juuri Fortniten hahmomuotoilusta ja sen mahdollisesta sisäisestä seksismistä ja naisten kuvauksesta, ei ole tietääkseni aiemmin tutkittu. Näin ollen, tutkimus tuottaa uutta tietoa käytännöistä ja kulttuurista peleissä, pelitiloissa, digitaalisissa tiloissa ja hahmosuunnittelussa, feministisessä viitekehysessä, sekä näin ollen edistää digitaalisten pelien ja kulttuurin tutkimusta. Se kertoo naispuolisten videopelihahmojen ulkonäön ongelmallisuudesta ja monimuotoisuuden puutteesta.

Avainsanat: Fortnite, analyysi, videopelit, (videopeli)hahmojen ulkonäkö, naishahmot, (nais)vartalojen representaatio, seksismi, feminismi, diversiteetti/monimuotoisuus

Abstract

This paper aims to gather insight into Fortnite's (an online video game) Female Characters Designs and how these Characters look and how Women are represented in the game; if this presentation contains sexist ideals. It is aimed to expose and break apart some of the design processes and causes, to the possible sexist and narrow portrayals of Women Characters in Fortnite.

As a male dominated space and game, this is a different, Feminist point of view to examine Fortnite and its' Characters. It portrays the still ongoing biases within Video Games. The study was done by looking at the gathered data, from the game itself. I asked, how are the female characters and the female body represented in the Fortnite -video game, and what possibly makes these phenomenas present, with the following specifying, how the female body is represented, how does sexism appear and do female monsters truly exist.

It was found that Fortnite does express sexism in its characters design and gendered biases. The most common Female Character is thin, young and beautiful, and appeared to wear sexy or insinuating clothing (such as tight crop tops which show a significant part of abdomen, very short, tight skirts) on nearly half of the characters. Moreover, Female characters show skin nearly five times more likely than Male. Additionally, Male characters' faces are half more likely to be covered than Female, and Female Monsters/Creatures have additional human forms, nearly every time, when Male do not.

Study on Fortnite's Character Design and its possible sexism Women's Portrayal, has not been specifically explored before, to my knowledge. Thus, this paper produces further illustration of culture and practices in Games, Gaming Spaces, Digital Spaces, Character Design within a feminist frame and thus, contributes to the study of Digital Games and Cultural Studies. It declares the problematic nature of female video game characters' appearance and their lack of diversity.

Key words: Fortnite, Analysis, Video Games, Video Game Character Appearance, Female Characters, (Female) Body Representation, Sexism, Feminism, Diversity

Table of contents

1	Introduction	4
1.1	Research Context & Motivation	5
1.2	Research Questions	6
1.3	Literature	7
1.3.1	Theories	7
1.3.2	Previous Research	8
1.3.3	Articles	9
1.4	Research Material & Methods	10
2	Fortnite	13
2.1	How the female body is represented	17
2.1.1	Sexual vs Sexualised	17
2.1.2	Traits	18
2.2	How does sexism appear	25
2.2.1	Appearance	28
2.2.2	Identification	33
2.3	Do female monsters truly exist	34
3	Summary	37
3.1	Results	38
3.2	Discussion	39
	References	40

1 Introduction

This includes the introduction to the topic, the significance of the research and the used literature are declared.

1.1 Research Context & Motivation

This paper is made about Fortnite, an (online) video game, and specifically a look into how the Female Characters look and how these Women are or are not represented in the game, if this presentation contains sexist ideals. The interest towards the representation of these characters, mostly stems from feeling misrepresented. Along with being a woman playing video games, there is still some level of feeling like *the other* in the space, so not seeing someone familiar, diverse bodies, in the characters can sometimes be alienating.

So, as a player of this game (young, adult, white female) I feel like bringing the plausible non-stereotypical-teenage-boy-gamer -view of this game forward. As a male dominated space and game, this is a different point of view to examine it. Moreover, Fortnite is played by approx. 30 million users daily¹, so it seems relevant to dive into.

Fortnite, in short, is a multiplayer shooting and survival game. It was published in 2017 by an American video game and software developer, publisher; Epic Games². You can play a solo-, duo- or multiplayer game and also build. You can play with friends or strangers in teams, or by yourself. The player can choose which type they want to play in (the amount of players, build or zero-build).

The point of the game is you get dropped off to a map and fight to survive from 100 players to the last player(s) standing. After dying or winning, the game just starts over and over again. There is an ongoing plot, sort of in the background, but it does not truly change the premise of the game (other than updating the map aka. the grounds, some weapons and Non-Playable Characters [NPC]).

¹ Fortnite Live Player Count (2025). ActivePlayer.io

² McCall (2020). What is Epic Games? Here's what you need to know about the game developer and distributor behind the success of 'Fortnite'.

What I'll be focusing on is the characters, or *skins*³, for the players' avatars. For context, there are around 10 original characters (or "Default Skins")⁴ who take part in a story line, but what I would say Fortnite is best known for – is its' take on trends. For example, promoting upcoming movies (Ghost Face⁵ for *Scream 7*) by having those characters as '*skins*' you can purchase in the game. Purchases can be done either with V-bucks (the games own currency you gain by playing) or real money (but still in V-buck form).

So, with skins, you can change your avatars' appearance. You are able to choose any gendered (or possibly not-gendered) skins; you don't have to choose either female or male avatar, you can "change" them anytime you like. There are/has been over 2.400 skins in Fortnite in total⁶, but the store for buying them is very frequently updated, so some of them are for limited time only or for specific Chapters or Seasons⁷. Additionally, there is a clear trend towards collaborations with movies, music artists, celebrities etc.⁸, which some think feels like polluting the game.

With my paper, I am aiming to expose and break apart the design processes/causes, to the possible sexist and narrow portrayals of Women Characters, and declare how these appear in Fortnite. And why we should urge creating more diverse and inclusive games and characters is needed and should be the default.

³ "the appearance of the players avatar" (Duetzmann (n.d.). Engaged Family Gaming)

⁴ Çakır & Jones (2024). Who are the original Fortnite characters?

⁵ Ghost Face -profile (n.d.). Fortnite.gg

⁶ Fortnite.gg (n.d.). All Skins

⁷ Amount of all Fortnite Chapters, Seasons, Themes: **39, on Feb 2026** (Ashley (2026). All Fortnite Season Themes So Far)

⁸ Amount of collaborations in the game: **263, on Nov 2025** (Ashley (2025a). All Fortnite Collabs and Upcoming Crossovers)

1.2 Research Questions

This paper aims to gather insight into Fortnite's Female Characters Designs, so presentation and portrayal of these Characters (or Skins) will be investigated. This paper intends to shed light on what this portrayal entails and how the game conveys this and how that possibly aligns with or contradicts with picked feminist concepts. Furthermore, by looking at the gathered data, get input from the game itself and additionally different views, perceptions and associations to/of the game via research and articles, already made of, or in reference to, the topic.

Therefore, the problem definition is: How are the female characters and the female body represented in comparison to the male, in the Fortnite -video game, and what possibly makes these phenomenons present?

The following reacher questions will be used to gather insight to the problem definition with: How the female body is represented, how does sexism appear and do female monsters truly exist, in the Fortnite -video game?

By focusing on the topics mentioned above, I seek to contribute to the field of theories such as Game Theory, Gender Theory and Feminist Media Theory. This is done by using Fortnite to examine the representations of women, stereotypes and possible sexism. Thus, the main concepts in this paper are Fortnite, Video games, Body Representation, Video Games, Character Design, Feminism, Sexism and (Body) Diversity.

1.3 Literature

1.3.1 Theories

This paper research applies and draws on theories such as *Game Theory* by Emmanuel Guardiola and Stéphane Natkin⁹, because in gaming, the nature of decision-making often mirrors real-world applications of game theory, and media is a reflection of societal norms.

⁹ Guardiola & Natkin (2005). Game Theory and video game, a new approach of game theory to analyze and conceive game systems. CGAMES'05, Int. Conf. on Computer Games, Angoulême, France, January 2005, Pp.166-170.

In addition, *Gender Theory* by Judith Butler¹⁰ is relevant to the problems at hand. This piece is a critical intervention in feminist and queer theory, disrupting traditional understandings of sex, gender, and identity. It encourages to rethink the discursive construction of bodies and the implications for social and political practices.

In turn, Julian McDougall's *Feminist Media Theory*¹¹ contains a complex selection of approaches, all of which critically examine, how gender norms are held up, maintained and constructed in the media. At the centre of this theory, is how the gender norms are deeply entrenched in media representations, and the concept of feminism itself; advocating for the deconstruction of these media-driven stereotypes. In this context, feminism seeks to challenge the dominant media narratives that marginalise women, and instead promotes more diverse, empowering portrayals.

¹⁰ Butler (1993). *Bodies That Matter: On the Discursive Limits of 'Sex'*. New York, NY: Routledge.

¹¹ McDougall (2012). *Media Studies: The Basics*. Routledge.

1.3.2 Previous Research

Fortnite's character design and its' possible challenges with women's portrayal in it specifically, has not been directly explored to my knowledge. But Fortnite's designs in general and otherwise sexism in different medias' character design, gendered biases, and other aspects regarding design, has.

For example, in Fennimore's *Are They Really Just Cosmetic? The Impact of Cosmetic Items on Fortnite's Gameplay and Game Design* -article, from 2020, he goes to explain: "Game companies know that players care about cosmetic items and avatar customization, and they design their games to make cosmetic items as desirable as possible." It is clear, that gaming industry wants you to keep playing, so making the games and characters desirable makes sense. But desirable to who and which group and can they be so desirable, that it could damage expectations, portrayals or experiences.

Additionally, in a study by Martins, Williams, Harrison and Ratan, called *A Content Analysis of Female Body Imagery in Video Games*, they did research on video game character measurements versus to the average American woman measurements, in 2009. Their results indicate that the characters were "significantly different on every dimension as compared to the real-world sample" as well that very few women can naturally in real life, achieve the video game character measurements, so they state: "the majority of female gamers will deviate from this ideal, and the majority of male gamers will never know a real woman whose body is actually this thin." They continue to ruminate, that more research is needed to define the impact of repeated exposure to such portrayals, on male and female gamers' perceptions of themselves, and expectations about women's bodies.

1.3.3 Articles

In addition to the theories and previous research mentioned, there were relevant articles that are worth mentioning and which moulded my paper.

One of these was written by De la Torre-Sierra and Guichot-Reina called *Women in Video Games: An Analysis of the Biased Representation of Female Characters in Current Video Games* from 2024. Beneficial from this article is the writers' understanding of the impact that video game media has and question the women characters' roles in these games. "-- the social and cultural impact of this technological activity in society today therefore stands out even more, often going unnoticed". De la Torre-Sierra and Guichot-Reina talk about how video games are often seen as a form of entertainment but not much deeper. They emphasize that games are a sociocultural product like any other media, such as film or literature and that all of them have the ability to "-- both construct and transform the way in which we perceive the world".

This article brushes on the same issues I'm seeking out to prove, which are the challenges with female characters bodies representation and (especially the lack of) diversity. About diversity, the article touches on *intersecting identities* and how it influences, how the players possibly relate to characters, and hence how particularly marginalized groups can often experience misrepresentation or exclusion. Additionally, ageism is touched on in the data breakdown of this article, and that is something I lightly explore as well.

Another influential article is by He, Jiao and Zhang, in their "*Who Lives in the Future*"?: *A toolkit for imagining inclusive and posthuman future characters as an approach to design fiction* article from 2024, they state: "-- characters in design fiction often reflect the perspectives and experiences of Western-centric culture, while marginalizing the voices of the Global South, minority ethnic groups, and other marginalized communities." They go on to profess that, if a design creation is limited by these Western-centric cultural paradigms, can that lead to the identification becoming consequently circumscribed. Inclusivity is something needed more in video games, and the lack of it, and possible Western-centrism of it, I aim to expose.

1.4 Research Material & Methods

Primary data collection to study the problem at hand, was gathered data from the game itself. I collected screenshots from Fortnite's in-game-store, during Fall of 2025. 1st screenshot was taken on 5.10.2025 and last on 4.12.2025 These screenshots include 156 characters that were sold in the store between those days. And for further and clearer study, I adopted a purposive criterion, for the selection of the characters. The selection criteria for the characters was human, humanlike, partly-human, or "packaged" releases, that included apparent pair-or-team/group-"costumes". Some exceptions could apply when handling the monster-skins specifically later in the paper, which will be justified.

In total the screenshots taken, amounted to Total of 156 characters: of which 78 were Female, 70 Male and 8 Non-Human. Thus, the raw categories made for my 1st level filing of the screenshots, on my computer, were female, male, non-human. But as mentioned, more precise categorisation is needed, so I then further categorised the character to Humans(/Humanlike/Partly Humans), Monsters/Creatures, Plus Size and Older, within the Gendered categories, for collages and to better analysis. The further categorisation of the genders separation, was based on the presented female and male categories within the game itself, which could be found in the 'Locker' section in the game. ¹²

In addition to my own data, I also researched articles and other useful, relevant resources regarding my paper's themes and issues. This material aims to capture perspectives ensuring a wider range of viewpoints, and to back up my arguments. These articles will be referenced to and dived into, throughout in the later Analysis section.

As for Methods, I am using the Qualitative Content Analysis Method by Zhang and Wildemuth¹³ for examining the game (screenshots) itself. This is done by gathering data of the 'skins'/characters and then further looking for recurring themes by developing Categories and a Coding Scheme. The aim of this method is to identify essential themes or categories within a body of content, and to provide "-- a rich description of the social reality created by those themes/categories as they are lived out in a particular setting." In general, this research is included in the study of Digital Games and Cultural Studies. As earlier described, my

¹² Easy-Pin-2265 (2025).

¹³ Zhang & Wildemuth (2006). Qualitative Analysis of Content

interest in particular is focus on the (problematic) nature of female video game characters' appearance and their (lack of) diversity, within a feminist framework.¹⁴

Since my themes are (tied to) body, body image and are stereotype –focused, it seemed rational to have a criterion to, which characters possibly exclude. Therefore, like Martins et al. state in their study: “-- characters that do not look human are presumably not processed, and the gamer may remain relatively “safe” from negative body image outcomes.”¹⁵ As it is mentioned, people playing are more likely to not get negative body image experiences, if the characters are clearly cartoonish and/or not human. There are several skins in Fortnite that are, for example, animals and/or cartoons. Hence, these skins seem irrelevant to this study, so they are excluded from discourse. Though it should be noted, some of them can still have apparent female or (mostly) male traits, poses, stances, accessories et cetera. (See picture below for examples of excluded, *non-human-characters*.)



And since no study is done on the non-human characters, the total now equals from the female characters and male characters, which amounts to the total of 148.

Ethically speaking, I am aware of how my own motivations may affect the way I view the game and characters. But by acknowledging this, I aim to maintain transparency and receptiveness throughout my research and to consider and explore different perspectives.

While the data gathered from the game itself covers only a few months time, the store is updated frequently enough that I believe it still provides a reliable picture of the issue at hand.

¹⁴ “A feminist framework occupies a political position seeking changes, on behalf of women by focusing on promoting an understanding of women as a group amongst many within any society identified by different needs, desires, values, and priorities due to their role and the position they occupy within these societies. The feminist framework offers new understanding of gender, questioning its “naturalness” in relation to the man/woman dichotomy by shifting the old patterns of description to reformulate them as fluid, culturally located negotiations.” IGI Global Scientific Publishing Dictionary (n.d.).

¹⁵ Martins et al. (2009). pp. 824–836.

Geographically, Fortnite is developed and published by a North American studio¹⁶, which most likely influences its character designs. It is also worth noting that the game is most popular in The United States (108 million players) and Indonesia (113 million), with Brazil closely (91 million) following.¹⁷

¹⁶ About Epic Games (n.d.). Epic Games

¹⁷ Desiata (December, 2025).

2 Fortnite

To understand the grounds of the explored topics, examining Fortnite as a game, its' possible audience and makers, is crucial. Firstly, the game is free and available on almost every device.¹⁸ The design is cartoonish and colourful, and it contains no visual blood, even it is a combat, shooter game. Attempting to identify the Fortnite player demographics through the publisher, Epic Games, itself is not possible since they have not released any official statistics of who their players are. However, there are sites which can be found and that show alleged statistics, from which we can form a general idea of who the average Fortnite player is (see chart below).

Source,year	Age 18-24, %	Age 24-34, %	Male Players, %	Female Players, %
<u>Techjury</u> , 2026	62.7%	22.5%	67%	33%
<u>Demansage</u> , 2026	62.7%	22.5%	89.7%	10.3%
<u>Exploding Topics</u> , 2025	36.9%	22.8%	63.8%	37%
<u>Techpoint Africa</u> , 2025	62.7%	22.5%	89.7%	10.3%
<u>Business of Apps</u> , 2023	62.7%	22.5%	89.7%	10.3%
= Average	57.5%	22.6%	79.9%	20,1%

Chart 1. Audience: average Fortnite player demographics displayed (age and gender) from 5 sources.

Three of the sources cite a significant (the biggest) divergence between the male and female players, (89.7% and 10.3%, on blue sections of the chart). Furthermore, the player base does have wide age range, spanning approximately from 10-year-olds to adults in their 30s and the games official age restrictions are from 12-year-olds-and-up or Parental Guidance Recommended.¹⁹ ²⁰ But younger players are just mentioned in passing, and so data of under 18-year-old players is not on record thus their involvement is unclear, which is why they are not present in the chart above. Additionally, a relevant detail for such broad audience is that

¹⁸ What platforms or devices are compatible with Fortnite? (n.d.). Epic Games

¹⁹ 1: “Fortnite is the second most popular video game among Pre-teens. 26% of the preteens under the age of 13 play the game.”

2: “Almost 53% of Fortnite gamers are in the age group of 10 to 25 years.” (Kumar, 2026, Fortnite Statistics 2026 (Player Count & Revenue))

²⁰ The Pan-European Game Information (PEGI) age rating system (n.d.).

the players do not kill their opponents, instead they “eliminate them.”²¹ The characters simply get wiped from the match, resulting in no visual bloodshed or gruesome visuals.²²

While the gameplay itself is not the primary focus of this paper, it is worth noting because it directly influences who is playing the game. Which in turn, can have an effect on the selection of characters / skins available.

From the chart (Chart 1.), it can be seen that Male Players dominate the audience demographic, comprising 63.8%-89.7% as well as mostly those aged under 24. Thus, it can be concluded that the profile for the alleged Fortnite player is an 18–24-year-old Male.

In addition to Fortnite players, estimating who is making the game and designing it and its’ characters seems necessary. Circling back to the study by Martins et al., in which they compared video game character measurements to those of the average American woman, the researchers conclude that their gathered data provides insight and knowledge into the matter while also raising new questions. And they consider, whether games and gender function as a cycle: “-- games feature more males and so attract more young males to play. Those males grow up and are more likely to become game makers than women, perpetuating the role of males in game creation, and so on.”²³ This could imply that designing is happening in a bubble or as a cycle, in which the presumption for games is often from-male-to-male.

In turn, in Tompkins and Martins article called *Masculine Pleasures as Normalized Practices: Character Design in the Video Game Industry*²⁴, they explored how developer identities and tools intersect and impact character design. They found that to Female Sexualisation Trope, the industry being Male-dominated and Technological constraint/affordance had the most significant impact to characters design. The interviewees expressed that animating flowing clothing is more expensive than animating form-fitting, which could partially explain an outcome of such limitations, but one of the interviewees experiences suggested “-- that a male gaze can operate (and go unquestioned) behind the technological tools wielded by developers in an industry dominated by men.”. Moreover, they go to suggest that women have a tendency to “-- draw what they think is wanted...and so they’re drawing sexualized characters.“

²¹ Here’s Why Fortnite May Be The Ultimate Growth Marketing Example (n.d.). Gallantway

²² Brown University Health Blog Team (2018). What Is Fortnite and Should I Be Concerned?

²³ Martins et al. (2009). pp. 824-836

²⁴ Tompkins & Martins (2022). p.399-420

Therefore, women artists (too) most likely also recognise the sexualised depictions as a normalised practice.

Fortnite, then, seems to be a male-to-male designed game, or at least follows a pattern that suggests this. However, could the crowd and the profile for the average Fortnite player be changing? During Covid-19 many interactive team games peaked in usage; Fortnite being one of them.²⁵ At that time, Fortnite also still had a mobile version available for Apple devices. In addition, Fortnite's Marvel-themed release in November of 2020, for example, drew in 15.3 million concurrent players.²⁶ The game has also released skins tied to artists whose fanbase possibly extend beyond the alleged young male gamer demographic. For example, skins for singers like Ariana Grande in 2021²⁷ and Chappell Roan in 2026²⁸, both of whom are popular among Women and the LGBTQ+ community. However, as young, beautiful, female pop stars, they both still fit comfortably within mainstream appeal and therefore may not represent a significant disruption to existing norms.

2.1 How the female body is represented

2.1.1 Sexual vs Sexualised

*“The only acceptable circumstance in which a woman can be sexual is when a man is doing the sexualizing.”*²⁹, or hopefully not.

”Many -- can no longer distinguish when an expression of sexuality is healthy, and when that expression is actually an object of sexualization.”³⁰, says Mohajir. In the context of video games, this distinction can be even more difficult to make. Since all the characters are technically objects, which means they can be objectified, sexualised, or both. However, there is a difference between something being sexual and something being sexualised. According to Olsen³¹, a sexualised person is “held to a standard that equates physical attractiveness with being sexy.” These standards are narrowly defined and involve unattainable, unrealistically

²⁵ McGowan (2020). Video Games Surge in Lockdown Boom

²⁶ Statham (2025). Fortnite: The Game of a Generation

²⁷ Ariana Grande - Fortnite Skin (n.d.). Fortnite GG

²⁸ Roan of Arc - Fortnite Skin (n.d.). Fortnite GG

²⁹ Jackson (2021). Being Sexual vs. Being Sexualized

³⁰ Mohajir (2014). Have we Confused Sexuality with Sexualization?

³¹ Olsen (2014). Sexuality versus sexualization – why is it important to know the difference?

“perfect” sexualised body types, especially with women and girls. In turn, being sexual means self-expression on one’s own terms and according to one’s own wants.

There are studies analysing how characters act within their alleged sexes’ roles, such as the one made by De la Torre-Sierra and Guichot-Reina, which was referenced earlier. They analysed the Biased Representation of Female Characters, and mention that women characters still often fall to the damsel in distress trope³², or their roles are sub-characters, or they only interact with the male characters, for instance. With Fortnite, thankfully none of these really apply as you can do all the same things with any character. Whether you use an Ariana Grande –skin or an army soldier –skin, they all shoot, run, and build equally well.

As Tompkins and Martins found in their previously mentioned study, the Female Sexualization Trope was most impacted by the industry being Male-dominated and by technological constraints/affordances. It was expressed that animating flowing clothing was more expensive than form-fitting, and that it could partially explain an outcome of such limitations. But it should be noted that these tools themselves, wielded by developers, happens in an industry dominated by men. And that, regardless of the designers' gender, they appeared to recognise the sexualised depictions as a normalised practice and thus as something they could, or felt expected to pursue.

In turn, the definition of *sexism*, according to a professor of sociology, Gina Masequesmay, is that it is an ideology or practices that maintain the patriarchy or male domination.³³ Sexism can appear in other ways than actions, tropes and roles, for instance through outfits and portrayal of characters’ bodies. In Fortnite’s case, it is not possible to know what the characters themselves think of their clothes, or what their personalities are like; if their way of dressing would be fitting to them, and if they’re doing it on their own account, as self-expression. So, we must look at what is considered sexist in clothing or body portrayal (aka. design), which is further explored in the following sections.

³² “a young woman who is in trouble and needs a man's help” (A damsel in distress – definition (n.d.). Cambridge English Dictionary)

³³ , Gina (2008). "Sexism". In O'Brien, Jodi (ed.). *Encyclopedia of Gender and Society, Volume 2*. Thousand Oaks, Calif.: SAGE Publications. pp. 748–751.

2.1.2 Traits

The most common physical female character is thin, young and beautiful. In fact, I found that the male character most often is too. However, societal views affect how differently these bodies are perceived, even if they would be presented similarly, for example in little clothing. The perception of an overt male is not the same as an overt female, and having sexualised male characters does not justify the sexualisation of female characters.

Being thin, is something one is stereotypically expected to aspire to and be admired for. These stereotypes are reflected in media, and in turn, media: “plays a vital role in formulating what is attractive in society, increasing the thin beauty ideal among females being unattainable.”³⁴ When looking at the females, there are 3 characters that could be considered bigger/middle sized/plus sized (see picture below). These skins are only in the store occasionally. The ones in black and white, are the most common body types within the game, for reference.



There are even skinnier and more kid-like skins, but not the other way; but no larger or in-between bodytypes in addition to these. Perhaps the middle character, wearing the leather jacket, could be older, mostly because the styling seems more old-school. In addition, the bigger appearance is achieved mostly by enlarging the thighs and chest areas, thus the

³⁴ Aparicio-Martinez, Perea-Moreno, Martinez-Jimenez, et. al (2019). Social Media, Thin-Ideal, Body Dissatisfaction and Disordered Eating Attitudes: An Exploratory Analysis. *International journal of environmental research and public health*, 16(21), 4177.

characters still fall in hour-glass-figure mould, and they are all generally beautiful, and youthful looking.

The character on far left is called Penny, and a Fortnite OG³⁵, she was first introduced in 2020 and she was received well. After Penny, Opal³⁶ (on the right, in colour) caused some conversation with her release, in 2023.³⁷ People faintly commented on and questioned her size and design, suggesting that non-skinny bodies are still questioned for their appearance and inclusion.

The male characters have more body diversity, some of them even have a belly, but most of this variety comes from collaborations, aka. the characters brought in the game from outside of Fortnite (see picture below). In addition to plus sized characters, there is an average-build-character in black and white, as well as otherwise larger bodies too, with wider and broader builds (on the right "section", in the picture below).



³⁵ Penny - Fortnite Skin (n.d.). Fortnite.GG

³⁶ Opal - Fortnite Skin (n.d.) Fortnite.GG

³⁷ Wilkins (2023). Plus-size Fortnite skin causes major controversy on Twitter

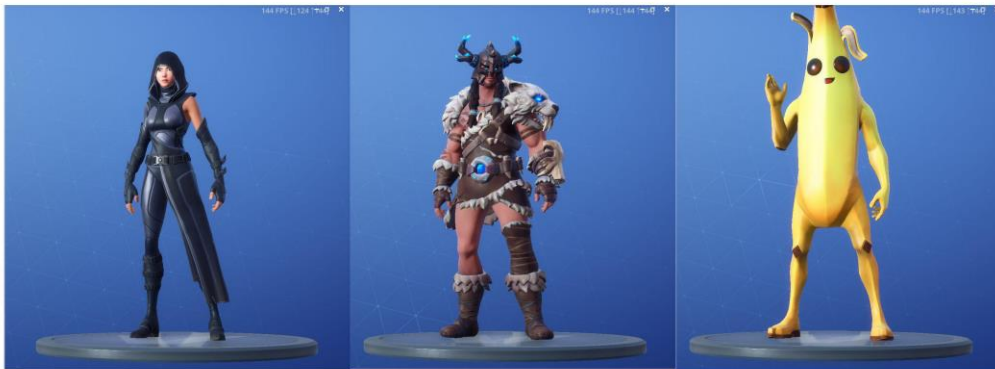
Some have claimed that the size of characters is due to literal game mechanics, as a larger character would present a larger, and therefore easier, target to shoot. But bringing back and looking at a non-human-character; (see picture below, Peely³⁸ [banana], on the right) they are often huge, thus can be seen easier, during gameplay. But the hitbox³⁹ is the same no matter the skin or character and its size,⁴⁰ so this cannot be a reason for absence of bigger characters.

Welcome to Fortnite, where

This

This

and This



all have the same hitbox

(and somehow, you still can't hit your shots.)

So why does the prevalence of thin bodies, and arguably, the promotion of thinness ideals, matter? As Martins et al.'s study discovered; the body shapes found in games, much like manipulated advertising images in magazines and on television, may have similar norming influence on those exposed to them. The rarity of the diverse, bigger body types, send a message that they in fact are not the norm in the game.

As for McDougall's Feminist Media Theory, which contains approaches that critically examine, how gender norms are held up, maintained and constructed in the media; at the centre is how the gender norms are deeply entrenched in media representations, and advocating for the deconstruction of these media-driven stereotypes. It does seem the portrayals of women in Fortnite are repeatedly stereotypical and don't seem to really challenge these dominant narratives.

³⁸ Peely (outfit) (n.d.). Fortnite Wiki

³⁹ "hitboxes try to cover the area where the strike is causing impact" (Hitbox (n.d.). The Fighting Game Glossary)

⁴⁰ Ashley (2025b). How do Fortnite Skin Hitboxes Work?

“In order to be attractive, women have to be young”.⁴¹

Once again, circling back to the study of De la Torre-Sierra and Guichot-Reina, they discovered that most of the female characters (featured in the cover art of video games) were within the young adult age range, 20–39 years old, and that “Women are never represented in the mature age range (over 50 years old).”⁴² Older women are not often seen or they are sidelined, not active nor playable characters. They are mothers in the backgrounds. In Fortnite too, the characters all around are predominantly young. One possible reason for this is the game’s young player base and it’s semi-low-detail graphics. But there are other ways to present age, such as hair colour, posture, build or style, but these indicators are almost never seen, particularly not on female characters.

De la Torre-Sierra and Guichot-Reina continue, that the age range (on the video game covers) for male characters, was more diverse and consisted *predominantly* (almost 40%) of middle-aged, 40–49, men, and thus they find that, video games indeed appear to perpetuate the eternal youth myth. In Fortnite there are no older women characters. The only ones that could be considered in this category on some level, can be seen in the picture below. With grey or white hair and possibly a more mature build and in some cases glasses, but there are no other visible signs of older age.



⁴¹ De la Torre-Sierra & Guichot-Reina (2024), p.545

⁴² De la Torre-Sierra & Guichot-Reina (2024). p.543

In contrast, again, the Male Characters include multiple mature-looking designs. They have features that can be considered older, such as facial hair and build (see picture below).

Though, it should be noted that many of these are again the result of collaborations, such as the Iconic Cartoon Dads⁴³ (three bottom right), so they are not Fortnite's own designs, but already existing characters added to the game.



But even when characters would be or are added from other media, larger or older women are absent, no matter the association, as Fortnite originals or through the collaborations. This suggests that older women are simply not seen as desirable characters for the game.

Female	78 (100%)	Male	70 (100%)
Darker	18 (23%)	Darker	12 (17%)
Lighter	50 (64%)	Lighter	27 (39%)
Odd	6 (8%)	Odd	21 (30%)
Unknown	4 (5%)	Unknown	10 (14%)

⁴³ FORTNITE ICONIC DADS (n.d.). Evil Eye Pictures LLC

Chart 2. The Skin Colours of Characters demonstrated and compared to Totals

Just as sexism, including the emphasis on thinness and ageism, can be puzzling and, in the worst case, a form of oppression, so too is the lack of darker-skinned characters. Different forms of oppression are tied to each other; they overlap and intersect, such as how fatphobia is tied to racism.⁴⁴ Western-centrism (or Westcentrism/Eurocentrism/Eurocentricity) means favouring Europe centric thinking or features, for example. In Art History, it appears as absence of non-European Art, as well as in Academia, in which European ideas and scholars are still dominating. This could lead (or has led) to racism and colonialism being naturalised, as well as knowledge and information of non-European cultures not transferring.⁴⁵

In Fortnite, players can customise character's appearance in the team-releases (see example in the picture below). Otherwise, darker-skinned characters are only available if a specific skin happens to be in the store.



⁴⁴ Strings, Sabrina (2019). *Fearing the Black Body: The Racial Origins of Fat Phobia*

⁴⁵ Luo, Wike & Xue (n.d.). *Eurocentrism*

As it is demonstrated in Chart 2. at the beginning of this chapter, it can be seen majority for both female (64%) and male (39%) are lighter skinned. “Odd” covers non-human colours such as blue, green, purple etc. and “Unknown” means the character’s skin is completely covered. The lack of diverse skin tones or coloured complexions raises questions. Most games already feature white protagonists by default⁴⁶, and though players can often choose their avatar’s appearance, the available options should be balanced. Given how mainstream gaming, and Fortnite in particular is, it is strange the selection remains so one-sided. This also reinforces the challenge mentioned earlier regarding the demographics of the game creators. In 2019, The International Game Developers Association found that 81% of developers identified as White/Caucasian, while only 2% identified as Black/African-American/African/Afro-Caribbean⁴⁷. When people don't see themselves represented in games, they’re less likely to become game creators themselves, and so the cycle continues.

People of colour, and thus characters of Colour, are often more frequently sexualised in media. In this gathered data, out of the 18 darker-skinned characters, 10 wear outfits that show skin to some degree, meaning over half fall into this category. Additionally, 4 of these characters show skin on both the abdomen and above knee. While revealing clothing is not inherently problematic, it raises the question of why these characters are consistently styled this way. Characters clothing is examined in more detail in the following sections.

Developers should strive to showcase more meaningful forms of diversity. If the industry were to start working with a more diverse range of people, from different backgrounds, it would likely lead to more authentic representation, and in turn, help foster healthier attitudes toward various demographic groups. Fortnite already includes diversity in some aspects, but it should continue to evolve its character designs in step with the changing demographics and expectations of its’ player base.

⁴⁶ “--more than 80% of them were white and male“ Packwood (2022). The era of white male games for white male gamers is ending

⁴⁷ Dornieden (2020). Leveling Up Representation: Depictions of People of Color in Video Games

2.2 How does sexism appear

*(Chris) Claremont was credited as one of the pioneers for helping the transformation of -- female characters. -- We were seeing females who were more like their male counterparts; they were strong and beautiful, so problem solved right? -- No, not quite. -- many women have accused certain comic creators of justifying sexy women by making them tough. It's like, you can have a female character wear a thong and nipple tape, as long as they're winning the fight., goes Brinkley in his *How Women Are Treated In Comics* -video essay.⁴⁸*

This seems to be the central issue in designing female characters: where does the line lie. Perhaps what matters most is who is designing them, for what purpose and for whom. What activities do the characters engage in, and does the outfit suit those actions, or does it need to. Fortnite's target audience has been younger men and boys, from the start. The question, then, is whether and how this is reflected in the game itself.

In turn, in another video essay, *The Sexualization of Female Characters in Art & Media (when is it bad? when is it ok?)* by Paranoid Rat⁴⁹, there is discussion about designing female characters, objectification and sexism, in the video 's comments:

Commenter 1: i get the "its all about personal preference" bit but i dont think it was well placed considering the theme of the video. the way a lot of women have been sexualized and wiped of any character or personality beyond being hot and sexy is insanely misogynistic and shouldnt be thing at all. creators in mainstream media often refuse to design female characters who are not conventionally attractive because being pretty is the only value they see in them. also, just as a little sidenote pointing out that these designs are bad is in no way slut shaming. the characterr doesnt have a mind of its own, it only reflects the choices of its creators. i totally agree with your points i just think the wording in places makes it sound like objectifying women in media is valid if its your preference.

Replier 1: my position is that if it is not a real character it doesn't matter if it is sexualized (unless is a minor and in that case we enter a dangerous terrritorty) but i don't really get the outrage if you sexualize a woman character like it doesn't matter

⁴⁸ John Brinkley (2023). Timestamps: 7:21 – 7:54

⁴⁹ Paranoid Rat (2025).

is not a real person you aren't insulting anyone well maybe the fans of said character but who cares?

Replier 2: Who gaf if it's insanely misogynistic just do your thing & don't force other people to participate in it.

The objectification of women, and by extension, female characters, has a long history. As Brinkley observes regarding the design of women superheroes in comics, it still seems unclear to some where to draw the line between expressive design and dehumanisation, how much showing skin or curves are too much. As well as in the comments of the later, Paranoid Rat's video, to some it seems to matter a lot how women are represented and portrayed. Whereas to some it doesn't seem to matter as much, at least if it is "not a real character" and does not "force other people to participate in it". As much as we would want it to only be up to peoples' preferences, unfortunately, nothing happens in a vacuum. During the stages of both childhood and youth, video game players receive messages, which influence the way they think they should act, and the way they should look.⁵⁰

Reeling back to comics and superheroes, seeing "only one type" of woman can be discouraging: "--this is what comics like this tell me about myself, as a lady: They tell me that I can be beautiful and powerful, but only if I wear as few clothes as possible.--" said Laura Hudson, a comic and video game artist, in 2011.⁵¹ Character design for women and female characters has been excluding, but is it better today?

In a study done by Hodgesa and Buckley on players, character picking in Overwatch⁵², there were 211 female respondents and 1117 male respondents. It is mentioned, 11 out of the games' 25 characters are female, and that "49.8% of respondents' favourite characters were female", as well that "Male gamers tended to have a relatively even split across the character genders with slightly more male characters (46.0% had a female character as their favourite character), whilst 66.8% of female players had a favourite character who was female --". Should be mentioned, Overwatch characters also have skill levels, but it is apparent that female players prefer Women Characters as Male players were nearly 50/50.

⁵⁰ Díez (2004). Investigación desde la Práctica. Guía didáctica para el análisis de los videojuegos. (Eng. Research from Practice. A teaching guide for the analysis of video games.)

⁵¹ Peterson, Latoya (2011). Sexism, Character Design, and the Role of Women in Created Worlds

⁵² Hodges & Buckley (2018). Deconstructing who you play: Character choice in online gaming. Entertainment Computing Vol. 27, pp. 170–178.

In an article by Nick Yee⁵³, on statistics on gender and which gendered characters people usually choose, Yee finds, that almost 1 out of 3 male players prefer female characters and that about "60% of the female avatars you meet are played by a male player." There were 2,956 responders to the survey (69% male, 27% female, 4% non-binary), the median age being 24. Thus, more or less players seem often prefer the female characters. This indicates that who plays Fortnite, affects the game and design / character choices made by developers and so, the implied average player does have an effect. If developers and designers believe and know what has sold well before, they'll be likely to reach for that similar design and traits, time and time again.

2.2.1 Appearance

Then, how does sexism appear in Fortnite's female characters, specifically. First let's categorise what to look for in the designs. While looking at the characters at hand, by comparing (the female to the male) and seeing how appropriate the clothing for the activity at hand is (aka. the theme of the game, exercise [running, climbing, fighting, "war setting"]), how much skin is showed and how do diverse bodies exist. The total number of characters explored can be seen, in the chart (Chart 3.) below.

Total of Characters	Female Characters	Male Characters
148 (100%)	78 (53%)	70 (47%)

Chart 3. Number of Female and Male, compared to Total of all gathered characters

According to De la Torre-Sierra and Guichot-Reina, Female Sexuality can be emphasized by sexy or insinuating clothing such as: "low necklines or tight crop tops which show a significant part of their breasts or abdomen, or very short, tight skirts with side slits that show the hips almost up to waist height."⁵⁴, so adapting these features, we are able to break down the designs.

First let's look at individual skins. Out of all the gathered female Skins (78), 28 are showed wearing clothing that shows skin on the abdomen, crop tops, and 23 are showed wearing clothing that shows leg above the knee, such as shorts, (partial) pants, skirts or dresses. There

⁵³ Yee (2021). About one out of three men prefer playing female characters. Rethinking the importance of female protagonists in video games
⁵⁴ De la Torre-Sierra & Guichot-Reina (2024). p.546

are 14 characters that intersect and belong to both categories. There are no apparent or notable low necklines.

Total F	Wears crop top	Wears shorts, “pants”, skirt, dress	Both	Showing skin in average
78 (100%)	28 (36%)	23 (29%)	14 (18%)	37 (47%)

Chart 4. Number of Female Characters’ different clothing, compared to Female Total

According to calculations demonstrated on the chart above (Chart 4.) 37 out of 78 characters are showing skin in some capacity, which is almost half with 47% \approx 50%. Additionally, nearly every fifth of the female characters wear clothing that show *both* skin on the abdomen *and* the leg above the knee (meaning the categories overlap) with 18% \approx 20%.

In turn, the male characters, when put in similar, reflective categories, the amounts are significantly different; out of 70 characters 9 are showing skin in some way or capacity, with 13%, which means about every tenth character (see below, Chart 5.).

Total M	Show abdomen, shirtless	Show leg above knee, shorts	Both	Showing skin in average
70 (100%)	8 (11%)	5 (7%)	4 (6%)	9 (13%)

Chart 5. Number of Male Characters’ different clothing, compared to Male Total

So, does the classic video game trope of difference in male and female armour⁵⁵ apply to Fortnite too, and do the adapted ‘Female Sexuality emphasized by sexy or insinuating clothing’ actualise. Women do tend to seemingly wear less clothing, with 47% showing skin. Versus their male counterparts with 13%, so the female showing skin is nearly five times more likely. There are no low necklines, but there are tight crop tops and also short, tight skirts. Female breasts seem to not be in focus nor are they for example, comically big on the characters. But like Lynch, Tompkins, Gilbert and BurrIDGE articulate, in their *Evidence of Ambivalent Sexism in Female Video Game Character Designs* -study: ”--a soldier-character

⁵⁵ Nixon (2013). The Chainmail Bikini or the State of Female Armor in Gaming

donning a bikini in a military combat game is inappropriate given the character’s role.”⁵⁶

Though it is clear, not majority of the characters clothes, no matter the gender, are exactly war combat gear, the designs are fun and comical. But one does question what the reason is for such prominent difference between the genders, with showing skin. And it does seem like the Female Sexuality is emphasised with the outfits, repeatedly, thus making it a gendered difference.

Secondly, a feature that stood out, was covering of the faces on characters, which appears to happen with the alleged male more often.

Total	Fully covered	Partly covered	Covered in average	Has showing-face-version
Male: 70	9 (13%)	6 (9%)	7.5 (11%)	0
Female: 78	5 (6%)	3 (4%)	4 (5%)	3 (4%)

Chart 6. Face covering regarding the characters, and amounts compared to their Totals

This chart narrates that male characters’ faces are half more likely to be covered, with male average 11% and female average 5%. Additionally, males don’t have different versions that would show the face like females do (see examples in picture below). Also, it should be added the monstrous skins are not included in this chart. Thus, it could be assumed, the female characters are preferred to show their face or at least have a version of their outfit, that they do, which enhances normalcy and their humanity.



Thirdly, let’s examine how outfits and designs appear in the paired or team/matching releases. As stated in section 2.1 on *Western-centrism*, the choices able to be made consider, skin-

⁵⁶ Lynch, Tompkins, Gilbert, et. al (2024). p. 1529–1554.

colour/ethnicity, in the grouped-outfit releases. When, instead looking at team outfits, it appears there are more differences, between the female and male characters.



In the picture above, it can be distinctively seen, the females have the most human like forms and fairly tight outfits, in contrast to their counterparts. This theme seems to continue, as seen in the picture below. The males are often these faceless beings or otherwise creature-like, while women have different aesthetics, but the outfits are skin-tight, at least partly if not fully and have to have a nod to human-likeness. Additionally, if one female character seems out of the earlier mentioned features, there is often two, which if one is different, the other one often seems to mold back to the norm.



These themes regarding the outfits seem to be recurring, which makes it seem to then be the game's norm. Trying to move away from possible sexualised portrayals, does not mean removing attractive female characters, but to ensure that they would be designed with "depth, agency, and realism rather than for the male gaze."⁵⁷

In addition to clothing and else, Fortnite also has Emotes.⁵⁸ They are little animations, such as dancing, that you can do at any time in the game. In general, Fortnite has almost no difference between genders, regarding to Emotes. Many games have different animations for their characters, including jiggle physics⁵⁹ (and often breast physics), which are familiar to the gaming communities.

Fortnite did have breast physics (on female characters) for an emote back in 2018, but it was called a mistake and then removed.⁶⁰ But it appears it might be doing a slow come back; as this one Reddit poster points out⁶¹, while posting an emote clip from the game, in January of 2026, with breast physics. Under the clip, one comment goes: "*It's just a cartoony stretch effect. It will do the same with male skins.*" to which someone replied with: "*It actually doesn't lol, my girlfriend tested it*". Thus, it appears Fortnite's' jiggle physics, seem to be more focused on female characters, and their breasts. To some extent it does just add movement, realism and life to the game, but one could argue for the reasoning for it to be questionable. In addition Butler's Gender Theory, which disrupts traditional understandings of sex, gender, and identity; she encourages to rethink the discursive construction of bodies and the implications for social and political practices. And since the alleged audience *is* young men and boys, it could be argued this design choice does appear to traditional gender identities and seems objectifying, as it is specifically designed to appeal for the male gaze.⁶²

⁵⁷ Oakes (2025). Deconstructing the sexualization of the female body in video games, one pixel at a time

⁵⁸ "-- animations or gestures that let characters wave, dance, cheer, and show expression. Players use them to communicate, celebrate, or joke with others, making the game world feel more lively and social." Czaja (2025).

⁵⁹ "to simulate soft anatomy, such as fat" (Jiggle Physics (n.d.). Tropedia)

⁶⁰ Gach (2018). Epic Games Says Fortnite's New Breast Physics Were 'Unintended, Embarrassing, Careless'

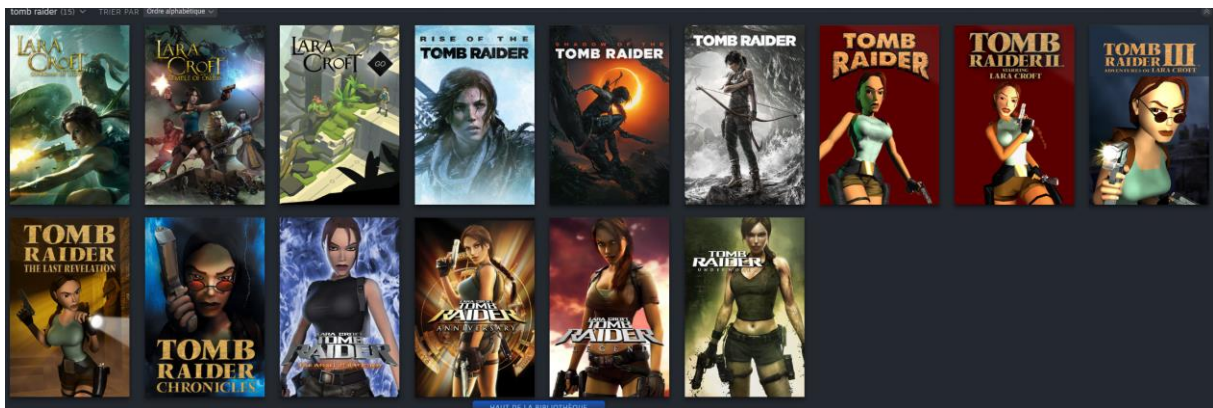
⁶¹ codenamemafia90 (2026). Jiggle physics is back?

⁶² "--how visual arts and media often depict the world from a masculine perspective, primarily affecting the portrayal of women" Caffrey (2024).

2.2.2 Identification

In the book *Gaming at the Edge: Sexuality and Gender at the Margins of Gamer Culture* (2014) by Adrienne Shaw, in the second chapter *Does Anyone Really Identify with Lara Croft?*, Shaw unpacks, how players identify themselves with characters. While the Tomb Raider is a single player game and you can't pick another character to play with, apart from Lara, it sheds light on male players' possible motivations to play as female characters.

Shaw quotes Maya Mikula, who argues: “--based on the way the game has been marketed, objectification rather than identification more aptly describes the primarily male audience's relationship to Lara.” Shaw also points out Lara to be “a female protagonist in a sea of games in which women existed almost entirely as victims or decoration” and that players were asked to play a female character, for the first time. This also affected the way she (Lara) was designed, and Shaw does mention that in Lara's early design process: “we can see inherent intersectionality at play” and “critique the developers' limited imagination of who could be a strong heroine.” On limited imagination, Shaw tells that “Lara could have been a kick-ass, intelligent, woman of colour, feminist superstar”, but that the market logics *couldn't imagine* this to be something the audience would want or could identify with. Lara too, was “stuck” in marketing and programming, for the implied male player.



Evolution of Lara Croft (Source: Keorl (2025). Reddit)

While it has been decades since the 1990s (the first Tomb Raider was released in 1996), very similar themes still appear today. Fortnite appeared 20 years after the first Lara, yet the assumed player profile remains largely the same, and the character design continues to favour the same traits; young, beautiful characters, often with hourglass figures and skintight crop-tops.

Video games do not only mirror societal norms, but are also an active participant in them, such as shaping cultural perceptions of gender. Therefore, “addressing the underrepresentation and misrepresentation of women in video games becomes critical in the broader effort to achieve gender equality both in media and in society at large.”⁶³ Like Guardiola and Natkin explored in their Game Theory, in gaming too, the nature of decision-making often mirrors real-world applications, and therefore media in fact is a reflection of societal norms.

2.3 Do female monsters truly exist

Female, total	78 (100%)	Male, total	70 (100%)
Monster	9 (12%)	Monster	20 (29%)

Chart 7. Characters Monster -feature amount, compared to their Totals

Since the data was gathered in the autumn, I came across many Halloween-themed, horror and monstrous skins. Due to this, a recurring pattern could be noticed; the female skins were often not scary at all. In contrast, the male skins feature a wide range of body horror and diverse body types. The female counterparts, meanwhile, are either non-existent or nearly always include a cuter, normal human version alongside the monster. (See picture below, for the different forms female monster often have.)

⁶³ De la Torre-Sierra & Guichot-Reina (2024). p. 535



Female monsters not being scary, while often in turn being sexy, is not a new phenomena. In an article *Feminist Monster Theory: The Vilification of the Violation of Gender Roles* by DeRosa⁶⁴, she dives into *monster theory* that fundamentally states that characters seen as villains or monsters, often reflect prejudices which can the often lead to “the vilification of those who defy gender roles, and perpetuates this vilification in the media.” Frequently there are also parallels to LGBTQ+ narratives.

“--Feminist perspective reveals how the violation of gender roles has always been vilified in the media, from old myths to modern movies.”, for example, vampirism is often seen as a form of sexual deviance, and as DeRosa states, it should be noted that stories commonly place a heavy emphasis on female sexuality as a particularly awful form, of this act of deviance. The other form of monster, which is often seen as embodying sexual deviance, is the witch, which are often portrayed as “young, seductive women” and witches are accused of similar crimes that portray *femme fatale*.⁶⁵ Consequently, in relation to Fortnite's characters/skins, it is necessary to note the different way female monsters are often seen, experienced, made, apart from male monsters. There appears to especially be witch -skins often, within the female monster range. In many media forms, female monsters are demonized. It is seen as a form of

⁶⁴ DeRosa (2015).

⁶⁵ “-- a seductive and beautiful woman who brings disaster to anyone with whom she becomes romantically involved“ Ostberg (2026).

women's rebellion, and as mentioned, especially sexual rebellion.⁶⁶ While, regarding the Fortnite characters/skins, mainly the physical appearance matters for this paper; it is good to know the history of how female monsters have been treated, to get the picture of how it appears in this video game as well or how it could affect it.

Even as categorising the pictures of the characters, it became clear, a lot of female monsters cannot even be called monster next to the male ones. It feels one has to search and dig for them, as for the males, it seems more obvious. It appears the female so-called-monsters are more like modified humans, fantasy or magical beings. And while those are okay, there is a clear lack of actual monsters and scary skins. (See picture below for female monsters/creatures, beside male monsters/creatures.)



Additionally, it should be noted some of the male monsters or creatures could almost be their own, maybe sexless/alien category (see picture above, far bottom right, for example). However, they are still often built to resemble a stereotypical masculine physique, and their the stances or poses, resemble those of the male characters.

As we are able to see, it seems impossible to make scary or disgusting looking Female Characters. In the beginning of this chapter, it was demonstrated how many female monstrous characters almost always have an additional human version, suggesting they cannot exist only as monsters. Additionally, even characters that are not exactly monstrous, such as fun creature- or animal-designs, are nearly always male, and female versions are almost non-existent: no radioheads, werewolves or skull-fire-headed females.

⁶⁶ Shaw (2014). p. 55-96

The old trope of seductive witches and vampires seem to still hold fairly well, and their influence can be seen in the character designs even today. Fortnite appears hesitant to create female (Halloween) skins that are not sexy or attractive. This could indicate either a lack of designer initiative or insufficient demand, or both, as each influences the other. Once again, it can be established that diversifying the character designs, seems to require change within the industry itself; so, we can move away from the male-gaze driven aesthetics.

3 Summary

Here results of the analysis are presented and summarised, as well as discussion, thoughts – segment of the paper, project, its’ topics and possible, desirable future.

3.1 Results

As result, how are the female characters and the female body represented in comparison to the male, in the Fortnite -video game, and what possibly makes these phenomenons present.

Firstly, men seem to dominate the player, audience demographic, as well as the industry itself. Who plays Fortnite affects the game and design / character choices made by developers, hence the implied average player does have an effect. Developers and designers appear to reach for that similar design and/or traits, time and time again.

The most (physically) common female character is thin, young and beautiful, and so is the male character too, most of the time. However, males still appear to have more diversity. The game mostly has thin bodies, and only the occasional appearance of the diverse, bigger body types, sends a message that it is not the norm in the game.

There are no older women characters, versus within the male characters, there are multiple which seem mature. They have features that can be considered older, such as facial hair and build, though it should be noted, many of these should be credited to the collaborations with other medias. But even if characters would be added from other medias, it seems there are no older women demand, no matter the association. This narrates, that older women characters are not the desired character for the game.

Players are able to pick characters appearances in the team-releases, but this limits to skin-colour/ethnicity, no different bodies sizes or shapes. Additionally, it could be observed both female and male are most often lighter skinned than not, (female, 64% are lighter skinned; male, 39%). Thus, there seems to be lack of diverse coloured complexions.

While applying the ways *Female Sexuality can be emphasized* by De la Torre-Sierra and Guichot-Reina, it appeared sexy or insinuating clothing (such as tight crop tops which show a significant part of abdomen, very short, tight skirts) more often than not, applied. Out of all gathered 78 female characters, 37 were showing skin in some capacity, which is almost half with 47%. Additionally, nearly every fifth of the female characters wear clothing that show

both skin on the abdomen *and* the leg above the knee, with 18%. Moreover, when male characters were put in similar, reflective categories, the amounts are significantly different, with 9 out of 70 characters showing skin in some way or capacity (13%, which means approximately every tenth character). Female characters show skin nearly five times more likely (with mentioned 47% versus to 13%). Hence, prominent difference between the male and female with showing skin, is clear and it does seem Female Sexuality is repeatedly emphasised with the outfits.

Male characters' faces are half more likely (11%) to be covered than female (5%). Additionally, female characters have different (outfit) versions that would show the face, males don't. Thus, the female characters are preferred to show their face.

The female characters, continuously have the most human like forms and fairly tight outfits, in contrast to their counterparts. Additionally, in group releases, if one female seems out of the-norm-features, there is often another to mould back to the norm. Fortnite seems to reach for similar features and themes especially in their female characters, that have been seen for about 30 years, which favours the male gaze and the alleged young male player.

Scary or disgusting looking female monster/creature characters seem nearly impossible and many of them have additional looks, beside their so-called monstrous ones. This implicates that there truly are not characters that would only be monsters, if they are women. Thus, Fortnite seems to be hesitating to create female (Halloween) skins that are not sexy or attractive, which could implicate the designers not making them or there just not being enough demand for them.

While Fortnite values diversity, it appears to be limited mainly to skin colour and clothing, within limits. The difference in body diversity between female and male characters physical body sizes was not as stark as I initially assumed; both are narrow and repetitive. It is clear that more diverse body sizes are needed for all genders; however, the male characters continue to have more diversity in their physical appearance than their female counterparts, with body sizes, age and monstrous forms. This implicates a male bias, regarding my sample of the game characters.

3.2 Discussion

It is nearly impossible to know all the reasons which lead to specific character designs, but nothing happens in a vacuum; most of the time everything is a reflection or a stereotype of

something. Even a better understanding of possible reasons to cause each design “error” (meaning offensive or problematic), could be had with even a bigger data collection and even deeper and more lengthy study on this matter.

I wonder if I contribute to the outdated ideology by separating genders in this kind of old-school-black-and-white way, but, at least in Fortnite's' case, until the avatars are sort of completely modifiable and you can add features or clothes regardless of gender, it is gendered, and an issue. As well as when it comes to body diversity, there is clearly still work to be done, regarding all sexes. Including skins with always diverse looks, shapes, sizes and skin colours should be the default.

I do think a good game would try to be as inclusive as possible, especially if character customization is at all, at play. How customizable must a video game be, and must it be for everyone. Of course, anyone can make a game for a specific purpose or story or audience. But if the patterns keep repeating, it is worth questioning and challenging.

In virtual environments, such as games, players should have the opportunity to reshape and present their identities in ways that reflect theirs and the progress and evolution of identities. Video games could be a tool for new realities and be a place for identity experimentation. However, as this paper demonstrates that this is not reality: as one of the most currently popular video games present gender in a sexist lighting, that reflects patriarchal culture.

Presence of these stereotypes, in video games, can contribute to possible marginalisation of women from gaming spaces, which could then extend into attitudes in the real world. The gender bias present in video games may indicate of why young women for example do not consider gaming or video games development as a career. The industry should consider offering alternatives that recognise gender diversity without stereotypes. This issue can only be solved by diversifying the game industry as a whole.

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