

"You have to prove yourself all the time": Misogyny and countermeasures in German games journalism

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Women in journalism are often the target of gender-based hostility (Posetti et al., 2020). This is particularly the case with topics that have a long history of being "male-associated" (Adams, 2017). Video games are one of them. In the past, this dynamic led to global controversies such as #1reasonwhy (addressing the underrepresentation of women in the games industry) or #Gamergate, which exemplified the aggressive exclusion of women from games culture (Ferguson & Glasgow, 2021). Misogyny in gaming is academically recognized as part of a toxic geek culture that purposefully marginalizes female, queer, or non-white participants (Massanari, 2017).

So far, gender-based hostility in games culture has mostly been studied from the perspective of female players. These studies show that many hide their gender online to avoid harassment or blame for gameplay failures (Robinson, 2023). There is, however, a research gap regarding the experiences of female journalists covering games, especially outside the Anglophone world. A recent study from the Czech Republic indicates that even professional games journalists report that their expertise is questioned due to their gender (Fousek-Krobová & Švelch, 2024). Yet little is known about how these patterns manifest in other national contexts, particularly in the German-speaking region, which features its own media infrastructure, games market, and cultural norms regarding gender and digital culture. This study addresses that gap by qualitatively exploring the extent to which misogyny affects female video game journalists in Germany. A qualitative approach was chosen to allow for a context-sensitive, in-depth understanding of experiences that may not surface in surveys or experimental designs. In doing so, the study also

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aims to contribute to broader discussions in feminist media studies, journalism studies, and the sociology of expertise.

The following research questions guided the study:

RQ1: Which forms of hostility and/or discrimination are female video game journalists exposed to in which contexts?

RQ1a: What gender-related stereotypes do they perceive in their work?

RQ2: How are these experiences dealt with on a personal and institutional level?

RQ3: To what extent do they feel recognized in their role as games experts - both institutionally and by audiences?

Between February and April 2024, 20 semi-structured interviews were conducted with female journalists in Germany, Austria, and Switzerland who work as freelancers or full-time employees for games publications. Some had left the field but reflected on their past experiences. Given the small population of female game journalists in the German-speaking world, the sample covers a significant share of the field and is diverse in terms of journalistic format (video, text, audio) and professional experience (2 to 15+ years).

The interviews were analyzed inductively using grounded theory methodology (Glaser & Strauss, 2014). The decision to focus on German-speaking participants is partly based on linguistic accessibility but also on the observation that existing studies tend to be concentrated in Anglophone contexts, with few cross-cultural comparisons available.

The interviews paint a complex picture. Experiences of hostility varied significantly, from minimal incidents to ongoing harassment. However, shared patterns emerged. Gender stereotypes were omnipresent: female journalists reported being more accepted when covering “feminine-coded” topics like cozy games, while facing backlash when reporting on sexism in games or voicing strong opinions in columns or video formats. Online comments and social media were cited as primary sources of harassment.

The analysis revealed that the type and intensity of misogynistic experiences were shaped by four intersecting factors: (1) content themes, (2) visibility, (3) institutional support, and (4) peer networks. Journalists received more hostility when discussing sexism or when highly visible (e.g., on-camera). Protective factors included strong community management and supportive editorial environments, especially when backed by male colleagues. Yet, many interviewees felt a need to constantly reassert their expertise in front of audiences, whereas recognition within their institutions was more consistent.

These findings confirm some known patterns from prior research, but they also underscore how national media cultures and workplace environments mediate gendered hostility. The study contributes to scholarship on media and gender by extending empirical insights and highlighting how institutional and peer dynamics can act as buffers.

Practically, the identification of key contexts of hostility can inform newsroom policies and protective mechanisms. Future research might expand this work by comparing findings with those from women in mainstream journalism to identify shared or distinct patterns.

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