

# Designing the Monstrous

What Character Design Attributes Contribute to Video  
Game Monsters' Gender Expression?

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# Skapandet av det monstruösa

Vilka karaktärsdesignattribut bidrar till  
datorspelmonsters könsuttryck?

## Abstract

As monsters may be presented differently depending on the context they belong to, determining their gender based on visual identity alone might be imprecise. This study aims to find out how video games monsters express their gender and how specific traits may help define monsters of specific genders beyond just appearance. Using a thematic content analysis, traits from 80 different monsters divided across 10 different games were observed and placed into broad themes to explain their relation to gender, or lack thereof. As the studied characters belong to games that were released between the late 1990's to the mid 2020's, not all of them accurately reflected gender depictions that were up to date. Our study suggests that that gender expression in monstrous video game characters reflect gendered ideologies and human culture, something which could potentially affect future depictions of video game monsters.

**Keywords:** Monsters, Monster theory, Video Game Monsters, Video Games, Gender Theory, Gender Studies

## Abstrakt

Det kan vara svårt att avgöra könsidentiteten på ett monster genom att endast utgå ifrån karaktärsdesign, då visuella aspekt kan visas på olika sätt beroende på det sammanhang som monstret tillhör. I den här studien undersöker vi hur monster i datorspel uttrycker genus och könsidentitet. Studien bearbetar hur specifika drag kan denotera och konnotera könsidentitet, samt hur dessa kommunicerar könsidentitet utifrån mer än bara utseende. Genom en tematisk innehållsanalys blev karaktärsdrag från 80 olika monster och 10 olika datorspel observerade och placerades inom breda teman för att diskutera deras könsidentiteter. Studien avgränsades till karaktärer från spel som kom ut vid slutet av 1990-talet till mitten av 2020-talet och är därmed inte nödvändigtvis en samtida studie. Denna studie antyder att könsuttryck inom monströsa datorspelsfigurer reflekterar ideologier inom genus och kulturella skildringar, vilket kan komma att ha betydelse för hur monster och genus representeras i datorspel framöver.

**Nyckelord:** Monster, Monster teori, Datorspels monster, Datorspel, Genusteori, Genusvetenskap

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## 1 Introduction

Video game monsters reflect the fears that can be found in human society and may look different depending on their representational meaning (Cohen 1996, 7-16; May 2021, “Introduction”). Monsters are not just the creatures which come out at night and are often representative of abstractions of very real fears that may endanger our lives and do not necessarily have to follow the same design rules as humanoid characters (May 2021, “Horrors from the Anthropocene”). However, it does not just extend to life threatening circumstances, as humans’ fear also extends to things such as loss of control (Pinder 2021,

“EcoGothic Origins”; Baker et al. 2017, 26-27) or being outside the norm (Cohen 1996, 7-8; Stang 2019, 235).

Monsters have been used in many contexts, such as deliberately creating the “other”, something to fear, something which the female body historically has been subjected to (Cohen 1996, 7-12; Baker et al. 2017, 33; Stang and Trammell 2020, 742-743; Stang 2019, 235; Pinder 2021, “Conclusion”) through things such as motherhood (Pinder 2021, “The Scientist and the ‘Broodmother’”, “The Abhuman Mother”), subjection to the abject (Germaine Buckley 2020, 363-364), and the fear of feminine shapes being used in monster design to create a monstrous feminine (Dumas 2018, 137). These designs play on a patriarchal loss of control which demands women not have free will for their own sake (Dumas 2018, 146-147; Tompkins et al. 2020, 238-239) and extends to other characters, such as robots and artificial intelligence, who are often depicted as subservient and feminine presenting (Meier 2024, 130, 141). These ideas have been around for a long time and are perpetuated by the patriarchal standards of their time, such as through Christianity (Stang and Trammell 2020, 731, 733-735).

Being monstrous, existing beyond the norm is in and of itself a fear (Cohen 1996, 12-16, 20), and by perpetuating these norms they become ideas which fester and have real life consequences for those othered (Tompkins and Martins 2022, 402-403). As it is possible to portray monsters in many ways to represent different types of fears (Carroll 1990, 52-58; May 2021, “Introduction”), it may be difficult to determine their gender identities based on physical appearances alone. In this study we therefore aim to answer the question of how monsters in video games express their gender, if at all.

## **2 Related Research**

In this section we collected literature based around the overall topic of monstrosity, how the theme of monstrosity may be portrayed and what design attributes are commonly used when depicting monsters in video games.

## **2.1 Introducing Monstrosity**

“Art-horror”, as Carroll (1990) describes it, is the feeling we get when a fictional piece of horror media makes us feel threatened and repulsed by an entity within the fictional world presented (Carroll 1990, 52-58). Carroll claims that the viewer does not need to identify with the human characters in relation to the monsters but simply understand that their reactions are sound and realistic (Carroll 1990, 95-96). Their reactions also help determine what genre of media the story is; if a monster is considered normal and an everyday occurrence, we might be seeing a fantasy or fairy tale, but if this monster inspires disgust or dread it is a horror (Carroll 1990, 16-18). Even if we are completely aware of the fact that this monster is not real, the reaction is at the thought of such a being existing, not our personal belief in it (Carroll 1990, 53, 87-88).

Since the feeling of art-horror is entity-based (Carroll 1990, 41) these monsters produce the effect through threat and impurity (Carroll 1990, 42-43). As already stated above, the viewer need not believe these threats, physical, psychological or social, to produce real-world harm, but rather the very thought of these threats is what creates art-horror. Impurity comes from the contradiction in two cultural categories and impurity may be presented in multiple different ways (Carroll 1990, 32-33, 42-47, 50-52).

Cohen (1996) describes the functions of the monster within culture; how the monster’s body comes to represent the anxieties of the time (Cohen 1996, 4-6) and the people who become the scapegoats (Cohen 1996, 9-11). The monster is the Other (Cohen 1996, 7), and Cohen links this to how when a people are painted as the monster through their personal identities their extermination is seen as a heroic act (Cohen 1996, 8, 16) as monsters have often been depicted as women and people of colour to satisfy a white patriarchal narrative (Cohen 1996, 15). Despite that, monsters need not always be a frightening thing and can in some cases be a path to wish fulfilment (Cohen 1996, 18-19), allowing us to explore alter egos and hidden desires (Cohen 1996, 17). Monsters reflect those who create them, both through what we want, and how we loathe them (Cohen 1996, 20).

## **2.2 The Female Body**

Stang (2019) argues that female bodies have commonly been made to look threatening and

used in different medias as ways to separate the hero of the story from what is part of the abnormal (Stang 2019, 233-234). The author continues by saying that video games often show the female reproductive process as something monstrous, in which the player must destroy, along with the body of the mother (Stang 2019, 234) and that women are commonly depicted as monsters in video games to show what it means to overstep gender norms and rules (Stang 2019, 235) while men, and specifically fathers, are often depicted as the heroic player character (Stang 2019, 237).

However, Stang (2019) proclaims that there are some instances where monstrous mothers are depicted in a different light, such as the playable character Sarah Kerrigan in the *StarCraft*-series who serves as an example of a self-aware monster that can spawn alien-like being at will (Stang 2019, 247). This instance portrays the female monster as a conventionally attractive humanoid with altered features like an unnatural skin colour, which is a common depiction of female aliens in media (Stang 2019, 248). Stang (2019) concludes that although female maternal monsters may have different narratives and physical looks, but that they all have a certainty to be killed off by either the male protagonist or die in other ways through gameplay, which are narratives that are inherently misogynistic (Stang 2019, 251-252).

Similarly, Stang and Trammell (2020) analyse monsters of the tabletop roleplaying game *Dungeons & Dragons* as a modern version of the medieval bestiary (Stang and Trammell 2020, 737-738) as they focus on the archetype of the Hag: an old, ugly and evil woman who kidnaps children (Stang and Trammell 2020, 732). They find that ludic bestiaries, identifies the “other”, the monster, by applying Christian patriarchal morality to them (Stang and Trammell 2020, 731, 734-735, 743). This dehumanisation, assigning numerical values to morality, of abject and nonnormative bodies is a part of their subjugation (Stang and Trammell 2020, 742). These patriarchal ideas have been passed down through role-playing and hobby spaces, empowered by these ludic bestiaries (Stang and Trammell 2020, 732-733), and further encourages white males to commit violent misogyny (Stang and Trammell 2020, 731, 733). The authors argue that these ludic bestiaries therefore recycle and enforce patriarchal ideas using archetypes like the “hag” (Stang and Trammell 2020, 742-743).

Women’s bodies are often portrayed as idealistic, sexualised, and when powerful they are depicted as less feminine and simpler in their characterisation (Tompkins et al. 2020, 239-240). Tompkins et al. (2020) set out to find if and how ambivalent sexism appears in video

games produced in the USA and Japan and emerged with two major themes; bodies as objects and bodies as weapons and (in)dependence (Tompkins et al. 2020, 241). Ambivalent sexism is a social psychologist theory which poses that sexism consists of two prejudiced attitudes towards the female gender (Tompkins et al. 2020, 237). One of these is hostile sexism, that assumes that men are meant to dominate over women and encourages contempt towards the women who dare to strive for equality and can be found in the trope of the femme fatale (Tompkins et al. 2020, 237-238). The other is benevolent sexism, which justifies patriarchy through seeing women as weak and in need of protection and guidance from men, and may be found in the Japanese tropes of kawaii and shojo (Tompkins et al. 2020, 238-239). This was deemed to be relevant to our study as it focuses on both physical and behavioural traits of female characters in video games that may or may not manifest even in monstrous form.

Continuing the topic of how the female body is portrayed as a type of monstrosity, Tompkins et al. (2020) analyses 11 female video game characters and labels them either as vamps or virgins. Vamps were found to have signifiers of hostile sexism, such as being sexualised, be dangerous to men, exhibiting compulsory heterosexuality and overall subscribing dominant paternalism (Tompkins et al. 2020, 243-245). There were also signs of empowerment, such as being overall detached from men and some hints of lesbianism (Tompkins et al. 2020, 245). Virgins adhered to protective paternalism, but were also capable fighters, and displayed emotional complexity the vamps did not (Tompkins et al. 2020, 245-248). The authors also note that these characters were feminised through sexualisation (Tompkins et al. 2020, 248) and theorise that sexualising characters with benevolent sexist traits may be a tactic to ease anxieties by anti-feminists about femininity and power (Tompkins et al. 2020, 250). Finally, they argue that while female characters continue to be sexualised, the game mechanics which feature their strength and power may be empowering (Tompkins et al. 2020, 248-250).

Reminiscent of this, Baker et al. (2017) mentions the monstrous nature of vampires in media and compares their portrayal as bloodsucking creatures to that of sexual deviancy and a demonisation of the female gender, as they have often been depicted in ways that represent desires through the use of metaphors (Baker et al. 2017, 2). The authors claim that vampires in media are portrayed in such a way to embody the crossing of borders, asking for consent to

stay in specific places—metaphorically or figuratively—while simultaneously knowing that they are destined to do so forever (Baker et al. 2017, 33).

The reasons as to why female characters are treated this way in the industry was discussed by Tompkins and Martins (2022), with the impact of #Gamergate, an overwhelmingly male labour force, and games companies' organizational cultures being potential explanations as to why (Tompkins and Martins 2022, 401-405). While they found little evidence of #Gamergate having a substantial influence (Tompkins and Martins 2022, 413), they found that the predominately male labour force and the practice of catering to a male audience had a large impact (Tompkins and Martins 2022, 415). Female characters were sexualised, both because it was seen as what the heterosexual male consumers wanted (Tompkins and Martins 2022, 407-408) as well as being considered less risk-inducing (Tompkins and Martins 2022, 410-411). Character design was conceived to tend towards an idealized gender, with masculine desires in mind, such as female characters being powerful but sexy and male characters being aspirational, heroic and in control (Tompkins and Martins 2022, 407-408).

### **2.3 Abstract Monstrosities**

May (2021) proposes that monsters do not need to take the shape of a creature at all and that they instead may manifest as environmental catastrophes in contemporary video games, in which the author describes them as “ecological” monstrosities (May 2021, “Horrors from the Anthropocene”). These monstrosities are compared to what humans may see as threats to their survival, such as climate change, affecting human life through ecological, cultural and political means (May 2021, “Horrors from the Anthropocene”). Through this narrative, May (2021) suggests that an ecocritical approach to the concept of video game monsters allows audiences to broaden their views on what might or might not be truly monstrous (May 2021, “Ecocritical Play”). While May (2021) mentions that different aspects of humanity may manifest in the shape of ecological monsters in contemporary video games, the author does not mention how these aspects are influenced by, and manifested through, different gender identities.

In contrast to May's (2021) ecological stance on the physical designs shown in contemporary monsters, Meier (2024) looks at contemporary video games from 1995-2020 to

analyse the intersectionality between gender, technophobia and techno criticism (Meier 2024, 125-126). Within these games, Meier found that robots and artificial intelligence (AI) are typically not monstrous in traditional ways and are gendered through their presentation and occupation (Meier 2024, 128, 141). Gender was used differently depending on if the character was an AI or robot; the latter tending to follow gender normative stereotypes, with caregiving female-coded robots and authoritative male-coded robots respectfully (Meier 2024, 141). AI typically did not have humanoid bodies and were more likely to be female-coded, which Meier attributes to the assumption that women are typically better at service and care jobs (Meier 2024, 130). Robots and AI were both predominantly antagonists, and a numerous amount of them grew to become so over the course of the games (Meier 2024, 141). These gendered robot bodies are ways for technology to infiltrate humanity and found that the villainous AI were monstrous on account of the combination of being female-coded and intelligent (Meier 2024, 141). Lastly, the author found that more recent games delved into ideas of humans as the monsters and robots as the victims, asking questions such as whether robots are tools or slaves (Meier 2024, 128-129, 141).

## **2.4 The Female Body and Abstract Monstrosities**

In Germaine Buckley's (2020) examination of the two female characters in *Penny Dreadful* the author describes the female grotesque as female characters who deviate from gender norms by being odd or a freak show (Germaine Buckley 2020, 363-364). These depictions use femme fatales, witches and the like to push boundaries which creates female characters who take up space unapologetically (Germaine Buckley 2020, 363). These women are subject to the abject through bodily fluids and degradation to create depth and a reasoning for their deviated behaviour (Germaine Buckley 2020, 365). Within contemporary post-feminist media such as *Penny Dreadful* there are both feminist and anti-feminist messaging, which leads to a confused identity regarding female characters (Germaine Buckley 2020, 369).

According to Pinder (2021) many of the female antagonists within the *Resident Evil* video game series are shown to have specific connections to motherhood which contributes to their overall monstrosity, with one forcing other human beings into becoming monsters and for herself to be seen as a motherly figure after losing her real child, and one becoming a monstrous through bodily distortion, including her vulva in which insects are born out of (Pinder 2021, "The Scientist and the 'Broodmother'", "The Abhuman Mother"). Another

motherly character shown, albeit asexualised, is shown as elegant until later in the game where she transforms into four-legged creature (Pinder 2021, “The Abhuman Mother”). The author concludes that the male player character is inferior to the things shown within the games and that the comparison between him, the female antagonists, and the rest of the game’s female characters show the player that eliminating the mutated female antagonists is something that is justified (Pinder 2021, “Conclusion”).

The concept of male superiority together with the monstrous feminine may also be found in video games inspired by specific cultural beliefs. Japanese survival horror games have many times been inspired by fears found within the Japanese population, and even though most of the public violence in the country is mainly perpetrated by male individuals this fear is often represented through the monstrous-feminine (Dumas 2018, 133-134). Dumas (2018) examines the similarities between these depictions and the fears of Japanese society through analysis of the contents within the video games *Silent Hill*, *Fatal Frame* and *Siren* (Dumas 2018, 134). The author claims that similar themes of female monstrosity and sacred violence based on certain beliefs within the Japanese population can be found throughout these games (Dumas 2018, 134). In *Silent Hill*, themes focused on the female body can be found in the designs of the game’s antagonists, such as the “split head”, a creature whose head resembles female genitalia with discharge coming out of it (Dumas 2018, 137), and in the narrative, where a religious cult leader impregnated her daughter with the seed of a powerful female deity to let her be reborn without caring about the consequences awaiting her child (Dumas 2018, 136).

In comparison, Dumas (2018) considers *Fatal Frame* and *Siren* to be games primarily inspired by the uprising of violence in Japan and the destruction of society, but with a focus on the implicated consequences of female impurity in religious contexts which is represented by the “corrupted” female main characters within the games (Dumas 2018, 144-145). The female body and its reproductive system, through this specific religious lens, are regarded as reserves for unacceptable sexual desires (Dumas 2018, 145). In *Fatal Frame*’s case this is showed through the female main character’s quest to find her brother with the help of a special camera that lets her see ghosts, where one is revealed to have been used as a female sacrifice in a supernatural ritual that failed and released dark forces into the world due to her corrupted blood (Dumas 2018, 146). Something similar also happens in *Siren*, in which a female cult leader tries to sacrifice female descendants of an ancient deity to revive it, an

event which is interrupted by the game's main characters and results in the world becoming distorted (Dumas 2018, 150). Dumas (2018) concludes by explaining that the tropes found within these games represent the complexity of the monstrous feminine in Japan's society and its culture and are shaped by the nation's collective imagination (Dumas 2018, 165-166).

## **2.5 Player perception on Monstrous Humanity**

Piittinen (2018) explains that the monsters within the game of *Fallout* are unique in the sense that they are not entirely monstrous, but instead mutated humans with some type of self-awareness which players may interpret in different ways through observation regarding their perceived humanity (Piittinen 2018, 4672). The player may work with the two types of monsters, which are called the Super Mutant and the Ghouls, on their own terms, but the outcomes of the interactions differ (Piittinen 2018, 4676). The Super Mutant is revealed to be a male victim of science experiments which made him larger and more grotesque in looks but remains kind instead of hostile like other Super Mutants in the game, and upon freeing him helps the player (Piittinen 2018, 4776-4777). The Ghouls, in comparison, are more human-like in size, intelligent, reminiscent of corpses in their appearances and treated like monsters by other characters—ultimately killing them if the player decides to not kill the other characters themselves (Piittinen 2018, 4680). The author notes that the observed players hold certain assumptions based on appearances when making decisions as they cannot sometimes justify their actions, and that the social status of a non-playable monster within the game also affects how much the player sympathizes with it (Piittinen 2018, 4685).

Much like how Piittinen (2018) studied the ways players react to video game monsters with specific features, Ferstl et al. (2017) examined the way in which facial expressions impact the way we perceive and treat non-player characters (NPCs) through two experiments that focused on NPCs with abstract facial features. For the first experiment, the authors used findings about human facial perceptions to determine if there are any rules regarding what facial features imply which personality traits, specifically on these abstract characters (Ferstl et al. 2017, 4:4-4:5). Using 54 images of various facial features puzzled together, participants were asked to rate dominance, trustworthiness, aggression, appeal and eeriness (Ferstl et al. 2017, 4:5) and the four highest scoring characters were then used in the second experiment. They found that there were different rules for abstract characters, such as narrow faces being seen as the most aggressive instead of the wide human face (Ferstl et al. 2017, 4:10). For the

second experiment, the authors were determined to see how these perceived personalities of NPCs impacted moral decisions in players using a short online game with four moral dilemmas (Ferstl et al. 2017, 4:6-4:7). They chose two types of dilemmas: direct harm/personal, and indirect harm/impersonal (Ferstl et al. 2017, 4:4) and found that the NPC rated high aggression inspired a utilitarian response with the indirect harm dilemma and deontological response with the direct harm and the opposite happened with the low-aggression NPC (Ferstl et al 2017, 4:7-4:9). The authors theorise that the aggressive NPC increased the perceived violence of the direct harm dilemmas, making participants make more deontological choices, and the opposite for the low aggression NPC (Ferstl et al. 2017, 4:9). In conclusion, the authors found that when looking at character design, the design could potentially elevate moral decision making within a virtual experience (Ferstl et al. 2017, 4:10).

### **3 Purpose and Research Question**

The purpose of this study is to find out which specific traits in video game monsters may indicate specific gender identities in a general manner, as monsters in media can be depicted in multiple ways to represent different fears in different contexts (Cohen 1996, 4, 7-12; May 2021, “Introduction”). We aim to explain how different monsters in video games convey their gender, the reason as to why they do it in the ways that they do, and if their gender is even communicated at all in their overall character designs through our research question: How do video game monsters express their gender?

## **4 Method**

### **4.1 Materials & Data Gathering**

For this study we chose to look at ten different video games and analyse their monster design in relation to gender norms. The chosen games are from the late 1990’s to the mid 2020’s to get a general look at how these norms are performed in the medium at large. Some games were chosen because we were aware of monster designs which we found intriguing in relation to gender norms by either conforming or resisting them. Both researchers choose half the games each, and both had at least an overview understanding of the contents of the selection. The knowledge of each game varied between titles, whereas with some we had

outstanding knowledge and other barely any. The chosen games and their respective monster characters can be found in the table in the appendix.

We chose to analyse video games with prevalent monster engagement resulting in 10 titles from the action and horror genres. This could either mean that the game focused on battling and defeating monsters, such as in the action game *Monster Hunter Wilds* (Capcom 2025), or that one of the game's primary obstacles were dealing with monsters who wanted the player dead, such as in the survival horror game *Resident Evil Village* (Capcom 2021). These titles were written down and shared between us researchers in a spreadsheet. From each game we analysed 8 monster characters, resulting in a total of 80 characters. We initially aimed for at least 20 humanoid, 20 animalistic and 20 abstract monsters to cover a variety of monstrosities. If a game had more than eight monsters, different types of monstrosities were favoured to ensure an even spread across the different monstrosity categories. A list of the monsters was kept with their respective monstrosity variety to ensure we would hit the goal of at least 20 of each monstrosity category. For some games, it was simply a matter of picking the monsters which were available, such as in *Silent Hill 2* (2001), which has a total of 10 monsters to choose from. In games with a larger number of available monsters, we chose monsters we deemed either gender normative, gender non-conforming, or chose monsters which filled the previously stated monstrosity quota. Whether a monster was deemed gender conforming or not was based on gender stereotypes.

To code and analyse the selected monsters, we used gameplay videos showcasing player characters interacting with selected monsters. This included boss fights, players following quest lines and cutscenes with the monster characters. With a few exceptions, most monsters had below 30 minutes of video, thus we looked at concept art, game guidebooks or fandom websites to gain a large understanding of each monster. In a few cases, there were monsters who had none of these, but existed as an overworld threat in-game, in which case we dug through gameplay to find as much interaction or fighting with that monster as possible. All these sources were shared between researchers in a spreadsheet.

We designated 5 of the 10 games to analyse characters from at a time. Once both researchers were done, the games that the characters were coded from was switched between to have a bigger variation in coding and character choices. This was repeated until all monstrosity quotas were met.

## 4.2 Data Analysis

A combined spreadsheet was created and shared with both researchers for the data analysis of the chosen game characters. The games were divided into different areas of the spreadsheet, and each character got its own unique row for the purpose of distinguishable coding. To keep the coding scheme consistent and organized between the researchers it was decided that the characters were to be coded sixteen times each. These codes were based on gender, perceived gender, attributes, shapes, colours, voice, monstrosity, fight style, size, motif, facial attributes, wings, hands, eyes, teeth, body horror, as well as trope which at times replaced motif if deemed as relevant.

The coding process was completed in two major phases, focusing on emerging codes and the categorisation of those into themes. In the first phase, emerging codes were created to describe different character traits that could be found within the analysed data (Kleinheksel et al. 2020, 129). These codes were not based on any specific theories and were rather based on our speculation of what character traits may or may not be prevalent in various video game characters of unspecified gender. This type of structured coding allowed for each monster to be coded independently between researchers without the necessity of frequently adjusting the codes to match each other's way of coding. A coding reference sheet was also created to keep track of the emerging codes, so that no code was repeated multiple times in different words.

The *perceived genders* of the chosen characters was coded based the researchers' own perceptions and assumptions regarding conforming and heteronormative gender identities, grounded in gender norms and stereotypes which are commonly found in other video games (Tompkins and Martins 2022, 401; Gabbiadini et al. 2016, 2), while their coded *gender* was based on available information regarding the character itself, such as the pronouns that they were referred to as in-game. Specific *motifs* and *tropes* were perceived as such by the researchers based on a character's physical appearance as well as their personality type. In certain cases, the code N/A ("Not Applicable") was used to describe data that was not available or applicable for the specific part that was coded.

After each monster had been individually coded the second phase began. This phase consisted of grouping the chosen codes into various categories that described similar ideas

and examining patterns that could be found between them using a table format for visual arrangement (Kleinheksel et al. 2020, 128). Fourteen categories were created, consisting of *Monstrous Moms*, *Traumatic Womanhood*, *Unknown Uncertainty*, *Weaponised Sexuality*, *Assertive Femininity*, *Dead and Genderless*, *Androgynous Danger*, *True Gender Neutrality*, *Authoritarian Gender Neutrality*, *Aspirational Masculinity*, *Wild Masculinity*, *Stereotypical Femininity*, *Reptilian Males* and *Dismissive Manliness*. Many categories were created due to the number of codes found, with some having a substantially different number of codes organised into them than others. The larger categories were therefore divided even further before they were organised into themes, while many smaller categories were combined with others.

The final themes were created as part of a thematic content analysis with an inductive approach (Kleinheksel et al. 2020, 135). Some of the themes remained similar to the ones that were previously categorised, while others were changed to include more complex concepts, with the final themes being *Untamed & Animalistic Masculinity*, *Prestigious Manhood*, *Gender Ambiguity*, *Hazardous Androgyny*, *Genderless Afterlife*, *Unknown Uncertainty*, *Systemically Tortured Womanhood*, *Female Sexuality as a Weapon* and *Assertive Femininity*. These themes were built on similarities that could be found between the different categories and allowed for conceptual interpretations based on multiple characters from our data to be created, rather than from just a few characters within the same category (Kleinheksel et al. 2020, 128). For instance, the theme *Systemically Tortured Womanhood* groups together the three categories *Traumatic Womanhood*, *Monstrous Moms* and *Stereotypical Femininity* and describes the way that some female monsters are victims or representations of systemic torture inflicted upon women due to sexism and a patriarchal society (Tompkins and Martins 2022, 401; Gabbiadini et al. 2016, 2).

## **5 Results**

### **5.1 Untamed & Animalistic Masculinity**

The theme of untamed and animalistic masculinity groups together the categories of *Wild Masculinity* and *Reptilian Males* and encapsulates the codes in which represent monsters whose masculinity is shown through untamed aggravation, violence and animalistic behaviours that were reminiscent of instincts. This was presented through various impulsive

and savage demeanours in characters that were coded as male and male-presenting, paired with appearances that made them look unapproachable and dangerous for players, such as open wounds or large horns. They were shown to often have a combination of a humanoid and animalistic appearance, as well as a combination of an abstract and animalistic one, with many codes describing reptile-like body types.

The descriptive codes of subjects related to reptiles and dragons appeared frequently. One such case was the character Mizutsune from *Monster Hunter Wilds* (Capcom 2025), a monster whose motif was coded as *Fox Dragon* with multiple earlike appendages that were coded as *Crests* as part of his facial attributes, both of which were included in the theme of *Untamed and Animalistic Masculinity*. Mizutsune acts like a wild animal and is driven by a pure and violent instinct, thus deeming him too dangerous to be left alive by the game's non-playable characters. His untameable behaviour makes him a threat to those around him and reflects his own masculinity.



Figure 1: Mizutsune from *Monster Hunter Wilds* (Capcom 2025) has crests on his head and an appearance that resembles a combination of a fox and a dragon.

Another common code was the motif *Werewolf*, which was used during the coding of several male monsters. In many of these instances a character was shown to transform from a man into a wolf-like beast with little to no self-control, embracing newfound strength and using it to fight the player. Maliketh from *Elden Ring* (FromSoftware 2022) was shown to embody this concept as he willingly stabbed his own hand to summon a powerful weapon, but upon doing so also transformed into an agitated and werewolf-like creature. There was one

exception to the repetition of violent male werewolves with the character Vicar Amelia from *Bloodborne* (FromSoftware 2015) who also transformed from human to a wolf-like being to fight the player. However, she was shown to have self-restraint and kept many of her human demeanours, such as praying to a higher power in the middle of battle and seemingly screeching in pain while moving around. Rather than fully embracing her newfound powers like the male werewolves she instead attempted to act as if she was still a human.

## 5.2 Prestigious Manhood

This theme gathers the codes which were considered as aspirational to a masculine ideal by the researchers. Two categories were placed within this theme, being *Dismissive Manliness* and *Aspirational Masculinity*. This theme encompasses stereotypical masculinity which is showcased through power and control above others by either their intelligence or dismissiveness. Monsters who had codes within this theme were gigantic, with low pitched voices, and had a mix of sharp, triangular and square shapes. They could have attributes such as bothered or absent-minded, or intelligent and prideful. The basis is not in their unchecked aggression, but in their control over a situation.

One of the motifs created was *Space Vigilante*, found in the character of Garrus Vakarian from *Mass Effect 2* (BioWare, 2010). While he isn't gigantic, Garrus is intelligent, proud, loyal and has a low-pitched voice. In-game he is one of the player's companions and potential romantic partners. He is not perfect, as he is on a quest for revenge, but this quest does not jeopardize this fulfilment of an ideal but enhances it as it portrays him as a scarred hero wanting to make things right. He fulfils it, not just for male monsters but masculine presenting individuals on a larger scale.

In contrast there is *League of Legends'* (Riot Games, 2009) Vel'koz, a destructive, alien entity who destroys not for pleasure but as a seeker of knowledge. Again, despite being an abstract monstrosity from another realm, here the character is in control by utilizing intelligence. The destructive tendencies, Vel'koz's deep voice and threatening visage grants him an authoritative presence backed up by this intellect.

*Bayonetta's* (PlatinumGames 2009) Temperantia, a large angelic structure who confronts the player around the half-way mark in-game, speaks to the titular character Bayonetta of

prophecy and her place within it. He is gigantic, as large as a skyscraper, and summons a tornado as he enters the human realm. The orb placed in his forehead and his eloquent speech are both indicators of intellect. Even after his boss fight, when the demons of Inferno summoned by Bayonetta grab him, he laughs and repeats his belief in the prophecy. Temperantia does not relinquish control, even in defeat, as he is fully aware of his role as a pawn of the narrative.



Figure 2: Temperantia from *Bayonetta* (PlatinumGames 2009) is gigantic in size and speaks in an eloquent manner in a low pitch.

These monsters and codes exemplify a masculine ideal through control, intellect, and taking up space. They are above the situation at hand, either by being aware and at peace of their place in it, or by being completely removed from it, fashioning themselves above it all.

### 5.3 Gender Ambiguity

Many character attributes could not be placed into certain themes due to them occurring across multiple gender identities. These codes were therefore placed into several themes that describe different gender-neutral attributes and behaviours, with the theme of *Gender Ambiguity* depicting codes which had no correlation to the gender of the character they were coded as. The attributes in this theme were not unique to, or specifically tied to, any gendered monster and could be found across many different characters regardless of their appearance or behaviours.

One such example of this was found in the characters Ogre Boss from *Dragon Age: Origins* (BioWare 2009) and Moroaiică from *Resident Evil Village* (Capcom 2021). Ogre Boss is a male character of a large size, with large horns and small claws on his fingers. Moroaiică on the other hand is a female character of a medium size with a transformative parasite inside her, no horns and small claws on her fingers as well. These two characters were visually different humanoid monsters with different genders but shared the physical attribute of having small claws on their fingers, with *Fingers/Small Claws* being one of the codes that were placed into this specific theme.

Another trait that was found across multiple gender identities was being masked, a code which was the result of analysing facial attributes in certain characters. One of these masked characters is Joy from *Bayonetta* (PlatinumGames 2009), an angel with the ability to shapeshift into any form that they want but with a preference for taking on a feminine appearance. The gender of this character is neither male nor female and yet parts of their face remain behind a mask. Similarly, Pyramid Head from *Silent Hill 2* (Team Silent 2001), a character that resembles a human man, wears a giant pyramid-like structure that covers its head and face. While both characters are depicted as dangerous in their respective games, their gender expressions are portrayed entirely different, making the code of (*Facial attributes*) *Masked* gender neutral.



Figures 3 and 4: The faces of Joy from *Bayonetta* (PlatinumGames 2009) and Pyramid Head from *Silent Hill 2* (Team Silent 2001) are both masked.

## 5.4 Hazardous Androgyny

Within the theme of hazardous androgyny, the two categories *Androgynous Danger* and *Authoritative Gender-Neutrality* were included. This was one of the largest themes and housed a great deal of purely animalistic or abstract monstrosities. Codes were either associated with all coded genders or only available to the genderless and uncertain monsters. These codes were primarily collected as they signalled some form of danger to the player, regardless or because of, a lack of gender.

This theme looks at how androgyny can be a warning to the player, either through the distortion of bodies or genderless creatures being outright dangerous. Rykard, Lord of Blasphemy from *Elden Ring* (FromSoftware 2022) is initially introduced as a large, coiled snake. Halfway through the fight, after the player has depleted one health bar, the snake's head hangs limply as it twists around to show a human face in the scales. This is Rykard, whose manor the player has just fought through, who had offered himself up to the very serpent the player just fought. His animalistic monstrous body was deemed as relevant to this theme as his humanoid male body became an animalistic and androgynous creature. This distortion and forced transformation can also be seen in the Lying Figure from *Silent Hill 2* (Team Silent 2001). Resembling a corpse whose arms have fused together with the torso, the creature writhes as it moves, presumably in pain. It has no obvious gender, using the distortion of a human body to showcase its androgyny.

Within this theme there are also some characters whose gender identity contradicts the in-game logic. The Archdemon Urthemiel from *Dragon Age: Origins* (BioWare 2009), a winged dragon, which according to the lore of the game would be a female creature as they are the only ones with wings, is said to be male. He was reawakened as a Darkspawn, and thus found his body distorted. This gender dichotomy along with his distorted body all serve to elevate his dangerous visage.



Figure 5: The character Urthemiel from *Dragon Age: Origins* (BioWare 2009) is said to be male but has the characteristics of female dragons according to the game's lore.

With the more abstract monsters, there was a larger focus on a lack of understanding to be depicted as dangerous. Kinship from *Bayonetta* (PlatinumGames 2009) is an angelic construct resembling a warship. On its bow is a pale face where its mouth is stretched into a cannon. Its face does not move, and it flies wordlessly through the sky as it attacks the player with missiles and the like. Its lack of gender, along with clearly non-human form, is used to unsettle the player and to warn them of the imminent danger.

## 5.5 Genderless Afterlife

Codes within this category befell monsters that represented, or were, the dead in various ways. Their deathly appearances accompanied their lack of a binary gender and therefore *Genderless Afterlife* resulted in being one of the only defining themes for genderless monsters specifically. Corpses and the distortion of bodies was common within this theme.

Dead Hand from *The Legend of Zelda: Ocarina of Time* (Nintendo 1998) is a corpse-like creature with a long neck, no legs, and arms which end in pointed claws drenched in blood. Its pale body shuffles along the floor as it moves towards the player. It lowers its neck down when within reach to stare with hollow eyes at the player, before biting them with its large dull teeth. The room that Dead Hand can be found in has thin arms sticking out of the ground which grab the player if they get too close, so the monster may catch up to them. This

creature has semblances of a humanoid body, in its head and arms, but they are missing several key features and limbs which in turn disqualify it as a human.

As a manifestation of the aspect of death, Kindred from *League of Legends* (Riot Games 2009) fulfils it as a grim reaper. Whilst they are two characters in one, Lamb who uses “she” pronouns and Wolf who uses “he” pronouns, together they insist on being referred to as “they”. Lamb uses a bow and releases those who accept their fate from their mortal coil, whilst Wolf hunts those who resist. Both Lamb and Wolf are animalistic, an uncommon monstrosity type for this theme. Unlike the humanoid monstrosities, they do not resemble corpses but are depictions of death itself. Whether death is wielded or experienced was thus framed differently.



Figure 6 and 7: (Left) Kindred from *League of Legends* (Riot Games 2009) is a physical depiction of death itself with an animalistic appearance unlike other characters within the theme of *Genderless Afterlife*. (Right) Dead Hand from *Ocarina of Time* (Nintendo 1998) is an example of the corpse-like monsters found in this theme.

The distortion of human bodies is evident in the design of Flesh Lip from *Silent Hill 2* (Team Silent 2001). It hangs from the ceiling with an arm, and its feet dangle from the main body, which appears to be a writhing brown bag. There is no clear face, only an allusion to a mouth in the fight’s introductory cutscene. Flesh Lip’s feet may grab the player and choke them, before pulling them up off-screen into the ceiling. As there is very little visual information to understand with this design, there is no way to assign a gender.

## 5.6 Unknown Uncertainty

In some cases, the lack of a gender identity was used to create a sense of mystery or make a monster seem otherworldly. Several motifs, such as *Angelic Construct* or *Eldritch Entity*, were put in this theme which depicted monsters who had uncertain origins and non-gendered appearances. The lack of a gender identity or gender markers was found to be used as a method to disorientate the viewer.

As one of the coded monsters, Astel, Naturalborn of the Void from *Elden Ring* (FromSoftware 2022) was considered an *Eldritch Entity*. The player challenges Astel on a shallow lake underneath a starlit sky, where its strange dragonfly body soars through. Astel's slender body consists of round multi-coloured rocks, insectoid wings, six skeletal humanoid arms, and a humanoid skull whose eye sockets are hollow. The skull's forehead is cracked and within sits one large eye. According to the in-game lore, Astel has the power to flatten cities, and works on instinct. Astel has no typical gender markers but uses human anatomy to drive further away from the humanoid category by distorting or the removal of limbs.



Figure 8: Astel from *Elden Ring* (FromSoftware 2022) is coded as an *Eldritch Entity* due to its unnatural appearance and uncertain place of origin.

On the highway in *Bayonetta* (PlatinumGames 2009), the player is accosted by Irenic, an *Angelic Construct* which looks like a heavily embellished car. Instead of wheels however, Irenic has halos, and at the front sits a bald humanoid head cut off below the upper lip with

non-functional golden wings framing the face. It has no voice, no hands, no limbs, and there are no substantial gender markers to be found.

## 5.7 Systemically Tortured Womanhood

This theme contains three subcategories: *Monstrous Motherhood*, *Stereotypical Femininity* and *Traumatic Womanhood*. Each of these were related to gender stereotypes for women and their role under a patriarchal system. Only monsters who had a perceived or confirmed female gender were associated with this theme. A large section of the codes depicted grief and pain, sometimes through sexual violence or a loss of bodily autonomy.

One of the most prominent examples of this was in the monstrous mother, Broodmother from *Dragon Age: Origins* (BioWare 2009). This monster was previously a humanoid woman who was kidnapped and forcibly transformed into a creature which births more monsters. She grunts and screams, is incapable of speech, and appears distressed. She was deemed to be systemically tortured as this is not a standalone character but described to be one of many monsters who has been transformed this way.

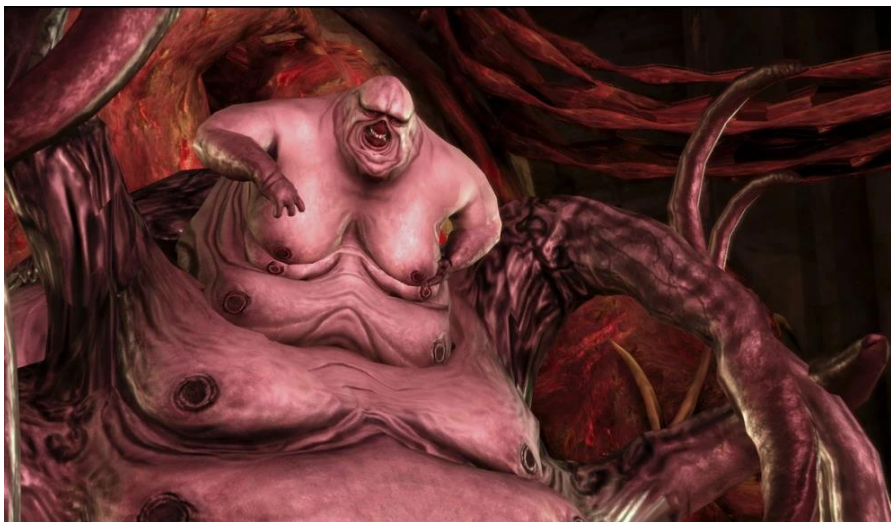


Figure 9: The Broodmother from *Dragon Age: Origins* (BioWare 2009) appears distressed and with distorted facial attributes as she is both forcefully impregnated and transformed into a monster.

Malenia, Blade of Miquella and Goddess of Rot, is a boss in *Elden Ring* (FromSoftware 2022). She is a renowned warrior and commander with a winged helm and long red hair, but her body is afflicted all over with rot. The disease has taken her eyes, an arm and both her

legs. She wears several prostheses, and her mechanical arm has a long blade affixed to the forearm. Despite this terrible pain she is in, she fights with ferocity and claims to be undefeated. The player finds her by a tree, completely still, awaiting the return of her twin brother, Miquella. The rot which afflicts her body is a curse she received young, and the only one who knew how to slow it down was her brother. This loss of bodily autonomy through loss of limb creates a strong connection to the theme.

## **5.8 Female Sexuality as a Weapon**

Some of the studied female monsters appeared to use either sex appeal or sexual acts to manipulate others and at times as a type of weapon to be used to defeat their opponents. Female monsters were found to have and use sexual traits for different purposes, such as to reflect certain misogynistic perspectives found in how certain characters see women in general, to influence their opponents in or outside of battle and to make deals that go in their favour through sexual acts.

For some of these characters, the sexual nature that is displayed serves the purpose of affecting other characters through certain actions. The Desire Demon from *Dragon Age: Origins* (BioWare 2009) lures characters in through sexual wiles, which in turn help her make deals that favour herself and her own power. Similarly, Morinth from *Mass Effect 2* (BioWare 2010) has a condition that kills anyone that she has sexual intercourse with but makes her powers stronger in return, which is a feeling that she enjoys. She is shown as intelligent and manages to lure the player character to lower their guard before using her powers to mind control them. Both Morinth and the Desire Demon resemble succubi, a type of demonic women that offer sexual acts to people and sucks out their life force in the process.



Figure 10: The Desire Demon from *Dragon Age: Origins* (BioWare 2010) acts in a sexual manner and resembles a succubus.

Not all characters within this theme were portrayed as lifedrainning entities through sexualised acts. For one of the monsters found in *Silent Hill 2* (Team Silent 2001), the theme of female sexuality as a weapon was displayed differently. The monstrous character Bubble Head Nurse in the game appears to be female, contrasting the other monsters in the game with ambiguous gender appearances. She is dressed up as a nurse, with a short skirt, a short-sleeved shirt with visible cleavage and a distorted face. Her overall appearance is something that is affected by the male player character's subconsciousness and does not affect her behaviour, as she uses a steel pipe to physically fight. In this case, her weaponised sexuality is her appearance as a whole—her entire being, the reason she exists, is the result of a specific man's view on women.

## 5.9 Assertive Femininity

Femininity in monsters was shown to be displayed in several ways, where the theme of assertive femininity described the characters found to be dominant in their behaviour towards others and often confident in themselves. These monsters were female and their appearances ranged from humanoid witches and vampires to beastlike creatures, connected by their desire to show their own strength through aggression or intellect, with traits differing depending on

character motive and background. One such example is Alcina Dimitrescu from *Resident Evil Village* (Capcom 2021) whose appearance reflects an elegant, very tall woman with pale skin. Her larger figure, along with her powers and influence, indicates dominance over those who are shorter and less powerful than her. Dimitrescu shows no mercy to both female and male individuals and enjoys consuming their blood, with the male player character of the game constantly being belittled, tortured and hunted by her and her daughters. Her assertiveness defines her role as a matriarch and is essential to her identity as a female monster.

In contrast to Dimitrescu's overall humanoid appearance, Naafiri from *League of Legends* (Riot Games 2009) shows that assertive femininity is not a theme that is exclusive to humanoid monsters only. Naafiri was previously a human whose body was sealed into a demonic dagger and later transformed into a group of distorted canines through powerful magic. Having transformed against her will several times, her mind is divided into several beings, forming a demonic pack whose numbers and teeth she utilizes for power and strength. The motif of her *Demonic Pack* shows her strength divided in numbers which are united through her aggression and desire to conquer the world with her fellow brothers and sisters.



Figure 11: Naafiri from *League of Legends* (Riot Games 2009) underwent several transformations and has multiple bodies that are physically distorted by blade-like structures.

## 6 Discussion

While this study aims to answer the question of how monsters in video games express their gender, the answer to the question may not be fully linear. Specific traits that may be heavily

gendered in one game may not even be gendered at all in another depending on each respective game's context and setting and it may be possible to reach multiple conclusions depending on specific game genres. As this study focuses on monster characters over various games and genres over multiple years of release, character traits in one game did not necessarily correlate to another game's portrayal of the same gender and had to be examined in a broader context, which resulted in multiple themes for different gender identities. To explain our arguments and results, we used some of the character traits that were found in gendered monsters and created personal visualisations of different gender expressions unrelated to the games which were used in this study.

## 6.1 Masculine Gender Expression in Monsters

Our results indicate that male monsters within the theme of *Untamed and Animalistic* were generally individuals with traits that reflected their state of mind—often depicted as wild and animalistic in both behaviour and appearance, with violent tendencies. Some were literal animals, whereas others were depicted as creatures that once had a humanoid form but later transformed into something stronger. These traits could potentially be design choices made to alert the player of direct harm from a character they may perceive as aggressive in nature (Ferstl et al. 2017, 4:9) given their added animalistic features, unnatural bodies or violent behaviours. On the other hand, it could also be an indication of gender stereotypes targeted at masculine characters—with functional appearances that made sense within each respective game setting and where physical attractiveness was not the focus of each character design (Tompkins and Martins 2022, 412). This is further emphasized when considering the characters within the theme that were seen with open wounds or mutated bodies, such as Karl Heisenberg from *Resident Evil Village* (Capcom 2021) who is a male presenting character.

However, there was an occurrence where an Abhorrent Beast from *Bloodborne* (FromSoftware 2015), a character whose traits were categorised as animalistic and untamed, showed kindness towards the player until he was attacked by them after being caught eating a human corpse. The attack, which transformed him from a poor human beggar to beast, was not necessary to progress in the game and was a choice that was entirely up to the player themselves. This could potentially be a case where the player is forced to interpret a character's perceived humanity based on their actions and appearance (Piittinen 2018, 4672). Considering that the player initially knew of the character's low social status as a beggar as

well, this could also affect how much sympathy the player would feel for the character (Piittinen 2018, 4685).



Figure 12. Visualisation of gathered codes.

<p><b>Gender-conforming male monster</b> based on codes from <i>Untamed and Animalistic Masculinity</i></p>
<p>(Gender) Male, (Perceived Gender) Male, (Attributes) Savage, (Colours) Greyscale, (Trope) Failed Experiment, (Hands) Mechanical, (Monstrosity) Abstract/Animalistic, (Facial Attributes) Crests, (Teeth) Small/Large/Sharp</p>

There were instances where female characters showed similar traits of animalistic behaviours to those of the male monsters within the theme of *Animalistic and Untamed Masculinity*, such as with Rek'sai from *League of Legends* (Riot Games 2009) and Rathian from *Monster Hunter Wilds* (Capcom 2025), but where the setting of the games played a major part as to why. For example, *League of Legends* (Riot Games 2009) is a MOBA (multiplayer online battle arena) with over 100 playable characters (Riot Games 2026) and *Monster Hunter Wilds*

(Capcom 2025) is a game where the player purposefully tracks down and kills monsters (Capcom n.d.), both with a large amount of monstrous characters of different genders.

At the same time, such as in the case of Mizutsune from *Monster Hunter Wilds* (Capcom 2025), this type of aggravation could be a display of sexual aggression and therefore an extension of male dominance (Dietz 1998, 4). The portrayal of male dominance was not exclusive to the theme of *Untamed and Animalistic Masculinity* however, as it also extends into the theme of *Prestigious Manhood* through an idealized version of the male gender where being competent and powerful could be seen as aspirational for male players and therefore something that they may project themselves onto (Tompkins and Martins 2022, 408). Characters like Rykard from *Elden Ring* (FromSoftware 2022) and Vel'Koz from *League of Legends* (Riot Games 2009) fit into these aspirational ideals for their low-pitched, masculine voices and their powerful, yet destructive, abilities. However, power was not necessarily needed to be part of the theme of *Aspirational Manhood*. Fade Beast from *Dragon Age: Origins* (BioWare 2009) displayed traits of being prideful, which may be considered as being in control of himself, and thus considered as aspirational for male players (Tompkins and Martins 2022, 408). As these traits primarily showed up in male characters, it could be argued that aspiration in masculinity could be a male trait in video game monsters.

While the examined traits of male monsters generally fit into the chosen themes, there was an occurrence where some traits from a specific character were reminiscent of codes found in the theme of *Systemically Tortured Womanhood*. The character, Salvatore Moreau from *Resident Evil Village* (Capcom 2021) has many physical attributes which are animalistic but also has attributes beyond his physical appearance because of a failed mutation. Unlike the other monsters within the theme of *Untamed and Animalistic Masculinity*, many who embrace their newly gained powers, Salvatore hides both his humanoid-form under an overgarment and his animalistic form in dark waters, as if he is ashamed to show himself. This is further amplified by the fact that he desires to be acknowledged by his chosen family, who constantly look down on him (Capcom 2021). Through these submissive acts, reminiscent of benevolent sexism against women, Salvatore's characterisation is comparable to traits within the theme of *Systemically Tortured Womanhood* and opposes traits within the theme of *Prestigious Manhood* (Tompkins et al. 2020, 238). However, Salvatore's oppression is not specifically because of his gender, making his situation different than characters within

*Systemically Tortured Womanhood.*



Figure 13. Visualisation of gathered codes.

<p><b>Gender non-conforming male monster</b> based on codes from <i>Systemically Tortured Womanhood</i></p>
<p>(Trope) Forced Pregnancy, (Body Horror) Forced Transformation/Parasites, (Body Horror) Distorted Body/Parasites, (Attributes) Sad, (Attributes) Distressed, (Facial Attributes) Distorted, (Facial Attributes) Hollow/N/A, (Monstrosity) Humanoid/Abstract.</p>

Masculine monsters were overall found to not have a strict design, but showed more variety compared to the feminine monsters, who were more often humanoid. This was also the case with many of the uncertain or genderless monsters, many who were often edge-cases on whether they would be considered masculine or not. One such case was Astel the Naturalborn from *Elden Ring* (FromSoftware 2022), who was ultimately coded as uncertain, but had many features which we might have coded as male. For example, Astel has something resembling a beard extending out from its neck, which at our initial glance at the character made us label the monster as male, but was ultimately deemed to more resemble hair, which did not

indicate a specific gender. Astel's design was one of the prime examples in *Unknown Uncertainty* but was not the only edge-case. With the lack of a distinct appearance among the masculine monsters, several uncertain or genderless monsters could be argued to be male, as the masculine design is far broader, especially considering the heteronormative practices common within the video game industry (Tompkins and Martins 2022, 412-413). Whilst determining whether a monster was female was relatively easy, there were many crossovers between male, genderless and uncertain monsters. It could be argued that this is due to heteronormative practices deeming a male gender the default (Tompkins and Martins 2022, 401) and the association of aggressive and assertive behaviour together with the masculine (Tompkins et al. 2020, 237-238, 243-244).

## 6.2 Feminine Gender Expression in Monsters

Some female characters were portrayed in ways that fit into common gender tropes, such as being unnecessarily sexualised or portrayed as weaker than male characters within the same game (Tompkins and Martins 2022, 401) as some were shown as distressed, sad and unaware, accompanied by decaying or distorted bodies. The Broodmother from *Dragon Age: Origins* (BioWare 2009) and Rom the Vacuous Spider from *Bloodborne* (FromSoftware 2015) are two characters which were forced to commit to female gender roles and stereotypes in ways that physically hurt them; the Broodmother being transformed against her will to become a birthing machine to an entirely different species than that of her human origin (BioWare 2009), while Rom repeatedly attempts to escape the player character's attacks and even avoids attacking in defence until later in the battle (FromSoftware 2015).

The act of giving birth to monsters is something that could be described as an inherently female act when discussing monstrosity as it is associated with deviancy and corruption (Dumas 2018, 136; Stang and Trammell 2020, 739). In this context, the act of giving birth implies that their bodies are corroded with the abject, such as the Broodmother being surrounded by fleshy ground and her very creation of requiring cannibalism (Germaine Buckley 2020, 363-364; Carroll 1990, 50-52; Dumas 2018, 145). The portrayal of these characters correlates with Stang's (2019) statement regarding how video games may portray the female reproduction process as something monstrous that needs to be destroyed by the player due to the physical difference between it and the hero's own body (Stang 2019, 233-234). The deviant sexuality that is represented through the monstrous feminine in this manner

is so far removed from the male body that there is an implied impurity, possibly implicated by cultural beliefs (Dumas 2018, 145; Carroll 1990, 32-43). Eliminating the female antagonist is something that can therefore be justified because of its dangerous nature (Pinder 2021, “Conclusion”) as benevolent sexism usually characterizes women as submissive instead of dominant (Tompkins et al. 2020, 238). Similarly, when depicted alongside fatherhood, the representation of motherhood in games generally leaves the motherly figure as either absent in the story or portrays her with a monstrous nature, whereas the fatherly figure is generally depicted as the heroic player character (Stang 2019, 237-238). Because of this, it could be argued that design attributes associated with negative experiences tied to parenthood and gender identity could be a feminine trait within video game monsters. As most of our games were from Japan, there is also a possibility that the ambivalent sexism present within the results is a byproduct of Japanese culture (Tompkins et al. 2020, 248-249).

The gender norms that some of the female monsters in our study followed in their behaviours also expanded into their physical appearances. These characters, while still monsters, were all humanoid in shape with a few key differences to keep them separated from humanity, appearing with arguably feminine body types accompanied by unnatural skin colours to make them stand apart from being fully human. Together with the fact that these monsters were all tied to female sexuality in some way, through sexual acts or by wearing inconvenient and sexualised outfits, almost of all of them were shown as individuals using their sexual nature in exchange for power. The exception to this was with the character Bubble Head Nurse from *Silent Hill 2* (Team Silent 2001), a character wearing a revealing nurse outfit, who was seemingly writhing in pain rather than actively seeking out sexual relations. Her distorted facial features were categorised into the themes of *Systemically Tortured Womanhood* as to represent the character’s erasure of self, and her general appearance was categorised into the theme of *Female Sexuality as a Weapon* due to its inappropriate nature. The monsters whose traits were categorised into the theme of *Female Sexuality as a Weapon* may be portrayals of feminine figures defying established societal structures and thus deemed as dangerous and untrustworthy (Stang and Trammell 2020, 740). This is especially relevant when considering that the sexualisation of female characters in video games, as well as the depiction of deceptive monstrous women in fiction, are not uncommon and often put in media that is targeted towards male audiences (Tompkins and Martins 2022, 401; Stang and Trammell 2020, 740).

Female monsters, in general, were not depicted in ways that embraced femininity as a power fantasy in the same way that male monsters' masculinity were. When femininity was shown as something powerful it was not in relation to prestigious ideals like those in *Prestigious Manhood*, but instead as either something sexual or as something that defied traditional gender norms. *Female Sexuality as a Weapon* establishes female monsters' bodies and their sexual desires as primary weapons, whereas the theme of *Assertive Femininity* focuses on traits that show feminine monsters as powerful and dangerous without any prestigious traits. This could be related to the monstrous depiction of female characters when they go against what's socially expected from them as women, as they push boundaries through odd and grotesque appearances and behaviours (Stang 2019, 235; Germaine Buckley 2020, 363-364). It is also consistent with how Tompkins et al. (2020) describes female characters as being depicted as less feminine when powerful (Tompkins et al. 2020, 239-240).

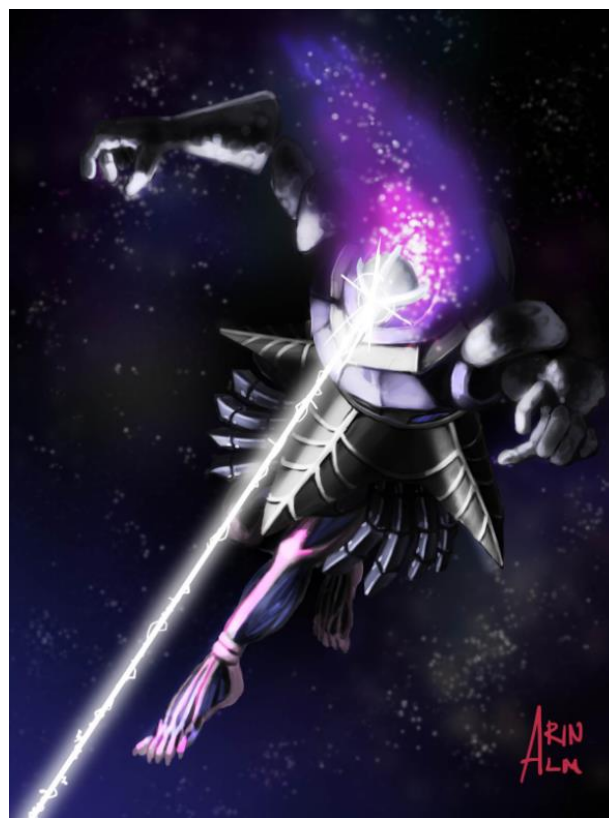


Figure 14. Visualisation of gathered codes.

**Gender non-conforming female monster**  
based on codes from *Prestigious Manhood*

(Motif) Destroyer,  
(Motif) Space Vigilante,  
(Size) Gigantic,  
(Shapes) Triangular/Sharp,  
(Attributes) Proudful,  
(Attributes) Intelligent/Wise

Despite most of the female monsters' designs portraying heteronormative ideas, some resisted such depictions. While the character traits that were categorised into *Systemically Tortured Womanhood* and *Female Sexuality as a Weapon* both indicate that heteronormativity may play a significant part in how female monster designs in video games are depicted in their behaviour and appearance, the coded traits in *Assertive Femininity* showed female monsters going against gender-based narratives. Characters such as Alcina Dimitrescu and Mother Miranda from *Resident Evil Village* (Capcom 2021) challenge patriarchal ideals through defiance of male leadership in favour of female authority and remain monstrous partially through their roles as abhuman mothers and thus become something that must be eradicated (Pinder 2021, The Scientist and the 'Broodmother').

In contrast to the Broodmother of *Dragon Age: Origins* (BioWare 2009), whose parental role was portrayed as something traumatic and something unwanted, the role of the maternal monstrosity of these characters was displayed differently. Alcina Dimitrescu is shown as a vampiric figure and a demonisation of the feminine (Baker et al. 2017, 2) who cares for her monstrous daughters and Mother Miranda is shown as a powerful entity using otherworldly magic so that she may resurrect her child outside of her own body (Capcom 2021). In this sense, these characters may serve the purpose of female empowerment through metaphorical depictions (Baker et al. 2017, 2) but are at the same time depicted as monsters to possibly show what happens when female characters go against established gender norms (Stang 2019, 235). The amount of danger they are capable of are not exclusively tied to their physical abilities and may be reflected through use of their own knowledge and intelligence, such as *Mass Effect 2's* (BioWare 2010) Tali'Zorah and her role as an alien mechanic (BioWare 2010). Even the more animalistic-looking monsters within the theme of *Assertive Femininity* are displayed as intelligent and calculated, with pack animals such as Naafiri from *League of Legends* (Riot Games 2009) being capable of human speech and coordination, and

Rek'sai from the same game being able to hunt and kill based on sound alone (Riot Games 2026).



Figure 15. Visualisation of gathered codes.

<b>Gender-conforming female monster</b> based on codes from <i>Assertive Femininity</i>
(Gender) Female, (Perceived Gender) Female, (Fight Style) Ranged/Magic (Motif) Witch, (Motif) Demonic Pack, (Motif) Dark Angel, (Attributes) Cunning, (Colours) Purple/Blue, (Facial Attributes) Scarred/Masked, (Shapes) Sharp

### 6.3 Androgynous Gender Expression in Monsters

Gender-neutral themes consisted of almost half this study's themes, and while some were more related to their gender than others, they displayed their monstrosity quite differently. All the following themes, except *Genderless Afterlife*, held all possible gender identities. Within *Unknown Uncertainty* the theme held monsters who bent their bodies beyond the knowledge of gender and gendered assumptions. Coded with angelic or eldritch origins, these monsters and codes were seen as something beyond, something so foreign to gender stereotypes that we assigned most of them as uncertain regarding their gender identity. They were often creatures of little to no biological material, as statues or robots, with mixed pitch voices to further distance themselves from an easily gendered biology (Meier 2024, 133, 135). When they were constructed of flesh and blood, they had no indicators of perceived or confirmed gender, or their humanoid bodies were malformed beyond recognition through body horror. As Cohen (1996, 6-7) describes, monsters may bring a category crisis and may refuse to participate in cultural norms and structures. The gender binary are the extremes, and the uncertain and genderless monsters who refuse categorisation were found to be monstrous by virtue of their lack of a category (Cohen 1996, 6).



Figure 16. Visualisation of gathered codes.

<p><b>Genderless monster</b></p> <p>based on codes from <i>Unknown Uncertainty</i></p>
<p>(Gender) Uncertain,          (Perceived Gender) Uncertain,          (Attributes) Mysterious,          (Motif) Angelic Construct,          (Motif) Statue,          (Colours) Greyscale/Violet,          (Hands) N/A,          (Wings) Non-Functional,          (Teeth) Large,          (Shapes) Square/Triangular</p>

The codes within *Hazardous Androgyny* all related to a sense of danger whilst relating to a genderless identity. To call something a monster, at least within the confines of art-horror, it must be impure and threatening (Carroll 1990, 42-43), and this impurity may be represented through a non-normative relation to gender (Cohen 1996, 6-7, 9-10; Carroll 1990, 39). When a lack of gender or the mixture of genders, such as in the case of Archdemon Urthemiel from *Dragon Age: Origins* (BioWare 2009), is considered monstrous because of its lack of alignment with cultural categories, it implies an impurity (Carroll 1990, 32-33). This impurity was further heightened as distorted or forced transformation was common by aligning bodies whose biology was fractured and reassembled with the androgynous (Carroll 1990, 42-43; Cohen 1996, 7-12). Codes within the *Hazardous Androgyny* were meant to be threatening, using their animalistic and abstract monstrous forms to further the threat. Their monstrous forms were given more weight than their gender, tossing it aside to appear more ferocious.



Figure 17. Visualisation of gathered codes.

<p><b>Genderless monster</b> based on codes from <i>Hazardous Androgyny</i></p>
<p>(Gender) Genderless, (Perceived Gender) Genderless, (Motif) Wizard, (Wings) Leathery, (Eyes) Several, (Trope) Transformed by Ambition, (Monstrosity) Animalistic, (Fight Style) Magic, (Hands) Fingers/Large Claws.</p>

The monsters who were dead and genderless were slotted into the category of the *Genderless Afterlife*, as their loss of life coincided a lack of gender. From the mutilated humanoid bodies akin to Flesh Lip from *Silent Hill 2* (Team Silent 2001) or Dead Hand from *The Legend of Zelda: Ocarina of Time* (Nintendo 1998), to the representation of death in Kindred from *League of Legends* (Riot Games 2009). This theme had exclusively monsters who were

identified as genderless, though the reasoning behind this identification differed. However, these were the only character attributes that directly related to a character's lack of gender, as other themes were more gender neutral.

The majority were reminiscent of corpses, human bodies twisted or chopped up into new shapes often subject to the abject (Germaine Buckley, 2020, 364). Their nascent humanity emboldened their relation to gender and as opposed to the uncertain and eldritch monsters, still held that connection to the player. Their impurity lied both in their gender confusion and in their crossing between life and death (Carroll 1990, 42-43). Kindred's situation resembled Urthemiel's, except that it was not a mistake in the game's lore, as Lamb and Wolf use several pronouns depending on the situation. Their genderless identity is the result of a complex state of being, as shepherds of those who have perished and as multiple creatures in one (Cohen 1996, 6-7; Carroll 1990, 45-47). Through death there was a loss of identity, and often the loss of their gender.

As many codes were deemed to be gender-neutral or not associated with any proposed gender at all, there was a need for the theme of *Gender Ambiguity*. This theme concerned all coded gender identities, but the codes within were considered detached from the study's question. These attributes could have been related to the *Hazardous Androgyny*, but these threatening attributes were found across all gender identities and were too widespread to find a common theme, thus considered ambiguous in correlation to gender.

We found that monsters may take the form of something we find in our daily lives and amplify what we already find scary through embodying or magnifying a concept (Carroll 1990, 50; May 2021, "Horrors from the Anthropocene"). One example is the fear of climate change in Anivia from *League of Legends* (Riot Games 2009) who is a manifestation of ice and heralds new ages akin to our real-world ice ages. Her awakening brings storms and ice, which can be likened to the extreme weather we face in our current climate crisis (May 2021, "Ecocritical Play"). Simply looking at her design, her gender is not obvious, mostly implied with her high-pitched voice (Meier 2024, 135), and her gender identity is not important to what she represents as a world-altering natural force. Similarly, there is the uncertainly gendered Nu Udra from *Monster Hunter Wilds* (Capcom 2025), an octopus whose entire body is doused in flaming oil. Instead of an unseen force which we cannot control, it is a response to humanity's own sins against nature, possibly designed to make us remember

those animals which choke on the oil spills we have created (Cohen 1996, 4, 20; May 2021, “Ecocritical Play”)

As stated previously, there were codes which we theorized should’ve been relevant to a monster’s gender expression but ultimately were not. Several monsters being the size medium or large was simply not observable to be connected to a gender identity or theme; however, this could be due to their monstrous state. Many codes within the theme of *Gender Ambiguity* were found to be *N/A*, as in they lacked a proposed attribute to be coded. *Gender Ambiguity* is thus a large compilation of codes either lacking a correlation gender or lacking a monstrous attribute in and of itself. Regarding the codes which do feature a proposed attribute, they could be considered the product of monster design, since to make a monster, whether within the realm of fantasy or horror (Carroll 1990, 16) it tends to exist beyond categorisation (Cohen 1996, 6-7). Attributes such as *small claws* or *(eyes) small/several* could indicate a monstrosity through impurity in a humanoid monster (Carroll 1990, 41-43), and these design choices may influence the player’s reaction to them (Ferstl et al. 2017, 4:10). These attributes could thus be observed to be indicative of monster design, rather than of gender design at large. They were not as relevant as we thought they’d be.

## 6.4 Limitations

As only ten video games were used in this study, with eight characters from each game being observed, future studies could allow for more varied results using an increase in video games for research and fewer characters to analyse from each individual game. The games which were selected could also be considered quite similar, with a majority being from Japan and with a heavy emphasis on action or horror. The gender ideologies observed throughout this study could be specifically related to Japanese culture (Dumas 2018, 133-134, 165-166; Tompkins et al. 2020, 237), but as we did not exclusively use Japanese games, it cannot be proven based on our results alone.

A more balanced study might utilize a wider spread of games. The selection is also subject to bias as we chose the games based on previous interest in them. The same can be said for the selected monsters, with some being chosen for the study as we may have found a particular character to be relevant due to our own stereotyping. This could be remedied by selecting the monsters at random and possibly extending this to the games themselves.

Furthermore, the intention to create a diverse spread of monsters through having humanoid, animalistic and abstract depictions might have provided its own bias. Some games provided a majority of one type, meaning the game itself might be more interested in depicting for example animalistic monsters. This could have skewed the results in a particular direction. A possible solution to this could be to look at games that only depict one type of monster, or to ignore the variety clause entirely, instead focusing only on the gender.

These games were selected across a timeline of 27 years, which could create data which is not as precise as needed to thoroughly examine gender and culture. Since the data does not span the entirety of video game history it cannot account for monsters' genders in the entire medium, nor can it accurately say whether this data speaks for a specific time frame, as it is too broad. A shorter time frame of data could provide more accurate depictions of how monsters' genders are presented within video games at a certain time. A longer time frame could say more about the whole medium's depictions of gender.

## **7 Conclusion**

Although the portrayal of video game monsters may vary depending on the context of the game's environment and narrative, certain gendered traits can still be found across multiple genres and may thus be way to determine the gender of a monstrous character regardless of which franchise it is from. Physical appearances were found to be more relevant in female monsters when portrayed in seductive contexts, such as being a succubus or a faceless woman in a revealing outfit, as they were shown to always appear as humanoid monsters. It was also common for female monsters to appear as humanoid outside of sexual circumstances, especially when portrayed as assertive, but this did not define the portrayal of the female gender in its entirety.

Much like female monsters who used their bodies as a type of sexual weapon, female monsters whose traits were deemed as assertive were often displayed as humanoid to a degree, appearing as witches, vampires and aliens for instance, sometimes accompanied by scars or unnatural bodies. However, these monsters did not need to be humanoid at all, as they also appeared as a demonic pack of dogs—suggesting that assertive female monsters possess other traits that are equally as important as their appearances, like cunning and

aggressive personalities and behaviours, to express their gender identities. This was also seen in certain male monsters who were deemed as being untamed and animalistic, where animalistic features were combined with impulsive and violent tendencies and thus made both their appearance and behaviour defining factors for their overall gender expression. When observed at an individual level, only the male monsters were found to be both humanoid and animalistic in their appearance. Looks were much less defined for male monsters overall, as their observed traits fit into humanoid, animalistic and abstract body types respectively, which contrasts many of the female characters observed. Female monsters' appearances were used to exemplify their monstrous categorisation, whilst for male monsters it was their behaviour which was monstrous.

The connection between appearance and behaviour was particularly evident in female monsters which were found with attributes that deemed them to be sad, passive, distressed and lacking awareness, as they were combined with tropes and motifs related to things such as motherhood, illness and the distortion of self. Similarly, monsters shown to be connected to the afterlife were observed to be genderless also displayed a certain loss of identity after death that tied into their lack of gender. In contrast to this, male monsters were more likely to be portrayed with traits that aligned with powerful and patriarchal ideals, such as intelligence, low-pitched voices and gigantic body sizes.

Monsters with traits that were connected to a lack of gender identity, or to complex gender identities in general, were also often shown to be a driving force behind their overall appearance. Creatures of unknown origin had uncertain gender identities that were not explained and monsters with androgynous features were used to show the monsters in relation to specific subjects, acting as warnings for danger. There were also traits which did not correlate to either the state of monstrosity or gender that were not specific enough to be placed into other gender-neutral themes and were thus grouped together in a gender ambiguous category. These traits belonged to monsters of different genders and with no connection between their traits and their observed gender identities, as they appeared on more than one gender, and were not considered as gender-defining attributes. Monster sizes, such as large and medium, were thus considered to be part of the characters monstrous nature rather than something relating to their gender.

Monsters may express their gender identity through more than just physical appearances, with female monsters, male monsters and genderless monsters being found with unique behaviours that do not necessarily extend to other monsters outside of their own identities. Monsters do not appear in a vacuum, they are created for a reason, and as observed throughout this study, reflect gendered ideologies. Monsters are cultural and they reflect those who create them, as observed within this study of monster design, shows a desire to utilize gender norms to some extent. Monsters and different gender ideologies seem to walk side by side, borrowing from one another, and can exemplified with the themes we have discussed above. Through this we can observe that monsters continue to be cultural, or at least influenced by culture, and are thus important to keep analysing as culture moves on.

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## APPENDIX

### Appendix 1: Games and Characters

Title	Developer	Date	Monster Characters
<i>Bayonetta</i>	PlatinumGames	2009	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Temperantia</li> <li>• Sapientia</li> <li>• Joy</li> <li>• Fortitudo</li> <li>• Iustitia</li> <li>• Kinship</li> <li>• Jubileus the Creator</li> <li>• Irenic</li> </ul>

<i>Bloodborne</i>	FromSoftware	2015	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Ebriatas, Daughter of the Cosmos</li> <li>• Rom the Vacuous Spider</li> <li>• Amygdala</li> <li>• Vicar Amelia</li> <li>• Father Gascoigne</li> <li>• Moon Presence</li> <li>• Mergo's Wet Nurse</li> <li>• Abhorrent Beast</li> </ul>
<i>Dragon Age: Origins</i>	BioWare	2009	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Broodmother</li> <li>• Ogre Boss</li> <li>• The Lady of the Forest</li> <li>• Desire Demon</li> <li>• Archdemon Urthemiel</li> <li>• Ash Wraith</li> <li>• Corrupted Spider Queen</li> <li>• Fade Beast</li> </ul>
<i>Elden Ring</i>	FromSoftware	2022	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Elden Beast</li> <li>• Rykard, Lord of Blasphemy</li> <li>• Godrick the Grafted</li> <li>• Maliketh, the Black Blade</li> <li>• School of Graven Mages</li> <li>• Astel, Naturalborn of the Void</li> <li>• Miranda the Blighted Bloom</li> <li>• Malenia</li> </ul>
<i>League of Legends</i>	Riot Games	2009	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Rek'Sai</li> <li>• Veigar</li> <li>• Fiddlesticks</li> <li>• Naafiri</li> <li>• Vel'Koz</li> <li>• Nocturne</li> <li>• Kindred</li> <li>• Anivia</li> </ul>
<i>Mass Effect 2</i>	BioWare	2010	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Samara</li> <li>• Grunt</li> <li>• Garrus Vakarian</li> <li>• Legion</li> <li>• Tali'Zorah nar Raaya</li> <li>• Thane Krios</li> <li>• Harbinger</li> <li>• Morinth</li> </ul>

<i>Monster Hunter Wilds</i>	Capcom	2025	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Mizutsune</li> <li>• Chatacabra</li> <li>• Guardian Arkveld</li> <li>• Lala Barina</li> <li>• Rathian</li> <li>• Hirabami</li> <li>• Jin Dahaad</li> <li>• Nu Udra</li> </ul>
<i>The Legend of Zelda: Ocarina of Time</i>	Nintendo	1998	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Dead Hand</li> <li>• Lord Jabu-Jabu</li> <li>• Twinrova</li> <li>• Beamos</li> <li>• Gohma</li> <li>• Barinade</li> <li>• Lizalfos</li> <li>• King Dodongo</li> </ul>
<i>Resident Evil Village</i>	Capcom	2021	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Varcolac</li> <li>• Salvatore Moreau</li> <li>• Angie</li> <li>• Alcina Dimitrescu</li> <li>• Dimitrescu Daughters</li> <li>• Moroaiică</li> <li>• Karl Heisenberg</li> <li>• Mother Miranda</li> </ul>
<i>Silent Hill 2</i>	Team Silent	2001	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Flesh Lip</li> <li>• Abstract Daddy</li> <li>• Bubble Head Nurse</li> <li>• Mary (Monster)</li> <li>• Pyramid Head</li> <li>• Lying Figure</li> <li>• Mannequin</li> <li>• Mandarin</li> </ul>

Table 1: Video games and their monsters which were used in this research.

## Appendix 2: Codes

Code	Scale	Meaning
<i>Gender</i>	Uncertain, Male, Female, Genderless	What gender the monsters were officially.

<i>Perceived Gender</i>	Uncertain, Male, Female, Genderless	What gender the monsters were perceived as by the researchers, based on gender norms.
<i>Attributes</i>	Impulsive/Agitated, Passive, Aggressive, Distressed, Mysterious, Bulky and Armoured, Impatient and Violent, Slippery and Fast Absent-minded, Savage, Slow and Instinctive, Primal, Power-Hungry, Selfless, Sinister, Intelligent/Wise, Mischievous/Sexual, Sad, Just and Powerful, Loyal and Fair, Symbolic, Powerful, Prideful, Cunning, Subtle, Bothered, Lack of awareness, Failure	Personality or body attributes that were found based on each monster.
<i>Shapes</i>	Round, Square, Triangular, Sharp, Slender, Sharp/Round, Slender/Triangular, Square/Triangular, Slender/Round, Square/Sharp, Sharp/Triangular, Round/Triangular, Round/Square	Shapes that were found within the physical design of a monster.

<i>Colours</i>	Gold/White/Red, Greyscale, Beige/Red, Purple/Blue, Yellow/Blue/Greyscale, Orange/Brown/White/Blue, White/Pink/Purple/Yellow, Greyscale/Gold/Blue/Red, Greyscale/Violet, Green/Gold/White/Red, Greyscale/Red, Greyscale/Beige/Red, Purple/Yellow, Green/Brown, Greyscale/Blue, Purple/Red, Green/Red, Rainbow, Greyscale/Purple/Blue, Green/Purple, Greyscale/Red/Gold, Blue/Greyscale/Brown, Greyscale/White, Greyscale/Gold/Blue/Red/Green, Greyscale/Green/Red/Light Blue	Colours that were found in different monster characters.
<i>Voice</i>	N/A, Low Pitch, Medium Pitch, High Pitch, Mixed Pitch	Different type of pitches that were found in the various monsters' voices.
<i>Monstrosity</i>	Humanoid, Abstract, Animalistic, Abstract/Animalistic, Humanoid/Abstract, Humanoid/Animalistic	What type of monstrosity a monster was perceived as by researchers.
<i>Fight Style</i>	N/A, Physical, Ranged, Magic, Physical/Magic, Physical/Ranged, Ranged/Magic, Physical/Ranged/Magic	What ways a monster would fight in battles.
<i>Size</i>	Gigantic, Large,	What size the monsters were perceived as, based

	Medium, Small	on the game's environmental factors.
<i>Motif</i>	Spider Mother, Space, Insect Queen, Reptile Alien, Fox Dragon, Guardian Whale, Werewolf, Symbolic Manifestation, Angel, Alien Slug, Amphibian/Animal, Corpse, Corpse Dragon, Dragon, Troll, Statue, Destroyer, Witch, Eldritch entity, Anemone, Distorted Corpse, Grim Reaper, Vampire Spawn, Goddess, Specter, Demonic Pack, Space Vigilante, Alien Mechanic, Flower Spider, Vampire Noble, Sexy Nurse, Masked Killer, Angelic Construct, Decaying Flower, Metal Monster, Diseased Valkyrie, Dinosaur, Mouth Monster, Robot Collective, Dark Angel, Forest Guardian, Succubus, Demon, Corrupted King, Demonic Scarecrow, Oil Octopus, Reptile Warrior,	Descriptors for a monster's physical appearance and character role.

	<p>Haunted Doll, Headless Corpse, Wizard</p>	
<i>Trope</i>	<p>Transformed by Ambition, Evil Mother, Failed Experiment, Man Eater, The Hunter Becomes the Hunted, Forced Pregnancy</p>	<p>Descriptors of a used trope, perceived by the researchers.</p>
<i>Facial Attributes</i>	<p>N/A, Large Horns, Crests, Small Horns, Distorted, Masked, Scarred, Large Horns/Crest, Scarred/Masked, Distorted/Scarred, Crest/Masked, Small Horns/Crest, Small/Large Horns, Small Horns/Distorted/Crests, Small Horns/Distorted/Crests, Distorted/Scarred/Crest</p>	<p>Specific details that were found on or around the facial area of a monster.</p>
<i>Wings</i>	<p>N/A, Leathery, Feathery, Non-Functional, Insectoid</p>	<p>Specific details that were found regarding a monster's wings or lack thereof.</p>
<i>Hands</i>	<p>N/A, Large Claws, Small Claws, Tentacles, Fingers, Fins, Mechanical, Mouths, Fingers &amp; N/A, Fins/Fingers, Fingers/Mechanical, Fingers/Large Claws, Fingers/Small Claws,</p>	<p>Specific details that were found about the hands of a monster.</p>
<i>Eyes</i>	<p>N/A, Small, Large,</p>	<p>Specific details that were found about the eyes of a monster.</p>

	Several, Hollow, Covered, Small/Several, Large/Several, Singular/Small, Large/Singular, Hollow/N/A, Singular/Large/Hollow	
<i>Teeth</i>	N/A, Small, Large, Sharp, Small/Sharp, Small/Large/Sharp N/A & Large	Specific details about the teeth of a monster.
<i>Body Horror</i>	N/A, Open Wounds, Extra Limbs, Forced Transformation, Body Transformation, Missing Limbs, Parasites, Distorted Body, Decaying body, Body Transformation/Distorted Body, Body Transformation/Parasites, Missing Limbs/Forced Transformation/Distorted Body, Parasites/Extra Limbs/Forced Transformation, Open Wounds/Body Transformation Decaying Body/Body, Transformation/Missing Limbs, Missing Limbs/Distorted Body, Extra Limbs/Missing Limbs, Forced Transformation/Parasites, Extra Limbs/Parasites/Body Transformation, Extra Limbs/Distorted Body Distorted Body/Parasites, Open Wounds/Forced Transformation/Extra Limbs	What type of body distortions and abnormalities that could be found on a monster's body, externally and internally.

Table 2: Codes and their variations.

### Appendix 3: Themes

Theme	Categories	Codes	Meaning
Untamed & Animalistic Masculinity	<i>Wild Masculinity</i>	(Gender) Male, (Perceived Gender) Male, (Attributes) Impulsive/Agitated, (Attributes) Impatient & Violent, (Attributes) Savage, (Trope) The Hunter becomes the Hunted, (Motif) Werewolf, (Motif) Troll, (Motif) Metal Monster, (Motif) Masked Killer, (Colours) Greyscale, (Trope) Failed Experiment, (Hands) Mechanical, (Hands) Fins/Fingers, (Colours) Purple/Red, (Facial attributes) Crests, (Facial attributes) Large Horns, (Teeth) Small/Large/Sharp, (Teeth) Large/Sharp, (Body horror) Open Wounds, (Body horror) Parasites/Extra Limbs/Forced Transformation, (Body horror) Open Wounds/Body Transformation, (Body horror) Open Wounds/Forced Transformation/Extra Limbs, (Monstrosity) Humanoid/Animalistic, (Hands) Fins	Monsters whose masculinity is expressed in the form of untamed aggravation, violence and animalistic behaviour.
	<i>Reptilian Males</i>	(Gender) Male, (Perceived Gender) Male, (Colours) Green/Red, (Motif) Reptile Alien, (Motif) Corpse Dragon, (Motif) Dinosaur, (Motif) Fox Dragon, (Motif) Reptile Warrior, (Colours) Orange/Brown/White/Blue, (Colours) White/Pink/Purple/Yellow, (Facial Attributes) Small Horns/Crest, (Facial Attributes) Large Horns/Distorted/Crests, (Monstrosity) Abstract/Animalistic	

Prestigious Manhood	<i>Aspirational Masculinity</i>	(Gender) Male, (Perceived Gender) Male, (Attributes) Intelligent/Wise, (Attributes) Loyal and Fair, (Attributes) Proudful, (Motif) Space Vigilante, (Voice) Low Pitch, (Size) Gigantic, (Shapes) Sharp/Triangular	Monsters whose attributes are deemed as aspirational and successful for other male monsters.
	<i>Dismissive Manliness</i>	(Gender) Male, (Perceived Gender) Male, (Attributes) Absent-minded, (Attributes) Bothered, (Motif) Destroyer, (Colours) Greyscale/Gold/Blue/Red/Green, (Colours) Purple/Yellow, (Shapes) Square/Sharp	

Gender Ambiguity	<i>True Gender</i> <i>Neutrality</i>	(Gender) Uncertain, (Gender) Genderless, (Gender) Female, (Gender) Male, (Perceived Gender) Uncertain, (Perceived Gender) Genderless, (Perceived Gender) Female, (Perceived Gender) Male, (Hands) Small Claws, (Hands) Fingers, (Colours) Greyscale/Red, (Fight Style) N/A, (Size) Medium, (Facial attributes) Masked, (Size) Large, (Facial attributes) N/A, (Fight Style) Physical/Magic, (Fight Style) Physical/Ranged, (Hands) Tentacles, (Hands) Large Claws, (Hands) Fingers/Small Claws, (Wings) N/A, (Eyes) Small, (Eyes) Large, (Eyes) Covered, (Eyes) Small/Several, (Eyes) Large/Several, (Eyes) Singular/Small, (Teeth) N/A, (Teeth) Small, (Body horror) N/A, (Body horror) Extra Limbs, (Body horror) Body Transformation, (Body horror) Decaying body, (Shapes) Round, (Fight Style) Physical, (Fight Style) Ranged, (Motif) Amphibian/Animal, (Motif) Dragon, (Motif) Anemone, (Motif) Flower Spider, (Motif) Oil Octopus, (Attributes) Slow & Instinctive, (Motif) Embodiment, (Colours) Yellow/Blue/Greyscale	Monsters whose traits are commonly found in multiple genders, with no correlation to their own gender.
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<p>Hazardous Androgyny</p>	<p><i>Androgynous Danger</i></p>	<p>(Gender) Uncertain,  (Gender) Genderless,  (Gender) Female,  (Gender) Male,  (Perceived Gender) Uncertain,  (Perceived Gender) Genderless,  (Perceived Gender) Female,  (Perceived Gender) Male,  (Colours) Greyscale/Purple/Blue,  (Colours) Beige/Red,  (Colours) Greyscale/Beige/Red,  (Colours) Green/Gold/White/Red,  (Colours) Gold/White/Red,  (Colours) Greyscale/Red/Gold,  (Colours) Greyscale/Gold/Blue/Red,  (Facial attributes) Small Horns,  (Eyes) N/A,  (Eyes) Several,  (Eyes) Large/Singular,  (Teeth) Small/Sharp,  (Body horror) Forced Transformation,  (Body horror) Distorted Body,  (Shapes) Round/Triangular,  (Shapes) Round/Square,  (Shapes) Sharp/Round,  (Monstrosity) Abstract,  (Monstrosity) Animalistic,  (Hands) Fingers/Large Claws,  (Attributes) Sinister,  (Wings) Leathery,  (Attribute) Slippery &amp; Fast,  (Wings) Insectoid,  (Attributes) Primal</p>	<p>Monsters whose androgynous attributes serve as warnings towards their potential danger.</p>
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	<i>Authoritative Gender Neutrality</i>	(Gender) Uncertain, (Gender) Genderless, (Gender) Female, (Gender) Male, (Perceived Gender) Uncertain, (Perceived Gender) Genderless, (Perceived Gender) Female, (Perceived Gender) Male (Attributes) Power-Hungry (Motif) Wizard (Attributes) Just and Powerful (Attributes) Powerful (Fight Style) Magic (Facial Attributes) Large Horns/Crest (Shapes) Square (Shapes) Triangular (Motif) Corrupted King (Trope) Transformed by Ambition	
Genderless Afterlife	<i>Dead and Genderless</i>	(Gender) Genderless, (Perceived Gender) Genderless, (Motif) Corpse, (Motif) Distorted Corpse, (Motif) Specter, (Motif) Grim Reaper, (Hands) Fingers & N/A, (Eyes) Hollow, (Teeth) N/A/Large, (Body horror) Missing Limbs	Monsters whose lack of binary gender is expressed through the representation and physical appearance of death.
Unknown Uncertainty	<i>Unknown Uncertainty</i>	(Gender) Uncertain, (Perceived Gender) Uncertain, (Attributes) Mysterious, (Attributes) Subtle, (Motif) Eldritch Entity, (Motif) Angelic Construct, (Motif) Space, (Motif) Angel, (Motif) Statue, (Motif) Angelic Construct, (Motif) Robot Collective, (Motif) Demonic Scarecrow, (Motif) Demon, (Motif) Symbolic Manifestation, (Motif) Mouth Monster, (Colours) Greyscale/Violet, (Colours) Greyscale/Blue, (Colours) Rainbow,	Monsters whose traits do not correspond to specific genders due to uncertain origins and non- gendered appearances.

		<p>(Size) Small,  (Voice) N/A,  (Hands) Mouths,  (Hands) N/A,  (Wings) Non-Functional,  (Wings) Feathery,  (Eyes) Singular/Large/Hollow,  (Teeth) Large,  (Shapes) Slender/Round,  (Body horror) Parasites,  (Shapes) Square/Triangular,  (Shapes) Slender,  (Body horror) Missing Limbs/Forced Transformation/Distorted Body,  (Body horror) Missing Limbs/Distorted Body,  (Body horror) Extra Limbs/Missing Limbs,  (Body horror) Extra Limbs/Distorted Body,  (Voice) Mixed Pitch</p>	
Systemically Tortured Womanhood	<i>Traumatic Womanhood</i>	<p>(Gender) Female,  (Perceived Gender) Female,  (Motif) Decaying Flower,  (Motif) Diseased Valkyrie,  (Motif) Headless Corpse,  (attributes) Distressed,  (attributes) Sad,  (Trope) Forced Pregnancy,  (Colours) Green/Purple,  (Attributes) Lack of Awareness,  (Colours) Greyscale/White,  (Facial attributes) Distorted,  (Facial Attributes) Distorted/Scarred,  (Eyes) Hollow/N/A,  (Body horror) Decaying Body/Body Transformation/Missing Limbs,  (Body horror) Forced Transformation/Parasites,  (Body horror) Distorted Body/Parasites,  (Monstrosity) Abstract/Humanoid,  (Monstrosity) Humanoid,  (Attributes) Symbolic,  (Motif) Forest Guardian</p>	Monsters whose femininity is expressed through trauma, physical pain (ex. body transformation, loss of limbs) and forced to fulfil female gender roles.
	<i>Monstrous Moms</i>	<p>(Gender) Female,  (Perceived Gender) Female,</p>	

		(Motif) Spider Mother, (Motif) Mother, (Trope) Evil Mother, (Motif) Insect Queen, (Facial Attributes) Distorted/Scarred/Crest	
	<i>Stereotypical Femininity</i>	(Gender) Female, (Perceived Gender) Female, (attributes) Passive, (attributes) Selfless, (Voice) High Pitch	
Female Sexuality as a Weapon	<i>Weaponised Sexuality</i>	(Gender) Female, (Perceived Gender) Female, (Motif) Sexy Nurse, (Motif) Succubus, (Attributes) Mischievous/Sexual, (Colours) Blue/Greyscale/Brown, (Colours) Greyscale/Green/Red/Light Blue, (Monstrosity) Humanoid	Female monsters who use sex appeal as means for manipulation and as weapons.
Assertive Femininity	<i>Assertive Femininity</i>	(Gender) Female, (Perceived Gender) Female, (Attributes) Aggressive, (Trope) Man Eater, (Motif) Witch, (Motif) Vampire Spawn, (Motif) Goddess, (Motif) Demonic Pack, (Motif) Vampire Noble, (Motif) Dark Angel,	Female monsters who are confident and dominant in their personalities and ways of acting.

		(Motif) Haunted Doll, (Attributes) Cunning, (Attributes) Bulky & Armoured, (Motif) Alien Mechanic, (Voice) Medium Pitch, (Fight Style) Ranged/Magic, (Fight Style) Physical/Ranged/Magic, (Hands) Fingers/Mechanical, (Colours) Purple/Blue, (Facial attributes) Scarred/Masked, (Facial Attributes) Crest/Masked, (Facial Attributes) Small/Large Horns, (Facial Attributes) Small Horns/Distorted/Crests, (Shapes) Slender/Triangular, (Body horror) Body Transformation/Distorted Body, (Body horror) Body Transformation/Parasites, (Shapes) Sharp, (Body horror) Extra Limbs/Parasites/Body Transformation, (Colours) Green/Brown	
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**Table 3: Themes, categories and codes.**