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*PLAYING GENDER: AN ANALYSIS OF
FEMININITY IN THE POPULAR CULTURE
PHENOMENON LEAGUE OF LEGENDS*

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Abstract

Video games are immensely popular in contemporary society, and it conveys explicit and implicit messages to the consumer. The author investigates the presence of gender portrayal and how the popular culture phenomenon *League of Legends* depict and represent women. The author analyzes its content, such as roles and appearances, to develop an understanding of its accuracies regarding femininity in the game, and to expand upon the general body of knowledge on video games. A literature review was conducted by the author analyzing the presence of gender in various forms of media (books, television etc.), and gender in video games, and how women are portrayed in them. As prior literature shows, women are underrepresented, stereotyped, and presented in a sexualized manner. The author contends that media including video games, have an impact on an individual's identity, socializing them to imitate the content that they see in video games under the pretense that it is 'normal' and 'the way it is' in reality. The author introduces the theories posited by George Gerbner and Ann Swidler in order to explain how exactly socialization works. The author engages in a qualitative content analysis of the roles in the game, and twelve female characters or 'champions' in *League of Legends* to uncover any themes or patterns, in relation to their roles, personality traits, occupation, and appearances etc. In addition, the author briefly discusses the male characters in the game to understand if the results on the female characters were unique only to them and not the male characters. Results suggest that women are placed in typically male-coded roles, such as leaders and protectors, but at the expense of being depicted in scantily-clad clothing and sexualized manners. Presented research reflect some of the conclusions drawn in previous studies, but opens the field of video games to more research topics regarding *League of Legends* as a case study. It

is an evolving game with new content added frequently, as a result, the game can be re-investigated to explore developments on gender representations of men and women.

Introduction

Leisure activities and entertainment are involved in an individual's daily routine and lifestyle. On average, people all over the world spend around 20% to 40% of their free time engaging in leisure activities (Rajkowska, 2014), and in Canada, approximately 19 million or 54% of residents elect to play video games as a leisure activity (Wilson, 2016). Video games had long to be thought of as a predominantly male activity by researchers, but that theory has been debunked as there is an even distribution of gamers in relation to gender (Paaßen, Morgenroth, Stratemever, 2017). Men outnumber women as consumers of video games by a small margin; as women constitute approximately 48% of gamers in Canada (Wilson, 2016). However, as the 'gamer' population reaches parity in relation to gender, can the same be said about the portrayals and representations of femininity in video games? Video games such as the popular *Grand Theft Auto* series, are renowned for rewarding their players for explicit displays of violence onto women primarily due to their portrayals as prostitutes and strippers, with the money that they paid for their services (Dill, 2009). Other video games like *Tomb Raider* revolutionized the gaming industry by introducing one of the first female protagonists in the history of gaming. However, *Tomb Raider* portrayed the lead character Lara Croft as an attractive, buxom, and curvaceous individual, critiques made by feminists that she was created in the 'male gaze', the dominant line of thinking that prioritizes heterosexual men (Kimmel & Holler, 2017).

An influential video game in contemporary society is the game *League of Legends*. *League of Legends* since its release back in 2009, has made an impact in the field of video games, redefining the genre of MOBA's or multiplayer online battle arena games (Mora-

Cantalops & Sicilia, 2018). *League of Legends* has a significant following, receiving over 67 million players per month, 27 million players per day, 7.5 million concurrent players during “peak hours” since 2014 (Sheer, 2014). It influenced the recognition of electronic sports (E-sports) or competitive video gaming as an official sport due to its overwhelming popularity, reaching over 43 million concurrent viewers at the annual 2016 *League of Legends World Championship* (Brown, 2018), beating out the *NBA* finals in 2016 which reached peak viewership of only 31 million concurrent viewers (Porter, 2016). *League of Legends* also received mainstream attention for its connections with sports and popular franchises; receiving sponsors and attention such as the *NBA*. Current *NBA* teams such as the *Houston Rockets* and the *Golden State Warriors* purchased a stake in current *League of Legends* competitive teams *Clutch Gaming* and *Golden Guardians* respectively (Webster, 2018); and in particular current *Boston Celtics* player Gordon Hayward, is an avid player of the game and advocate for competitive gaming (Wolf, 2018). *League of Legends* also attracted attention from popular brands such as *Coca-Cola*, *Samsung*, and *Red Bull* (Brown, 2018).

The impact that *League of Legends* has on its consumers is undeniable with the amount of people playing the game, and the traction it receives from sponsorships and relationships with other products of consumption such as *Coca-Cola* and *Samsung*. However, with live action role plays or cosplays, which are “forms of appropriation that transforms and actualizes an existing story in close connection to the fan community and the fan's own identity” (Lamerichs, 2011, pg. 56), people are replicating and emulating characters from video games because of their attachment and connection to said characters. As a result, video games act as a resource for people to take from in order to portray and re-enact what they see in the game. Therefore, it is important to analyze *League of Legends* in regards to the ideas it conveys as consumers may use

it as reference to construct their own identity, and other video games replicating *League of Legends* to emulate its success, therefore reproducing its content. In essence, the primary concern is what *League of Legends* trying to say in regards to femininity, as their concepts can be reproduced by the average player or video game producers. This paper will address how female characters are represented and portrayed in *League of Legends*, in relation to what roles they occupy in the game and how are they presented and portrayed, and how would the results affect consumers of this product.

Background Information

In this paper, there are terms that people who do not play video games may not understand. As a result, the following terms will be understood and defined by the author as:

PvP – “Player vs. Player”, a human player against another human player.

PvE – “Player vs. Environment”, environment meaning AI that controls characters such as companions or enemies during a game.

In addition, the author uses the terms ‘female characters’ and ‘women’ interchangeably throughout this paper.

What is a Video Game?

Video games are a form of entertainment that individuals choose to partake in as a type of leisure activity. The first technical classification of what video games are, they were understood as a video signal transmitted to a cathode ray tube (CRT) that creates a rasterized image on a screen (Wolf, 2007). Nonetheless, this definition of a video game begins to shed its relevance and importance to the overall depiction, shifting to a broader, wider, and more extensive range of

technology due to modernization. Video games today could be understood and classified as any game that can be played on hardware built with electronic logic circuits that incorporates an element of interactivity and outputs the results of the player's actions to a display (Wolf, 2007), which entails consoles, phones, and computers which was used by the author to conduct this study.

Video Games as Expression of Literature and Art

Video games can be differentiated from its practical usage to more of an art form or a literature. As a unique form of art, it requires extensive studying and innovative analytical tools to explain and rationalize the emergence of video games as literature and art (Gee, 2006). Video games consequently can be investigated as art, as it elicits certain moods, atmospheres, and sentiments similar to traditionally accepted forms of art such as paintings or what can be observed in an art gallery (Patterson, 2019). In order to be considered art, accepted forms of art have to be aesthetically pleasing, so it has to be appealing and creative to consumers, but what is appealing or not is socially constructed and determined by people who already have a reputation in the industry (Patterson, 2019). As a result, often sports such as gymnastics, diving, and ice skating are evaluated by in large how 'aesthetic' the performance is. Other sports that brings up analogous comparisons to dance such as baseball pitchers with a 'beautiful' arm, or a boxer's graceful demeanor could be plausible candidates to be called art forms (Smuts, 2005). From the definition of 'aesthetically pleasing', video games such as *Castlevania* can be likened to art because of the ability to illicit certain moods and feelings.

In the game *Castlevania: Symphony of the Night*, each of the shapes, movements and combinations are assigned a meaning, with some given shapes are used to represent a character in the game such as a "Sword Lord", while other shapes are used to represent an object of

interest such as a treasure chest, and lastly some combinations or movements of shapes is assigned with the action of killing a character with an object. These assignments of meaning to each shape, combination, or movement helps determine what they should look like and sound like in the game, and subsequently paint a picture in the player's mind. The point of assignments in games like *Castlevania* help generate the visual design of the game. For example, the Sword Lord in the game looks a certain way because of the object that was assigned "Sword Lord", because despite using certain shapes such as a triangle to describe a potential character that would most likely not look like a triangle, this creates an atmosphere or ambiance, which allows the player to metaphorically sense the presence of the "Sword Lord" by observing the appearance of an allocated symbol (Gee, 2006).

Video games could also be narratively driven which could be used to elicit certain 'aesthetics'. Video games achieve this by combining the generation of story elements with the artistic design of video games to enhance the emotions and reactions for a richer experience, or new form of performance art that is coproduced by the player and the producer (Gee, 2006). In the *The Walking Dead*, for example, the player controls Clementine, a teenage pseudo-mother/guardian of a young child by the name of "AJ". The narrative in *The Walking Dead* could be considered the author through playing to be emotional and immersive as the players are thrust with tough decisions that they have to make in order to progress through the story. The game itself is tailored by how the player plays, with each decision's impact varying from insignificant to consequential. The combination of this mechanic with the overall atmosphere of being in the midst of a zombie apocalypse, the melancholy and depressing music, and the motoric components of the game, allows the player to feel, look, and act like the protagonist of the game.

In essence, because video games can illicit emotions and moods from the consumer, it could be loosely considered as a form of art and literature (Gee, 2006).

History of Video Games

One of the first appearances of video games dates back to 1940, where an individual by the name of Edward U. Condon designed a computer that plays a game called *Nim*, in which players try to avoid picking up the last matchstick as it would result in them losing the game. In 1947, Thomas T. Goldsmith Jr. and Estle Ray Mann file a patent for a “cathode ray tube amusement device”, which utilizes a cathode ray tube hooked to an oscilloscope display, which challenges players to fire a gun at a target. This “cathode ray tube” system constitutes the earliest definition of what video games are (The Strong, 2016). Another competitor for creating the first video game was a physicist named Willy Higinbotham, who created a tennis game on an oscilloscope alike his predecessors Goldsmith and Mann, but innovated a new technique by incorporating an analog computer for public demonstration at the Brookhaven National Library in 1958 (Chodos & Ouellette, 2008). Although it was largely forgotten and discarded soon afterwards, it provided inspiration and insight for one of the most successful games to be released and available to the general public called “Pong” (Baer, 1998).

In 1972, the game *PONG* was an instant success and soon inspired many spin-offs and other companies like *ATARI* to create ‘clones’ per se – in hopes to emulate the success and reception that the previous iteration received. However, these attempts to create content that can even remotely hold a light to its predecessor failed tremendously as it led to a saturation of hopeless *PONG* clones and replicas. Consequently, the video game market crashed in 1977, citing the lack of innovations and creativity as key factors, bringing the era of video games to a slump (Hadzinsky, 2014). Fortunately, due to the release of Toshihiro Nishikao’s *Space Invaders*

in 1979, pulled the concept of video games out of its collapse and revived public interest into video games once more, effectively ushering in what was called the “Golden Age of Video Games” (Kent, 2001).

The “Golden Age” defined an era of prosperity, which sparked a technical and design creativity in arcade video games, resulting in the rapid rise of video arcades in not only North America, but across continents to Europe and Asia; between the years of 1980 and 1982, the number of video game arcades increased by more than double (Wolf, 2007). Video game arcades became so common that it appeared in many convenience stores; even made its appearances in places that people would not expect such as funeral homes (Wolf, 2001). During the “Golden Age”, we begin to see many video games appear, some popular titles include *Donkey Kong* and *PAC-MAN*, and through these games, we can also see the emergence of certain gender roles and stereotypes. In *Donkey Kong*, the eponymous character Donkey Kong was portrayed as the de facto villain or antagonist as the storyline has him kidnap the hero (Jump Man)’s apparent ‘girlfriend’ Pauline/Lady. The player controls Jump Man, who eventually evolved to become Mario, one of the leading mascots in the *Nintendo* franchise, as he traverses through the map with Donkey Kong attempting to sabotage him at any means necessary by hurling obstacles such as barrels at him before the player eventually reaches Donkey Kong and rescues his ‘girlfriend’ and wins the game. This is considered to be one of the first appearances and occurrences of the ‘damsel in distress’ scenario which created a template for countless other games to mimic and imitate (De Maria & Wilson, 2004; Sheff, 1993). Some examples include 1985 revision of the game, Mario formerly known as Jump Man is tasked to rescue a kidnapped princess named Princess Toadstool formerly Pauline/Lady but now commonly known as Princess Peach from a villainous turtle by the name of Bowser. The character Link from the popular series and

franchise *Legend of Zelda* is tasked by the titular character Zelda to save her land of Hyrule from an evil wizard, and assisted by her by scattering clues and treasures around the level maps. This portrayal of the damsel-in-distress cliché was met with a twist due to the increased autonomy of the female character instead of idling and awaiting rescue (Ray, 2004).

Female Protagonists in Video Games

Portrayals of femininity in video games had an introduction in games like *Donkey Kong*, and in its ‘sibling’ in *Super Mario Bros.* for an interpretation of what the female character is like. Secondly, due to the success of PAC-MAN, a derivative was created named Ms. PAC-MAN, which could be considered as an attempt during the early period of video gaming to differentiate between female and male genders, with the titular character sharing the exact same characteristics of PAC-MAN, in addition donning a bow-tie and make-up/lipstick (Rajkowska, 2014). *Ms. PAC-MAN* also displays behavioural attributes, favouring dramatic and theatrical methods to die in a game such as swooning before falling. One of the earliest attempts of being able to choose the gender of your character in video games was in the *Leather Goddess of Phobos*. In the beginning of the game, players are placed into the setting of a bar, not too long after, the protagonist goes to the washroom and depending on which washroom the player chooses, they would either be a female protagonist with a male companion if they choose the female washroom, and vice versa. This is the first explicit attempt to include gender differentiations in a video game (Ray, 2004).

The rise of female protagonists began with the introduction of the character Samus Aran from the franchise *Metroid*, being heralded and regarded as the “first playable human female character in a mainstream video game” (Guinness World Records, 2012). A video game icon for feminists in the gaming community, Samus Aran was regarded as the video game industry’s

“first dominant female, a femme de force that didn't rely on a man to save her” (GameDaily, 2008), leading the charge for implementing female protagonists in video games which was considered to be a male-dominated role, and was regarded as a breakthrough for female characters in video games. According to some authors, she was perhaps “the most non-sexualized female video game character ever” (Hawisher, Selfe & Gee, 2007), where portrayals of women were in scantily-clad clothing with large breasts (Jansz & Martis, 2007). Samus Aran’s true identity was not revealed until the end of the 1986 game *Metroid*, but due her portrayal and character being athletic as well as disguised under a suit of heavy weaponry and armoury evident of masculine traits, many consumers thought that she was a man, but ultimately her revelation as a woman surprised the gaming community, with reviewing websites describing the moment as a “jaw-dropping moment” (UGO, 2011), or considered as “the greatest twist in video game history” (Game Informer, 2007). She gained a cult following over the years and has been considered to be “enduringly popular” amongst gamers, selling over 17 million copies of the original *Metroid* as of September 2012 (Guinness World Records, 2012), and remains one of *Nintendo*’s most recognizable figures and most popular video game mascots (Rabin, 2009).

In the 90’s, the presence of female characters in a leading role began to increase, appearing in popular game franchises such as *Tomb Raider* and *Resident Evil*, with iconic characters such as Lara Croft and Jill Valentine starring in each of them respectively. Lara Croft is depicted as a British archaeologist, and the daughter of archaeologists. After multiple adventures across the globe engaging in expeditions to recover ancient artifacts, she morphs from a vulnerable girl into a survivalist, mercenary, and an adept thief. The series received critical acclaim and was considered an “unexpected success” as the protagonist is typically male, reaching the top of sales charts and remaining there for a considerable amount of time with the

first entry of the series selling over seven million units worldwide (Marshall, 2013). Lara Croft's debut in the 1996 game original *Tomb Raider* was often cited as a catalyst for more female leads in video games (Casamassina, 2007), and had brought "girl power" to video games (Hwang, 2005). Similar to Samus Aran, the appearance of Lara Croft was credited with redefining what what women could do and achieve if placed into a protagonist role (IGN, 2009).

Despite the revolutionary success of having a woman in a protagonist role, gamers and critics attributed the success of *Tomb Raider* with that of the main character Lara Croft's appearance, as Lara Croft was considered and regarded as a sex symbol (Dell, 2005), and one of the first video game icons to be accepted as a mainstream sex symbol (Schedeen, 2009). The first iteration of Lara Croft was one of the first characters to be openly considered sexy and voluptuous (Ashley, 2006). This 'sexy' description could mostly be attributed to her depiction of having large breasts as one of her defining characteristics. Smith (1998) conducted an interview with the players of *Tomb Raider*, which players when discussing Lara Croft, regularly mention her breasts as her most memorable feature. Her portrayal has also reached cross-platform such as the internet and movies, in particular appearing and featuring in fantastical scenarios in pornography; with fans developing techniques and modifications to remove clothing from Croft's body to put her in compromising situations (Parish, 2004).

Feminist reactions to Lara Croft have been negative, with common critiques relating to the unrealistic portrayal of a woman's physical appearance, and inadvertently imposing these unrealistic ideals regarding the female body to consumers. Lara Croft drew analogies and allusions to classic literature with critics describing her as the female counterpart to the titular character Frankenstein in Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein*, as the "monstrous offspring of science, an idealized, eternally young female automaton, a malleable, well-trained techno-puppet"

designed by and fit for heterosexual men (Csikszentmihalyi, 1998), where curvy bodies and large breasts are paramount (Schleiner, 2001; Greer, 1999).

This idealized view of what a female protagonist should be like seemingly perpetuates the concept that women are simply sex objects, it is undoubtedly still a step in the positive direction. Lara Croft remains a role model for women and girls alike and a stepping point into the field of a male-dominated domain of video games (Staff, 1997). Although Lara Croft physically hyperbolizes feminine ideals and ‘goals’ and could be considered a drawback on what Samus Aran had previously accomplished. However, Lara Croft does not embody the ‘helpless bimbo’ or ‘battle trophy’ that was emphasized in earlier eras of video games such as *Donkey Kong*. On the contrary, she breaks the expectations for female characters through being violent, capable and sexy; positing that women can be attractive albeit unnecessary, and intelligent, as throughout the games she is required to demonstrate effective logical thinking and puzzle solving whilst combating enemies.

In the *Resident Evil* franchise, Jill Valentine was regarded as the first playable female character in the survival horror genre (Guinness World Records, 2012), and was another exemplar praised for defying gender stereotypes, drawing comparisons to some of her early female protagonist cohorts like Samus Aran and Lara Croft, due to her character background as a competent, clever and professional soldier who relied on herself to face insurmountable challenges. Jill Valentine was depicted as a member of a Special Forces military unit who was caught out in the midst of a zombie apocalypse, thus relying on her set of skills and dexterity to survive the apocalypse. Like Samus Aran, Jill Valentine is considered to be one of the least sexualized female characters ever created, although her apparel can be described as ‘revealing’ but definitely not obscene (Ruberg, 2005). Shinji Makami, the creator of *Resident Evil*,

expressed his opposition to sexual objectification and perceived inferiority of women in video games, and avoids eroticizing his characters. In addition, he refused to portray women that were submissive to men or in light of emphasized femininity, and wrote female characters “who discover their independence as the game progresses or who already know they are independent but often tested against challenges” (Stuart, 2014, pg.1). Despite the game and creator’s progressive nature towards women in video games, the game has components that could be considered as ‘ironic’ or ‘hypocritical’. For example, Grimes (2003) argued that Jill Valentine was subordinate to the male characters in the game and was also the only one to be depicted without a bulletproof vest, and sported provocatively close-fitting clothing.

In conclusion, the video game industry during the time period of 1980’s to 1990’s was a “man’s world”, dominated by men and male characters in the protagonist role (Salter & Blodgett, 2012). Through sexualization of female characters in video games, female consumers are thereby encouraged to pursue the ideals posited by video games and begin seeing themselves negatively (Botta, 1999). Men on the other hand are more inclined to view women as ‘eye candy’. However, with the rise of female protagonists, women are encouraged to view themselves not subordinate to men, but at the same playing field. However, due to the success of female protagonists, most notably the ones that were discussed, video games will be more inclined to have strong female leads in video games. In addition, it can empower women by knowing that video games with female characters and leads are successful, and that they occupy a vital role in the world of video gaming (Jansz & Martis, 2007).

What is Media?

The author defines media as a form of communication that is meant for conveying messages. Associated with mass media, the forms of media encompass a wide range of products

and outlets such as television, music, radio, newspapers, and the press (Lister, Giddings, Dovey, Grant & Kelly, 2008). Regardless of which form it takes, contemporary society is saturated with the presence of mass media because of how easy it is to access it, whether if it is television, internet, or movies to name a few examples.

However, what purposes do media serve and why is media created in the first place? Media according to a sociologist by the name of C. Wright Mills, is a replacement for the family; and the goals of individuals are dedicated to commodities such as media consumption. (Mann, 2011). By consuming media, such as watching television and advertisements, individuals are manipulated into buying things they do not need. This according to Mills, is the idea or ‘standard of reality’ that individuals need to buy things is reproduced over again in numerous forms of media, such as radio, television, and movies (Mann, 2011). Images and sounds from mass media seep into our consciousness from an early age and help shape our view of ourselves, constantly reminding individuals that our sole purpose is to consume and buy products (Mann, 2011). Research can corroborate the claims made by Mills as mass media influence is constant, and individuals are socialized into and by media from a young age to adulthood (Ghazali, 2010). Other forms of socialization such as parental or peer influence, is not perpetual in comparison to media (James, 1997). Noele-Neumann (1993) and Lowery & De Fleur (1995) have explored on how much media influences individuals and found that particularly identity creation processes and self-worth of individuals are highly affected by media consumption (Rajkowska, 2014). Dill & Dill (1998) concluded that media especially video games does affect its consumers, shaping players’ reflection of individual self-worth, body image, and sexuality etc.

The things that we see in media, according to Mills is because it is what the ruling class or the “Power Elite”, wants us to see and internalize (Mann, 2011). This “Power Elite”

constitutes a variety of different groups including media representatives that works together on a constant basis to make sure that they control every aspect of society, the political, economic, and military circles (Mann, 2011). Consequently, what we end up getting is a system that allows the members of the “Power Elite” to easily move from and to each of those three realms, perpetuating their line of thinking across all facets of society, institutionalizing it as ‘normal’ and ‘the way it is’ (Mann, 2011). As a result, media messages through Mills’ interpretation, will be consistent throughout all forms of media. Video games, are the product of this “Power Elite”, and whatever we see in video games favours them and reproduces the their worldview or their values. For example, if we see women as sexualized objects in video games, one can argue that the “Power Elite” is patriarchal, and sees things from the ‘male gaze’, the dominant way of thinking from the cultural standard of a heterosexual man (Kimmel & Holler, 2017), and this portrayal of women will be consistent in other forms of media. In addition, due to the overreaching power of the “Power Elite”, culture, as a result, is also their product. Media is simply just another tool at their disposal that can be used to shape reality to their liking; media shapes culture and what we think is natural.

Theoretical Frameworks

In this section, a short review of theoretical approaches relevant for this study will take place. A choice was made by the author of two key theories, Cultivation Theory, posited by George Gerbner (1994), and the Cultural Toolkit, posited by Ann Swidler (1986). These two theories are chosen by the author because they are the most relevant to the discussion of video games/media as a socialization agent. Both theories posit that individuals learn from experiences, whether it is from television for Gerbner or from “symbolic vehicles” according to Swidler, and then we reflect upon these experiences and apply them into reality. Gerbner’s theory in a sense,

provides the backbone on how socialization works through watching television and listening to stories. Swidler indirectly improves upon Gerbner's theory and further explains how socialization works by introducing a term named the 'cultural toolkit', which posits that we learn from everything, with television being one of the many mediums we can take from to use in our 'toolkit' and is not the single most important socialization agent. Nonetheless, the two theories provide explanation on how exactly individuals learn, and these 'experiences' in the form of media, are constantly shaping individuals by providing information and knowledge as guidance.

Cultivation Theory

Cultivation theory was developed by George Gerbner and Larry Gross in 1976, derived from large-scale research projects in a comprehensive project entitled the *Cultural Indicators* (Gerbner, Gross, Morgan & Signorielli, 1994). The project was attempting to address issues of violence in American culture; one specific area of interest was the effects of television violence on audiences. Television, according to Gerbner is a 'story', and he posits that the world of media (television) exerts a broad, 'gravitational' pull on the viewer, systematically shaping their worldview to match that of the symbolic one on TV (Gerbner et al., 1994), suggesting that viewers of television were more likely to perceive the real world in ways that reflect the television world.

What we know or what we think we know are hardly experienced; for example, we have never experienced death besides seeing other people die, yet there are personal connections to what death is and what comes after death that varies depending on beliefs, faiths, and values. According to Gerbner (1998), this is the result of stories and interacting with them. Gerbner states that we live in a world erected by stories that to an extent, socializes us into roles of gender, class, vocation, and lifestyle (Gerbner, 1999). Stories weave the seamless web of our

cultural environment, animating our cultural environment into revealing how things work, describing what certain things are, and lastly tell us what to do about them (Gerbner, 1999). Gerbner (1998) claimed that our stories were used to be hand crafted, homemade, and community inspired, which implies that stories used to only reach a handful of people. However, in contemporary society, stories are now mass produced and policy driven, the result of a complex manufacturing and marketing process we commonly known as the mass media, new stories and knowledge emerged in the form of television (Gerbner, 1998). In other words, media affects consumers' perception of the real world to reflect what they see on television. Media tells a 'story' that delivers knowledge and experience that effectively shapes how we view certain situations, which if repeated to a certain extent, becomes institutionalized in the form of culture.

Gerbner was not concerned with what forms of media people liked or disliked, nor was he concerned with how people interpreted the messages that media is conveying. His conclusion regarding television was the result of trying to find out how the influence of a much broader scope of messages affected the public as people were exposed to media messages in their daily lives (Potter, 2014). In other words, Gerbner using the medium of television as a focus, wanted to examine how media affects how people who watch television think and act, creating an environment which integrates diverse communities and people, socializing people into certain inclinations, roles, and behaviours; such as gender roles and trivializing violence. Television according to Gerbner, is the dominant form of communication, and can be likened to traditional forms of media such as folk tales and fairy-tales that conveys messages, because it socializes individuals and provides information to draw from.

Arendt (2010) claimed that media researchers tend to focus on television and the effects it has on consumers because it is the most common form of media consumption in the world.

However, cultivation theory researches have shown to be applicable to a wide range of products and media outlets such as television, music, radio, newspapers, and the press (Lister, Giddings, Dovey, Grant & Kelly, 2008; Arendt, 2010), that is readily available to consumers for individuals to choose from that best suits their preferences, personalities, and interests (Arnett, 1995). This includes the facet of video games and the effects it has on consumers and their interpretation of the social world.

An issue that arises from applying the cultivation theory to video games, is the ability to evaluate video games the same way Gerbner evaluated television, as both are separate mediums and entities. There are fundamental differences between video games and television, for example the depiction of violence. Dominick (1984) argued, “Video game violence is abstract and generally consists of blasting spaceships or stylized aliens into smithereens”, whilst television shows were mostly more “down to earth” and relevant. Considering this, video games and television should be evaluated differently, but the author contends that these two entities are similar and video games can be assessed with the Cultivation Theory. Video games are more realistic today due to technological advancements which led to increased quality of gameplay, and more complex scenarios being portrayed leading to more realistic depictions (Hadzinsky, 2014). In addition, with the prevalence of virtual reality gaming, players are no longer staring at a screen, but rather they are propelled into the game itself for added effects, making the player feel like that they are actually in the game. With this in mind, video games as a result can be likened to television, in a way that they are both realistic to a certain extent, and consumers can now shape their worldview to match the one they see in video games, in addition to the one they see on television. Video games create an environment that allows the consumers to embody an

active role as they get to control the character and progress through the story at their own pace, unlike passively absorbing information from television.

Cultural Toolkit

Swidler's (1986) work is centred on the concept of culture and the influence of culture on the explanation of social action. Swidler's theory is still used in contemporary research, but with a twist to 'modernize' her ideas to explain entities like corporations and present-day governments (Weber, 2005; Noordegraaf & Vermeulen, 2010). Nonetheless, the core concepts are still the same, as researchers relate to Swidler's idea of repertoire and set of skills that individuals or groups (corporations, governments) use to their advantage.

Swidler develops the 'cultural toolkit' at a time where the predominant explanation of culture was to use a 'structural' paradigm, rather than a 'cultural' explanation (Patterson, 2019). The structured perspective posits that culture's only objective is to shape action by supplying ultimate ends or values towards the explanation of action; that individuals are inclined and geared towards an action because of their values and it seems to be constant, fixed, and inevitable. This transforms individuals into becoming passive actors whom are incapable of thinking for themselves. Swidler critiques this reigning model used to understand culture's effects on action, and argues that it is fundamentally misleading (Swidler, 1986). In response, Swidler argues for a 'cultural' explanation that places priority and emphasizing the individual's agency, explaining how despite having the same values, some are less fortunate than others in their search of success.

Swidler argued that culture is "symbolic vehicles of meaning", and these 'vehicles' can take forms in beliefs, ritual practices, and numerous other forms as well that could very well include media (Swidler, 1986, pg. 273). Essentially, Swidler argued that these "vehicles of

meaning” are forms of knowledge and experiences of people to accept and integrate into their ‘cultural toolkit’, a “style or set of skills and habits than a set of preferences or wants” (Swidler, 1986, pg. 275). Using the concept of the “cultural toolkit”, Swidler explained why some people do what they do. Swidler argued that actors’ ultimate ends or goals do not necessarily have a preordained method of achieving them, but rather stringent on the actor’s ‘toolkit’ or selected “strategies of action” (Swidler, 1986, pg. 276), as efficient means to given ends. People essentially learn a set of skills or repertoire through culture and interactions with “vehicles of meaning”, which they selectively choose accordingly for constructing their lines of actions (Swidler, 1986, pg. 277) to use at their disposal in certain situations. Swidler does not blame the victim for why they have not achieved success, but rather it is because they do not have the ‘tools’ that are paramount to success. “People will come to value ends for which their cultural equipment is well suited” (Swidler, 1986, pg. 277), meaning that if an individual does not have the skills to pursue a certain line of action, they should look for another line where their cultural competencies or ‘tools in their toolkit’ are going to shine or be more useful; as trying to force yourself to another line would require “drastic and costly cultural retooling” (Swidler, 1986, pg. 277).

The relation between the discussion of media and Swidler’s ideas is not clear-cut and could be confusing to connect the two together. However, what is important about using Swidler’s theory of the cultural toolkit to discuss media is that people can learn methods or incorporate ‘tools into their toolkit’ from media to approach something or engage in social action. Individuals, according to Swidler conduct certain actions or lines of thinking because it is what they are capable or the best at. If people are socialized into certain inclinations, roles, and behaviours from media, they are susceptible to reproduce said inclinations, roles, and behaviours

because it is what they are ‘good’ at. This relates to the connection between media and culture. If a group of individuals use media, and reproduce what they see in it, it becomes institutionalized under the pretense that it is ‘normal’ and ‘everyone is doing it’.

Media can very well provide information for individuals to construct their toolkit and strategies of actions. Underrepresentation of women across media might influence individuals to incorporate into their toolkit that men are the default cultural standard whilst women are either invisible or unsubstantial (Collins, 2011; Wood, 1994); inadvertently shaping cultural standards which reinforces a ‘standard of reality’ or in Marxist terms, a ‘false consciousness’ that serves to benefit those who are favoured, specifically the power elite (Mann, 2011). People who watch mainstream television are likely to display greater acceptance of stereotypical and casual attitudes about sex, higher expectations about the prevalence of sexual activity and of certain sexual outcomes, and, even occasionally, with greater levels of sexual experience (Ward, 2003), because it was the ‘tools’ that were provided to them. This causes individuals to reproduce this behaviour, sustaining traditionally or stereotyped views of gender, such as men are aggressive and women are passive (Craig, 1992; Wood, 1994; Collins, 2011). Furthermore, in a study concerning the usage of mass media in changing social norms and behaviours in Rwanda, Paluck & Green (2009) found that mass media can influence the set of culturally available behavioral practices that citizens use—the “toolkit” of political cultural conduct, where the citizens after listening to a radio drama, selectively aligned and connected with the characters that broke the traditional expectations.

The implications of Swidler’s theory are endless as it does not limit where we can get our ‘tools’ nor does it limit when we can acquire them. Socialization is a life-long process, and individuals throughout their lifetime can continuously acquire and replace tools into their toolkit

to be used in numerous situations. Swidler would not condemn individuals who display characteristics that are result of media such as television including hypermasculine beliefs, gender stereotypes, or casual attitudes about sex etc. (Dill & Thill, 2007). Swidler would claim that people who accept hypermasculine beliefs, do so because of their exposure to mainstream television, and lack of exposure to other content. In essence, individuals behave in a certain way because it is where their competencies lie and what they are brought up to believe, but are capable of change and are not necessarily destined to remain like this forever.

Literature Review

As previously mentioned, video games are a form of socialization agent and media that has potential to inform and influence an individual's way of thinking. In order to assess what ideas video games are promoting, a literature review must be conducted to not only show what previous research studies concluded regarding the content in various forms of media, and video games. As this study's topic is regarding gender, especially femininity, the following literature review will be focused on the intersection between gender and some forms of media (television, commercials, books, newspapers etc.) and gender and a specific form of media, video games.

Gender and Various Forms of Media

Media, as previously mentioned are found in numerous forms such as television, books, movies, newspapers etc. How media decides to portray certain concepts such as gender, and the what the 'ideal' man or woman is can differ across media. Media such as commercials that are targeted to one sex tends to portray gender differently than commercials for the other sex (Craig, 1992). An example would be the sexualizing women by depicting them in scantily-clad clothing in a men's commercial advertising alcohol. On the contrary, in a commercial that is targeted

towards women, would include a mother and child scenario that advertises cleaning utilities for household work. Media such as commercials and advertisements cater towards a specific audience in order to make profit, ensuring that the sex and gender they cater to would have an increased likeliness to buy the product it is advertising (Craig, 1992; Kempf & Palan, 1997). Although advertisement is not the main research topic, it brings to light an issue, that an individual must be critical of media portrayals of gender and should consider those portrayals under careful evaluation as media are motivated by how much they can sell, rather than aiming to depict an accurate representation of gender.

Firstly, women are underrepresented across a wide range of media and settings. Whether it is prime-time television, in which there are three times as many white men as women (Basow, 1992), or children's programming, in which men outnumber women by two to one (Wood, 1994). As time goes on, representation of women across media is still the same. Schwartz (2010) found that men are almost three times more likely to appear in newspaper coverage, and nearly twice as often in local television news coverage than women (Desmond & Danilewicz, 2010). Nether and Murphy (2010) found that women represent 38% of the major characters appearing on popular primetime television programs. In music videos drawn from five music-oriented television networks, men outnumber women by a ratio of 3 to 1 (Turner, 2010). Overall, media misrepresent actual proportions of men and women in the population, which might imply the imbalance in power relations between men and women with men at the top; the view that men are the dominant sex and therefore the cultural standard are reinforced and conveyed to consumers.

Secondly, gender is portrayed in stereotypical manners. Women for example are involved in female-coded activities such as housework, chores, and caretaking. This is seen in television

shows where women are more likely to take on interpersonal roles such as motivating and socializing with other people than men, and men are more likely to take on a work role (Lauzen, Dozier & Horan, 2008). Women are described and depicted in relation to or dependent on men, depicting women as unimportant or subordinate in comparison to men (Davis, 1990; Craig, 1992). As a result, men are valued and assessed based on their achievements and accomplishments by individuals such as their bosses, whilst women are valued and assessed by factors other than achievements such as appearances. Men are presented in media as hard, tough, independent, sexually aggressive, unafraid, violent, totally in control of all emotions, and above all-in no way feminine (Wood, 1994), whilst women are represented as the exact opposite. For example, *The Sopranos*—a violent, hypermasculine television show is noted for hypermasculine themes, namely that violence is both thrilling and manly, and women are meant for the private sphere, particularly household work including cooking and cleaning (Scharrer, 2005).

Lastly, when women are portrayed, it is often in a “circumscribed” and negative manner (Collins, 2011; Vernon, Williams Jr, Phillips & Wilson, 1991; Wood, 1994). Women are sexualized, appearing in content that displays them in scanty or provocative clothing, or were subordinated as indicated by their appearance in compromising positions, facial expressions, and other factors (Collins, 2011). When they were not sexualized or described in relation to men, they were depicted as evil or undesirable. Media creates two juxtaposed archetypes of women as the result of perceived positive and negative traits; the “good” woman and the “bad” woman (Wood, 1994). “Bad” women are the ones who are evil or undesirable, and consistently represented as the ‘witch’, ‘bitch’, ‘non-woman’, or all the things that a “good” woman is not. What constitutes a “bad” woman according to media, is uncaring, not focused on home/family, and not subordinate to men, but rather hard, cold, and aggressive (male-coded characteristics).

For example, this is corroborated in children's literature, where antagonists are commonly witches or evil stepmothers, with beautiful and passive women like Snow White or Sleeping Beauty as their benevolent counterparts (Wood, 1994). In prime-time television, men were more likely to be depicted characteristics that are generally regarded in American society as "positive" or "desirable", such as wealthy, creative, flexible, intelligent, extraverted, and physically healthy (Vernon et al., 1991). Women on the contrary are not only underrepresented in being described by these traits, but are also more likely to be described with "undesirable" traits such as unintelligent, unpleasant, socially isolated, and poor (Vernon et al., 1991).

Overall, women's inclusion in media is mostly stereotypical, negative, and they are not included to the same degree that men are. As stated in the theoretical frameworks, this may inadvertently socialize women into reproducing the same behaviour, or feelings of irrelevance and insignificance through exclusion by media consumption. In the realm of "be careful what you wish for," simply increasing the prevalence of women among characters in media might exacerbate any problematic effects of media use unless the manner in which women are portrayed is also addressed (Collins, 2011).

Gender and Video Games

Most research in video games regarding the relationship gender were done through quantitative research. For example, Provenzo (1991) analyzed illustrations on the cover-boxes of video games, which usually had the main character on it. Beasley & Standley (2002) randomly selected a brief time sequence that has the character(s) they are studying in ten to twenty-minute intervals from the beginning or middle of their sampled games as units of analysis, and concluded that there is gender stereotyping, underrepresentation of women, and sexualization of women in video games. Downs & Smith (2010) conducted chi-square analyses on data that was

collected by using brief game segments and appearances as units of analysis to examine male and female sexuality, and concluded with similar results to Beasley and Standley (2002).

These conclusions that were drawn concerning the relationship between video games and gender and in particular femininity, mirror the themes found the previous section relating other forms of media and gender. Firstly, women are underrepresented in video games in general, with studies supporting this notion. Dietz (1998) found that there are no female characters in 41% of video games that were examined. Years later, similarly to Dietz (1998), Jansz & Martis (2007) found that in the first generations of video games, are dominated by male characters. Williams, Martins, Consalvo, & Ivory (2009) built upon the conclusion found by Dietz (1998) and found in their study that women appear in only 14% of the video games they sampled, a decrease from the 41% as previously established. As stated earlier in the discussion on various forms of gender, the results of this implies that women are invisible and unimportant in comparison to men; and men are the dominant sex and therefore the cultural standard.

When women are represented, they tend to be portrayed as sex objects in an overtly sexualized manner (Downs & Smith, 2010; Beasley & Standley, 2002). Common examples of sexualization of women includes appearing in scantily clad or revealing clothing, and having physical characteristics such as large breasts or buttocks (Jansz & Martis, 2007; Beasley & Standley, 2002). As previously mentioned, Schleiner (2001) argued that Lara Croft for example, lived up to the standards of media endorsed stereotypes of women, and contends that she is an idealized woman, created by and for the male gaze, the dominant cultural way of seeing from the view of a heterosexual male subject (Kimmel & Holler, 2017). Glaubke, Miller, Parker & Espejo (2001) argued that female characters may be as tough as the male characters, and may have to face similar missions and opponents, but they have an added challenge: to look sexy while doing

it. Women despite being heroes and displaying qualities that are originally to be thought of as male-coded such as violent and aggressive (Dill & Thill, 2007), are still largely portrayed as sex objects. The archetype of being curvaceously thin, beautiful, sexy and overtly sexualized still prevails in video games today, evident in Downs & Smith (2010)'s sample of popular video games across consoles created by Nintendo, Sony, and Microsoft.

In addition, women were also more likely to be portrayed as less aggressive, non-essential, passive than men, with male characters are more likely than female characters to be portrayed as aggressive (Dill & Thill, 2007; Dietz, 1998). As a result, female characters are found mostly in supportive roles, who are either to be rescued, assistants to the leading male characters (Mou & Peng, 2009). On the contrary, men are not only portrayed as aggressive, but also confident and bold, which empowers men, but in a way that is detrimental to women. Out of the games examined by Dietz (1998) that allowed for aggression and violence such as fighting games or *Grand Theft Auto*, women are portrayed as the targets of men's aggression and violence, either getting killed by them or assaulted by them.

Lastly, women are more likely to take on a protagonist role which are originally a male-dominated role, which may be one of the first steps towards equal representations in video games (Dill & Thill, 2007). Female characters are less likely to be portrayed as the proverbial "damsel in distress" but rather as the main character and heroes of the game (Summers & Miller, 2014; Kondrat, 2015). Women and men now share the spotlight in the leading role, occupying a "dominant" position as often as men did (Jansz & Martis, 2007; Kondrat, 2005). However, even when video games have female protagonists, the endings for these characters in these games are unfortunate and ill-fated. These protagonists were forced to 'sacrifice' themselves; for example, in *The Walking Dead*, the protagonist gets her leg chopped off after being bitten by a zombie to

save her life, and in *Life is Strange*, the protagonist allows her friend to be killed to save her hometown. This is all in the name to maintain the ‘greater good’, and can be interpreted by the players as natural, fated, and necessary (Butt & Dunne, 2017), putting out the idea that there are consequences to being a strong female protagonist that leads to disastrous endings, not only to the character, but also people who are associated with them.

From these results, women are still condemned to being assessed by their physical appearances, appearing as nothing more than a site of objectification and ‘eye candy’ that complements the male character’s instrumental traits, regardless of the female character’s role. However, the current representation of female gender in video games is better in comparison with video games in 80’s and 90’s and it is slowly changing because of the new independent game companies who are not concerned with mass production, are interested in creating new types of video games with their diverse characters (Kondrat, 2015). If this is true, current representations in particular the appearance and sexualization of female characters and women would seem to come to an end, but that remains to be seen.

In conclusion, like other forms of media, there tends to be a ‘trade-off’ for involving women in video games, and it ultimately depends on consumers’ preference of representation, quantity or quality. Women are included more often, but are depicted in an overtly sexualized manner. If this is the nature of female video game characters, should the number of female characters be increased at all (Ivory, 2006)? Instead of focusing on increasing the number of women in video games, should we be concerned about the proper representation of women?

Methodology

The main concern of conducting this project is to develop a thorough understanding on how femininity is depicted in video games; what roles do women occupy, and what are their appearances like? In particular, how does *League of Legends* portray female characters?

Few research studies have been completed that involve thoroughly playing a video game or watching a video game playthrough as the main sources of information, instead relying on superficial information such as box covers or brief moments in the game. Unfortunately, these strategies have serious disadvantages because they are unable to give comprehensive detailed information about the unit of analysis they are studying, as they use information that are taken out of context. For example, Beasley & Standley (2002) had limitations in their study as they stated that some of the characters they studied were only seen in the introductory footage and were not available for game play. Downs & Smith (2010) stated that they ignored the introduction and finales of the video games which can contain information on overt sexuality, especially the finale as it is a reward to the player. In essence, by focusing on a specific part of a game, be it illustrations or short time segments, they are insufficient in judging a video game as it does not represent the game efficiently. For example, in a video game that is designed to be ten to twenty hours long, brief segments only constitute a minor part of the game. Illustrations/box covers are meant to entice the audience to buy the game and can strongly differ from actual video game content (Downs & Smith, 2010). As a result, conclusions that were drawn from these units of analysis are based on 'out of context' information, which leads to difference in interpretation than if the entire playthrough of the game was used. Playthroughs can not only provide additional information, but also take account of the entire story which can provide reasons on why it is like such.

Consequently, the author chose a qualitative research method because it seeks deeper meaning beyond assessing box covers and character models (Elo & Kyngäs, 2008), and rather interpreting what the data means and what overarching themes are there. Qualitative methods, in particular a qualitative content analysis is used by the author as the primary research method for this project. It uncovers details that are overlooked if only a random short section of the game is analyzed, or by only looking at illustrations. Hence the reason for selecting a qualitative approach is to present *League of Legends* with oversimplifying it, and by solely analyzing *League of Legends* would prevent the issue of overgeneralization. In order to accomplish this, playing through a game carefully and patiently is the most advantageous for research in this topic. Additional information regarding the research method are laid out in this section.

What is a Case Study?

A case study method involves the study of a single unit and analyzing it to discover information that exists in the case. In other words, “a case study is best defined as an intensive study of a single unit with an aim to generalize across a larger set of units” (Gerring, 2004, pg.341). If we are to define what a “case” is, a case is the unit that is chosen to be studied (Flyvbjerg, 2006). Case study methods are concerned with adequately describing a case, and the single case chosen is designed to connote a “spatially bounded” phenomenon that is observed at a single point in time or over a precise period of time. This means that it is imperative to establish the importance of case studies as an assessment of phenomena within a specific time or location frame (Gerring, 2004). In essence, case studies are excellent at providing an in-depth and detailed account of the unit that was studied.

However, it is important to take notice of some issues that arise from case studies. For example, case studies make the assumption that observations in one case is exactly the same in

other cases, leading to the same results. This makes case studies problematic, as it makes the assumption that “all other things are equal” (Gerring, 2004, pg.341). Case studies cannot ensure that the same results can be confidently reproduced for a claim that is designed for many units due to the fact it focuses purely on one unit, which brings up the issue on if results in one place are exactly the same in another place. In essence, the evidence provided by case studies can be critiqued on the basis of how probable it is to receive the same results if applied for another case or numerous cases (Gerring, 2004). Overall, choosing a case study or not ultimately depends on researchers that determines if doing a case study is advantageous or not. For this research topic, the case study method is advantageous for the author’s research topic because the author is only examining a single case/game, which is *League of Legends*.

What makes the author’s research a case study is the number of units chosen to go about with the research topic, which is femininity in video games. Research was done by examining multiple games and focusing on gathering trends among the games rather than aiming for an accurate description of the game (Jansz & Martis, 2007; Dietz, 1998; Downs & Smith, 2010; Summers & Miller, 2014; Dill & Thill, 2007) As a result, I have selected one unit or video game in attempt to understand more about the research topic of depictions of femininity in one single game.

What is a Content Analysis?

Content analysis is a method of analysing and interpreting written, verbal, or visual communication texts (Cole, 1988). Texts can be obtained from a vast array of sources such as narrative responses, open-ended survey questions, interviews, focus groups, observations, or of print media which encompasses articles, books, or manuals (Kondracki & Wellman, 2002), and for this study, video games. Content analysis allows researchers to use information from their

collected data and apply it to their areas of research. Similar to all empirical research, content analysis improves upon knowledge that was already established through past studies, providing innovative insights from new studies whilst representing facts and serving as a guide for new research to be done (Krippendorff, 1980). Artifacts such as video games contain data, and for the purpose of the research topic, *League of Legends* is used as the primary source of data, and in particular, the female characters in the game as units of analysis.

Qualitative content analysis is concerned with converting data and abstract concepts into relevant information that researchers can operationalize to discuss the overarching theme. By choosing a content analysis method, there is a systematic examination of texts. What is essential, however, is that the communicative material should be fixed or recorded in some form (Mayring, 2004). Qualitative researchers immerse themselves in the data to allow any new concepts or insights to emerge, and reading all data repeatedly to get a sense of the whole (Hsieh & Shannon, 2005). The main concern of qualitative content analysis as a result is to describe everything, without using over-hasty quantifications such as preconceived categories. (Mayring, 2004). The aim is to attain a condensed description of the phenomenon, and the outcome of the analysis leads to new concepts and categories that describe the phenomenon (Elo & Kyngäs, 2008). Qualitative researchers avoid using preconceived categories in qualitative analyses, and rather conduct research with an open mind and allow categories and names for categories emerge from the data (Kondracki & Wellman, 2002). They accomplish this by including information, regardless of its relevance, code the information and then organize it into categories (Kondracki & Wellman, 2002). The aim is to reduce the number of categories that are similar or dissimilar into broader categories, but how to do that is ultimately left to the researcher's discretion on what to and not to include in a category (Dey, 1993). Creating categories provides a means of

describing phenomena and to increase understanding and generate knowledge of the research topic(s) at hand and what the topic(s) represents (Cavanaugh, 1997). In essence, qualitative researchers seek to illuminate and understand the phenomena without generalizing it, and applying results and conclusions to similar situations to notice if there are any similarities and differences among them in order to draw conclusions (Hoepfl, 1997).

However, what is the connection between content analysis and a case study? By conducting a qualitative content analysis on the game *League of Legends*, the two concepts come together because the author is analyzing and interpreting texts (Cole, 1988) in *League of Legends*. This was done to provide an in-depth and detailed account of the unit that was studied, *League of Legends* (Gerring, 2004), in order to provide insight regarding portrayals of women in video games.

Choice of Material

The case of the case study is *League of Legends*. It is a multiplayer online battle game or colloquially known as a 'MOBA' (Mora-Cantalops & Sicilia, 2018). This game was chosen as the focus was due to the popularity of the game and the amount of people who partake in this game. The purpose of the game is to select a 'champion' to play in the game and work alongside your teammates to siege the enemy base and destroy their base or 'Nexus' in order to win the game. Players can choose to either play with other players known as "PvP", artificial intelligence-controlled players known as "PvE", or in a custom game where players can choose ways to alter the game for their own preferences. There are many game modes available in the game, but the primary focus is on a game mode named "Summoner's Rift". "Summoner's Rift" is organized into three lanes; top, mid, and bottom lane, and a jungle. The players then engage in gameplay until the enemy base is destroyed, which indicates a victory, or have their base destroyed, which indicates a loss. In order to destroy the base, players will have to destroy

structures such as turrets and towers to get close to the enemy base, which enemy players attempt to prevent. As a result, players are pit against each other in lanes or in the “jungle” to contest for supremacy either by fighting against one another and destroying structures such as turrets and powerful neutral characters such as “dragons” and “Baron Nashor” which grants bonus attributes to those that slay them. Currently, there is a total 143 champions in *League of Legends* and 49 of them are female characters. Each champion or character has a specific ‘role’ that they play in the game, which follows: Assassin, Fighter, Mage, Marksman, Support, and Tank. These roles are predetermined by the game. A sample of twelve female “champions”, two from each unique category was made in order to describe each category or role. These champions were randomized from the game by a gameplay mechanic in the game that can randomize champions.

Unit of Analysis and Coding

The unit of analysis for this study are the female characters in the game. Female characters or “champions” are assessed and analyzed by the author. Identifying characters and labelling them conclusively as female or male was an issue, as many characters in the game were not human, but of other “species” so gender can not be confidently attributed at first glance. An example would be “Rek’Sai, the Void Burrower”, a scorpion-like champion that does not speak but is female due to lore depicting it as a “her”; and reasons for describing her as a female character are unknown. In response to this issue, female champions were coded based off of a combination of details in addition to appearances such as feminine names (Elise, Lulu etc.), given pronouns in lore (she, her), and voices which women are higher in pitch than men, indicating a ‘higher’ voice (Lattner, Meyer & Friederici, 2005). Champions have unique abilities, and organized by the game into three groups; “passive”, “basic” and an “ultimate”. Champions also have unique taunts, walking and attacking animations, which are complemented with a

unique character quote or saying. An example would be when Soraka is attacking her enemies, she comments that “they (opponents) will know serenity”. Also, as previously stated, their background stories will also be analyzed and assessed. Players can also customize their chosen characters/champions through microtransactions, as *League of Legends* provides an online shop that players can use to convert real life currency into in-game currency. Players can buy ‘skins’ for a character which changes their appearances with this in-game currency. This can lead to variation in of gameplay in terms of what these characters look like; therefore, the original character model is the primary focus and the available skins that can be purchased are not analyzed. Female characters are analyzed consistently under these factors. However, there are champions that have unique interactions with other champions, so it is important to acknowledge that not all champions have these interactions nor would they be seen during this study as it is a highly variable subject and different combinations of characters in the game could potentially lead to completely new dialogue.

Male characters are only analyzed to provide a comparison between the two groups of characters, to notice if there were any differences or characteristics that were unique to one group and not the other. Male characters were only analyzed in terms of what roles they occupy, and what appearances were they depicted in, due to the fact they are not the main focus.

Data Generation

League of Legends is an online game, which makes it difficult to pause or suspend gameplay to record data and information during playthroughs especially if other human players are playing alongside you, making it impractical for one person to stop the game for themselves. As a result, data generation was conducted in two ways.

The first method is through playing the game; recording data and information encountered in the game on a piece of paper by pen along the way. Before the game was played by the author, the randomized (by the game) character's biography or in-game lore was analyzed to inquire more about their story before they were selected to partake in gladiatorial combat. These background stories were also accompanied by a picture of the characters. Therefore, these stories are read to record details such as what their occupation was, characteristics and personality if applicable, and how they were portrayed and dressed in, once again onto paper by pen. Each game was played with a female champion that was randomized by a gameplay mechanic in the game that can randomize characters, on a map named "Summoner's Rift". Twelve games are played in a PvE game mode called "Practice Mode" in a one-on one scenario with a computer-controlled player or artificial intelligence, rather than playing in a mode with other human players, on Summoner's Rift. This is due to overlapping information with other characters selected by other human players that would have made recording and remaining attentive to data more difficult, as they get to control the character to the extent to which they are programmed. For example, they would have access to all the quotes and abilities of that character, which when overlapped, would be too distracting. Practice Mode allows players to modify the game to their desired liking such as adding in-game currency which can buy items that enhances your character, or turning off damage taken to become indestructible etc. These games were played by the author from start to finish, where the end of a game is determined by the destruction of the enemy base, indicated by a "victory" symbol being shown in the game. These games were approximately ten to twenty minutes in length, indicated by a timer in the game that is placed in the upper-right corner.

The second method of data generation was using recorded video game footage. Footage was recorded by the author using an app called named “Plays”. The purpose of this was to re-watch the game to demarcate relevant information that were ignored during the first playthrough, documenting data accordingly on what has been recorded by the author and what was not. All other game modes can be recorded in the same way. Data that was recorded was exactly the same as what the author experienced in the game, as indicated by a timer and ‘bookmark’ on which event happened at what time. Every detail such as specific quotes, when the game started and finished, were exactly the same.

Once the data was generated, the data was coded and separated into different categories. Every quote, ability, action, background story etc. that was noticed by the author for each character, are separated based off of how similar or different they were. For example, all relevant information regarding leadership tendencies would be put into one category. Afterwards, the categories are given a name and description and best suits the information under that specific category.

It is important to note that the game is fixed to a certain extent, the player can select their character and the opponent that they want to go up against. Female characters and their behaviours/interactions with their opponents were mostly the same, with the only exception of some characters like Evelyn who can have unique dialogue with specific characters, and not others. Due to this, what can be implied is that there are other characters that have unique dialogue/interactions with other characters, but were not seen in the duration of the study.

Results

The following section describes the results of the study. The results regarding female characters in the game *League of Legends* are organized into six sections: one section describing the roles they occupied in the game along with a brief description of what a specific role entails, four sections on the behaviours and characteristics of the female characters, and lastly a section on what the female characters' appearances are.

Role Distinctions and Demographics

Female characters in *League of Legends* are underrepresented in the game. As previously mentioned, *League of Legends* has 143 champions or characters in the game as of April 2019, and only 49 of them are conclusively female as stated by their lore and background stories.

These champions represent the following roles of Marksman, Mage, Fighter, Assassin, Tank, and Support. This following table represents the amount of female characters in the game and the distribution of female characters into the roles they occupy:

Female Characters and Role Distribution

Female Characters in the game/Total of Characters	Female Marksmans/ Total of Marksmans	Female Mages/ Total of Mages	Female Fighters/ Total of Fighters	Female Assassins/ Total of Assassins	Female Tanks/ Total of Tanks	Total of Female Supports/ Total of Supports
49/143	12/22	15/33	9/40	5/15	3/19	5/14

It is important to note there is no role that is 'better' than the others, but the role that was assigned by the game is a suggestion on where the selected champion is the most effective. In order to become 'strong', there are items in the game that can be purchased using 'gold', an in-game currency at will and open to everyone that can heighten your defenses or attacks. The game also lists a suggestion of items that best suits the selected character.

The role Marksman has several characteristics that defines the role and its objective in the game. Through playing the game, Marksmans in *League of Legends* are characterized by a few details. They are weak early in the game, such as a lack of damage output, defenses, and sustain. However, with resources such as gold, Marksmans can buy items which makes them strong and effective, perhaps the strongest in terms of damage output during the later stages of the game. They are weak in terms of defense in comparison to the rest of the roles and can be killed quite easily during all stages of the game which leads to the necessity of having an additional player, usually a Support to help them during the early phases of the game.

Mages in the game are equipped with abilities because they were able to master the art of magical forces and energy. Their kits allow them to deal either sustained damage from up close with their abilities that enhances their damage output; either by providing a shield or a heal that prolongs their presence in a fight. They can dispatch an enemy player from afar with abilities for a quick kill before players even have time to react. Similar to Marksmans, they sacrifice mobility and defense in favour of damage.

Fighters in *League of Legends* are characterized by their inclination to be up-close and in the center of skirmishes with opponents. They have the capacity to deal continuous damage due

to their high defense statistics and have abilities that heals and shields them from harm which lengthens their time in a skirmish. They thrive in prolonged skirmishes where roles such as Marksmans, Assassins, and Mages are unable to once they are caught by enemy champions.

Assassins in the game are characterized by their ability to assassinate priority targets to potentially turn the game into their own favour. Assassins are demarcated by having abilities that allow them to slay their target in the quickest way possible. Defensively, they are not as inclined as other roles such as Tanks or Fighters, but to make up for the fact that they can be easily killed as they can kill, they are given by the game, a high-mobility approach that allows them to cover long distances in a short time period which they can utilize to assassinate someone and retreat quickly.

Tanks in the game are similar to the Fighter role, but where they differ is that Tanks sacrifice damage in exchange for powerful “crowd control” abilities such as stuns and suppresses which inhibits their enemies from performing actions in the game. Characterized by having strong base defense statistics, their purpose in the game is not to kill enemy champions; but to disrupt enemies and redirecting their focus onto themselves, subsequently buying enough time for their teammates to remove potential threats. Their defenses allow them to absorb a significant amount of punishment in exchange for lack of damage.

Supports are characterized by their inability to do anything whilst alone, so they heavily rely on their teammates and other roles to become relevant and useful in a game. They achieve success by either amplifying their allies’ contribution to the game by supplying heals or removing stuns to assist their allies from death and enable takedowns on the enemy team. They lack prominent defense statistics or reliable sources of damage that would make other roles

successful in a solo scenario. They are seen assisting the Marksman during the early stages of the game, which would cover both the roles' weaknesses, making them efficient together.

Selected Champions of Analysis

The following is a list of the champions that were analyzed by the author and their corresponding roles according to the game. There was no deliberate attempt to select these characters other than the fact that these characters were selected randomly from the game that allows character randomization.

Selected Female Characters and their Given Role/Characteristics

Name	Role	Coded Characteristic(s)
Ashe	Marksman	Leader
Miss Fortune	Marksman	Leader
Irelia	Fighter	Leader
Shyvana	Fighter	Violent
Elise	Mage	Deceiver
Ahri	Mage	Deceiver
Evelynn	Assassin	Deceiver/Violent
Katarina	Assassin	Violent
Leona	Tank	Protector/Leader
Sejuani	Tank	Leader
Soraka	Support	Protector
Lulu	Support	Deceiver

Description of Female Characters

It is important to note that these following categories that are made from analyzing the female characters in the game are not mutually exclusive. Most of these characters display characteristics that were unique to one category, but some characters cannot be confidently attributed to one category only because there was sufficient evidence to suggest they can belong to another group. As a result, some of these characters appeared in more than one category. In addition, there is no correlation between a character's role and the each category their dominant characteristic. For example, a Mage is just as likely to be described as a leader like Marksmans or Tanks.

Women as Leaders

Out of the twelve examined characters, there are female champions in *League of Legends* that are depicted as the leaders of their respective group or tribe according to lore and in-game interactions such as quotes. They strive towards unity and leading the charge in battle, whilst motivating their allies with confidence whether for purposes like defending their home or for pillaging and robbing whilst displaying disdain for cowardice and respect for courage.

These characters have unique background stories that describes their occupation. Ashe is described as the commander of the Avarosan tribe which happens to be the most populous horde in the north. Irelia resides in her homeland of "Ionia", but her homeland was forcefully occupied by "Noxia", a region that is of great evil that is built upon the reputation of conquest and oppression of neighbouring communities. Irelia was essentially forced into becoming a resistance leader in order to preserve her home and repel invaders. Lastly, Leona is described as a celestial warrior for the sun, who strives to end oppression and bondage.

For the author, quotes and actions that gives out advice, emphasizing unity, and leading people towards a certain goal is what qualifies as leadership qualities. These quotes demonstrate leadership because the main point of saying such phrases are meant to guide allies towards an objective. This is accomplished through examples such as reassuring your followers that their allies have ‘got their back’ and commanding your allies by telling them what to do. Ashe, Ireliia, and Leona emphasizes the importance of unity using words such as “we” and “they” to rally their allies. Ashe said phrases such as “United, we are stronger”, or “We are one people”, and mentioned that she is going to unite her people. Ireliia when picked by the player, she can be heard leading her troops into battle, evident by her quote “Fight for the First Lands!”. While in-game she can be heard worrying about how to lead her allies in the quote “they await my words, what should I tell them”. Ireliia commands her allies in her quotes “We will live on, either in victory or in the scars we leave on them”, and “we stand on the bones of the ones who came before us, for them, we fight!”. When attacking, Ireliia emphasizes the importance of having allies by her side, with phrases such as “standing together, never surrendering”. Similar to Ireliia, Leona commanding her allies to “stand and fight” and that their enemies “will be sundered. Ashe and Ireliia can be heard advising tactics for their teammates, such as Ashe advising her allies with quotes such as “Do not confuse mercy for weakness”, “Peace requires a steady hand”, and telling her teammates to never lose focus, similar to Ireliia when she make comments regarding form, footwork, and composure, as well as showing no weakness towards their enemies. They also exude confidence in their abilities, exemplified through Ashe’s quotes such as “I won’t miss”, “My aim is steady”, “I only need one shot”, and “No one escapes my aim”. Other examples such as Ireliia mentioning how her dance has forty-two forms but her enemies will only see one, which

is interpreted by the author that Ireliia is implying that they will not live long enough to see the remainder.

Where Ireliia, Ashe, and Leona strive to defend their home, leader figures such as Sejuani and Miss Fortune on the other hand strive to maintain her tribe's survival, and for personal wealth gain respectively. They lead their allies to commit crime, raiding citizens whether benevolent, neutral, or evil in order to fulfill the demands of survival in such an unwavering environment plagued by harsh winters (Sejuani) or rough seas (Miss Fortune).

Sejuani was molded by the harsh winters whilst Miss Fortune witnessed the murder of her parents by a pirate. They are capable warriors who are confident in their abilities, which can be determined from their quotes. When the author picks Sejuani, she tells the player to "Trust nothing but your strength", and proclaiming that "I was forged by winter". Miss Fortune, when attacking her enemies can be heard saying "I always shoot first", an acknowledgement to her ability to kill and claim a bounty, and also "I know what I'm doing" which indicates her veteran experience in bounty hunting and warfare, implying that she does not need assistance or troubled by these tasks. Miss Fortune seems to enjoy leading the charge to battle, evident in her quote "Set sail!" in a convincing and bold fashion, and displays aptitude towards giving out advice like Ashe and Ireliia. Miss Fortune remarks "fortune doesn't favour fools", presumably a run-on of her time that in order find their 'fortune', one needs to be intelligent and strategic or else the 'fool' gets nothing. Sejuani displays a disposition that is intolerant of cowardice and weakness. This is manifested in her comments as she demands her opponents to "prove their worth" and "stand and fight"; simultaneously commanding her troops and warriors alike to "trample them", "show them our teeth", "leave no survivors", and "seize what's ours". This is further emphasized through Sejuani's quotes during movement. Examples such as, "we fight while cowards talk",

“no spoils for the meek”, “fight or make room for those who will”, “there is no strength in servitude”, and “I will not tolerate weakness”. Miss Fortune also displays this through her own quotes, telling her opponents to “don’t get cocky”, and demanding her enemies to “watch their mouth, or you’ll find yourself respawning at home!”, implying death.

Women as Violent Individuals

Amongst the female champions in the game, some of them display a propensity towards punishing their enemies. These characters are relentless and merciless in their pursuit for their personal goals, and will harm those that stand in their way of their objectives. What connects these characters together are their lack of remorse or regard for killing, and blatant disregard for their opponents. Shyvana and Katarina come from opposing backgrounds, from a land called “Demacia” as a bodyguard for the king and “Noxus” as an assassin respectively, and according to lore, they are sworn enemies due to their allegiances. Evelynn on the contrary seeks out prey to harm for her own satisfaction.

Shyvana and Katarina are condescending towards their enemies in their inimitable ways. Shyvana refers to her competition as “nothing” before her, and she will “end them” in the name of her father, calling them “fragile creatures” and will dance in the ashes of her enemies. Katarina after she casts her ultimate ability “Death Lotus”, she makes comments such as telling her opponents to run instead of fighting, that they are unmatched, and her enemies, through the author’s interpretation, are not putting up a fight as she claims that it is “too easy”. From the author’s interpretation, Shyvana and Katarina both propose through the author’s interpretation that their enemies should essentially back down or else they will surely face the consequences. When Shyvana is moving and taunting her enemies, she threatens that “the enemies of Demacia will fall”, daring her enemies to come forth and “take a glimpse into the belly of the beast”.

Katarina teases her opponents, evident in her quotes that she communicates to her opponents that “if you run, you won’t see me stab you!”, and to “live a little, while you can!”, implying that her opponents will soon be dead at her hands. When picked, Katarina states that “violence solves everything”, and this motif is further enhanced through other interactions in the game such as yelling “let the bloodshed begin” when attacking.

While Shyvana and Katarina’s inclination for violence are driven by the needs of their factions, Evelynn’s craving to cause pain and suffering is purely self-driven, subjecting her victim to unspeakable torment and anguish, reveling and gratifying herself with her victim’s pain, which justifies her attribution as “Agony’s Embrace”. Evelynn does not concern herself with what the game describes as “abhorrent acts of evil”, but merely considers it as an innocent fling. This is exemplified through her quotes when attacking that is embellished with sexually suggestive themes. Some examples such as when Evelynn is attacking her enemies, she said quotes such as “my pleasure, your pain”, telling opposition to “cry for me honey” and complimenting enemy champions that they are at their most attractive when in pain or agony. These quotes and interactions were only displayed once, and is unknown if it is the same with every other character or not. Her in-game abilities in addition to her in-game antics and behavioural characteristics, strongly indicates her to be a dominatrix. For example, when she respawns after death, she comments that her opponents like it ‘rough’, as her opponents displayed resistance through killing her. When considering that she uses whipping motions to attack her targets in combination with those taunts/other quotes, they are suggestive of dominatrix behaviour.

Women as Deceivers

Another theme that exists in *League of Legends* is the attribution of women as deceivers and manipulators, luring in prey and targets through desirability and sexualization, and misleading their targets into doubting their capabilities and level of danger that they possess, all for the purpose of advancing their personal gain. Four out of the twelve champions that were examined fit this description.

Ahri, Evelynn, and Elise are described by the game through their background stories as predators who revel in toying with their prey by manipulating their emotions and luring them in before killing them. They are motivated by goals such as gaining a sense of empathy through absorption of life essence (Ahri), doing it simply for enjoyment (Evelynn), and maintaining eternal youth (Elise). In order to achieve their goals, they use their appearances to manipulate their targets into thinking that they are harmless before striking them down with ferocity. An example would be telling their opposition to come closer, before claiming that she does not “bite”, or claiming that she can guide them to the “true path”. All of these characters glorify their beauty and make some sort of remark towards their desirability.

When the player picks the character Ahri, she can be heard asking if the player “trusts her”. When Ahri moves, her dialogue in coalition with her background suggests that she is trying to entice and lure in the opposition. Some examples include “I know what they desire”, and “Indulge me”, which may be ways to make the enemies become more receptive to her before attacking as she claims to know what her targets want to see in a woman to attract them. This can be corroborated by Ahri’s self-described ability to induce increased heartbeats through her taunt “Should I make your pulse rise?”, suggestive of Ahri’s alluring appearance before ending off with “Or stop!” and begins giggling afterwards, indicating the deceptive feature in her

personality. Evelynn is a demon that specializes in luring in prey with the voluptuous facade of a woman, using her charming allure to lure her targets in through quotes such as “You know you want me” when she is selected by the player, suggesting that she is aware of her appeal and allure. Her constant calling of people using light-hearted words like “love”, “sweetie”, and “honey” in the game, are examples of how she is able to lure in victims. Elise, like Ahri makes promises alongside her beauty to lure in her targets, hence the “naïve”. Some examples such as promising prerogatives to “know the true path”, offering to show them “the way to divinity”, and claiming her targets need “guidance”. She assures her targets through seduction, stating that “there is nothing to fear”, her “true beauty is beneath the skin”, “a man likes a lady with legs”, and “ladies wish they had legs like me”. She would also ask her enemies to relax and taunting them to come closer for she “does not bite”, and once lured in her targets, she follows up with “Surprise! I do bite”.

Ahri and Evelynn both utilize an ‘ability’ in the game that allows them to literally lure their targets in. For example, when Ahri’s ability “Charm” strikes an enemy, the game states that her targets will “walk harmlessly towards Ahri” and take an increased amount of damage from her, symbolizing the idea that her enemies let their guard down. When considering the movement and attacking dialogue together, it provides further evidence towards her predatory nature, luring in prey with her beauty and benevolent demeanor. Evelynn’s ability “Allure” curses her target which causes her next attack after a delay to charm her target and make them more susceptible to damage by reducing their defense statistics. There are special interactions when using her “Allure” ability, which she remarks about “things that I’m going to do to you”, asking if the target is lonely and in need of accompanying, telling her target to relax and let their guard down,

or offering a kiss. These are literal representations of what Evelynn can say or do that lures her targets in.

Unlike the other champions, Lulu does not rely on sexualization and attractiveness to advance her goal. On the contrary, she deceives her opposition through her small stature, manipulating them to become more amiable towards her and into thinking that she is just a 'little girl' and is of no threat. According to the game, Lulu is able to conjure dreamlike/fantasy-like illusions and facades, and fanciful creatures with her fairy companion that she calls Pix. Lulu is able to shape reality on a whim, "warping the fabric of the world", and what she vies as the constraints of this mundane, physical realm. Her adorable, 'little girl' façade can be corroborated through some micro-expressions. Lulu prefers skipping to walking and would use words that an adolescent might use such as grammatically incorrect words, and made-up language or slang. Some examples such as when she casts her ability "Whimsy", she says words like "Zippy!", "Tut tut", and "Hot foot!" which are nods to the additional movement speed she provides to allies surrounding them in flowers, or when casting "Wild Growth", she uses terms like "Hugify!" which can be properly linked to the word huge, "Enormibus" which is an attempt to say enormous, and "Tremendo" which is an attempt to say tremendous, whilst surrounding her allies in glitter.

Lulu also avoids making comments that are overly violent or threatening. Where other champions with violent tendencies like Shyvana would say that she will "dance in the ashes" of her enemies, Lulu instead would say "a solid giggle should do the trick". Her quotes whilst moving are interpreted by the author as whimsical and creative, which is a potential tribute to her nature not only as a sorceress who relies on warping reality and a colourful imagination. For example, Lulu talks about how things can "taste purple", people can see more "with your eyes

closed”, advising to “never look a tulip in the eye”, and her inclination to potentially call people or her companion “Pix” a “nosey dewdrop”. When dancing or using an ability that allows champions to tell a joke, Lulu displays a fancy or preference towards spinning around in a circle and joyously laughing. This is done in order to maintain the façade she is a cute, adorable, incapable child, potentially to get her opposition to let their guards down.

Women as Protectors and Defenders

There are champions in the game that displays high desire to protect and guard one’s home and allies, and their background story and lore suggests these tendencies, furthered exemplified during in-game, judging by the quality of interactions they have with other characters or actions.

Leona and Soraka are portrayed by the game as celestial beings/deities from “Mount Targon”. They fervently defend their home and people to the extent that they are willing to throw themselves in front of the battle to protect them and destroying those that dare to threaten them. Leona is portrayed as a warrior for the sun whilst Soraka is portrayed as a wanderer who gave up her immortality to protect people. Both champions share a strong desire to protect, and it is evident in their interactions with the player. Leona is aware of the impact that she can bring to a fight, stating that she “will break their line”, communicating with her enemies that “they’ll have to get through me”. She is also a valuable leader, as she makes promises to her allies that she “will protect you”, and gives advice to her allies to “rally to her” and to stay “ever vigilant”. Soraka reveals her nature towards healing and aiding people rather than focusing on self-interest and gain. She often asks herself “Where am I needed?”, justifying her role as an aide, before following up with quotes that depicts her desire to protect her allies. Some examples being “I heed their call”, “to heal and protect”, and “I lend my aid”. During the cast of her ultimate, her

persona as the protector is further exemplified as she often yells out in excitement, telling her allies to “live!” and to “have hope!”.

Where Leona prefers to fight, Soraka is more of a pacifist who fights out of necessity. Leona challenges her opponents by telling them “next time, try to leave a dent”, whilst bashing on her shield, criticizing her opponents’ effectiveness. Leona also alludes to traditional events that may occur to a woman, such as breaking a nail or being observed or ‘checked out’. She defies those stereotypes through her joke interactions, as she comments that “I think I broke a nail, good thing it wasn’t mine”, suggesting violence; and advising to not stare at her directly for too long, referencing her embodiment of the sun and possibly display showings of weakness and openings for Leona to strike if her enemies ought to stare at her. When Soraka is attacking her enemies, she comments that “they (opponents) will know serenity”, advising her enemies to “be at peace”, and that “violence cannot go unanswered”, suggesting that she will be attempting to stop acts of violence although unwillingly through her acts of violence, citing it is “what must be done”. She also critiques her opponents’ skill as she asks if they always “fight so poorly?”, and shows no remorse and compassion towards her enemies, stating that “I will not save you”.

Appearances of Women

When analyzing the twelve female champions in *League of Legends*, I found that the characters were dressed differently depending on what their role was, meaning those who were not characterized by high defense statistics were dressed in minimal to no clothing, and vice versa. Characteristics that were found across roles such as Marksmans, Mages, Supports, and Assassins, involved the idea that they were underprepared in terms of defense. In these categories, female champions lack any substantial defense items such as chest plates, gauntlets, and bracelets, which are donned by champions in the Tank and Fighter roles. This is ironic

considering they were heading into battle and engaging in warfare. On the contrary, they were donned in apparel such as kimonos, leather jeans, and capes etc. that can be considered unsuitable, even for daily wear let alone battle, as they are often leaving their defenses exposed in places such as their backs, stomach, breasts, and lower body areas such as thighs and legs. This suggests prioritization on aesthetic purposes over practicality. In other words, over half of twelve female champions apart from tanks and fighters are insufficiently prepared for battle due to the lack of proper defenses.

For example, Ashe, as previously stated as a Marksman resides in an area called “Freljord” which is known for its harsh winters. However, despite residing in an environment that is characterized to be extremely cold, Ashe bares minimum clothing or clothing that would not be suitable in a freezing environment. Ashe has white hair, symbolizing the chilly atmosphere and snow, sports a cape and hood, and a blouse that covers her breasts and stomach, but leaves her upper back exposed. She dons light armor, such as shoulder plates, wrist guards, boots, but wears a mini-skirt which leaves her thighs exposed.

On the contrary, her fellow “Freljord” resident Sejuani, who is a tank, dons heavy armour and protection that is both suitable not only for battle, but for proper shelter against the cold. Despite residing in the same region as Ashe, Sejuani wears more adequate clothing that is sufficient to deal with the freezing temperatures, where Ashe is portrayed with skin baring in some areas, particularly her thighs and back. She is clothed with a helmet with horns coming out of the side, potentially to emulate her boar’s tusks. She is fully suited up in armor that covers every single inch of her body with fur protruding out, whilst handling a mace like weapon as she leads the charge towards the battlefield. Considering that Sejuani is a Tank whilst Ashe is a Marksman, what this means is that the portrayals of female characters in *League of Legends*

depends on what role the characters were designed as by the game. Tanks are dressed in heavy armoury to symbolize their high defense statistics, whilst Marksmans are characterized by minimal to no clothing to symbolize their weak defenses.

For further evidence, Tanks and Fighters such as Leona and Shyvana are well prepared in terms of defense. They both wear bracers, gauntlets, shoulder plates, and breastplates that covers their body with no room for skin to appear. They also wear a large helmet that is covered in spikes or horns. The only difference between the two is the variation of colour and theme that they chose their apparel to be in. Leona, due to her roots to the sun, wears bright yellow/orange themed armour while Shyvana has gauntlets in the shape of a dragon's head with fire protruding from her fists in a crimson red-orange colour, a nod to her dragon ancestry. However, Shyvana does have a considerable amount of skin exposed. Her stomach, back, and legs are exposed through lack of armor and protection.

Female champions that are not of the Tanks or Fighters are sexualized in *League of Legends*. They display physical characteristics such as appearing in scantily clad clothing, curvaceous or thin bodies, clear skin, large breasts, and lipstick and make-up (Jansz & Martis, 2007; Beasley & Standley, 2002). For example, Miss Fortune sports long red crimson hair that extends to her legs; pale-white skin; long eyelashes; curvaceous body; thick-wavy eyebrows; and large breasts. Her clothing and apparel further highlight her body, as she wears a blouse that inadequately covers her breasts, leaving the top half of it completely exposed. Her stomach and shoulders are completely exposed, effectively highlighting her body. The only clothing to some extent that effectively covers her body are the bottoms that covers her legs. However, it should also be noted that on the sides of her bottoms are buttons that closes the gaps in the clothing, leaving patches of skin on her legs bare and if her bottoms were not buttoned up, it would most

likely reveal her entire lower body including her private areas. Her clothing choice does not resemble anything that would be worn for protection and battle.

There are other examples that displays sexualization of women. Evelynn wears minimal clothing, appearing scantily nude, covering her breasts and her lower body to a bare minimum, where cleavage areas can be clearly made out and seen. She wears stockings that go up to her knees, leaving her thighs exposed. Her back, stomach, and shoulders are completely exposed. While Ahri dons a red kimono-like apparel that covers her stomach and breasts but exposes her thighs, shoulders, as well as the upper part of her chest. Ahri would most likely rely on her kimono-like clothing as the primary form of defense. Elise is depicted wearing a one-piece attire in black and red that covers up to her breasts from her legs, with a dark background and red spots on it. However, her breasts are insufficiently covered, leaving her cleavage and the top of her breasts completely exposed and bare, which is problematic as this constitutes partial nudity. Elise's appearance can almost be likened to the appearance of a black-widow spider, which is widely known for its behaviour to prey on male counterparts after mating.

Male Characters in *League of Legends*

To compare the results that were gathered from assessing the female characters in the game, it is important to conduct a brief comparison of male characters with the female characters in the game to notice any differences between the two groups and if there are any qualities that particularly characterize one group and not the other.

Male characters in *League of Legends* constitute 94 of the 143 champions or the majority of characters in the game. In regards to roles, they make up the majority of the Tank or Fighter role, who are known for their capacity to take enormous amounts of harm from the enemy

opposition. This suggests that men are ‘hard’, ‘tough’, and unafraid, which are typical male-coded characteristics in media (Wood, 1994) On the contrary, female characters are at a disadvantage when it comes the amount of female characters in the game. Nevertheless, if *League of Legends* were to equally distribute all the champions in each role, there should be an under-representation of female characters in every role, but this is not the case. Women are over-represented in the Marksman role, which means they are depicted as individuals who are dependent on another player/character. This means men are more likely to be depicted as independent and autonomous than women. Women also reach a close parity with men in relation to the Mage role, which like Marksmans are designed to be weak in defenses, thus depicting women as fragile and frail.

In addition, men are depicted differently than the women in *League of Legends*, they are not sexualized to the same degree that women are. As previously mentioned, female characters that were not known for having high defenses (ex. Support, Marksman, Assassin, Mage) were dressed in minimal or unsuitable clothing for battle. This is not true for men in *League of Legends*. Male characters like Draven and Graves who are in the Marksman role, are portrayed with heavy armoury and defense despite residing in an environment that is unlike Freljord, which is known for its freezing temperatures, home to Ashe and Sejuani. They are covered from top to bottom with armoury such as bracers, shin guards, capes, breastplates, gauntlets that allows little to no skin being shown, with the only exception being Draven’s shoulders that is riddled with what appears to be tattoos. The only exception of these male Marksmans is Varus, who is depicted to be half-naked, baring his torso completely to the same extent where a female character like Miss Fortune or Evelynn, with a scarf around his neck, but nonetheless still wears adequate clothing on his lower body. Male Mages, who constitute seventeen of the thirty-one

characters, wear adequate clothing that covers their body from head to toe in armour, wearing a selection of armoury that was listed earlier in the description for Draven and Graves, with the exception of a few champions, notably Ryze and Brand who, like Varus, only have their torso bared. All of the male Assassins and Supports wear clothing that leaves no skin to be seen, donned in apparel that is synonymous with those that female Tanks or Fighters would wear, with the exception of Braum who has his torso bared despite living in Freljord. This means that sexualization of men is not as ‘important’ than the sexualization of women; sexualization is not integral in order to represent a man’s appearance.

Overall, men are not sexualized to the same degree as women, where some characters only bare their chests and the rest of their bodies are thoroughly covered, and are more likely to be designed as characters that are independent and viable on their own.

Discussion/Analysis

This following section will discuss the results from the study. Beginning with an interpretation of the results that were gathered, going into detail on what was encountered during the study and what does it ultimately mean. Secondly, the author discusses the implications of these results in regards to the theoretical frameworks that were previously discussed, and in particular, what would these theories say about the results.

Interpretation of Results

Overall, *League of Legends*’ representations of female characters are diverse. Results suggests that female characters are presented in roles and characteristics that were traditionally male-dominated by *Riot Games*, such as being a leader to a tribe that defends their home/pillage and raid other homes, or having propensity towards violence. However, *League of Legends* still

presents female characters as ‘eye candy’ and sexualized objects, which was a trend established by earlier research in other video games (Jansz & Martis, 2007; Downs & Smith, 2010).

Female characters in *League of Legends* are underrepresented in the game. Jansz & Martis (2007) found that early generations of video games are dominated by male characters, a trend that remains true even for the modern generations of video games like *League of Legends*. In *League of Legends*, as previously mentioned, there are approximately 143 champions or characters in the game, and only 49 of them are female; constituting an under-representation of female characters in the character pool.

League of Legends depicts women as individuals with weak defenses that are incapable of taking punishment from opposition, despite being characterized as leaders who lead the charge, or individuals who favour violence and fighting. The Marksman and Mage roles as previously mentioned are weak and fragile in terms of defense, and use weaponry such as guns and magical energy that allows them to remain far away from the fight, but are still effective. Nevertheless, the majority of female characters are distributed in these two roles. Tanks and Fighters as previously mentioned, are characteristically defined as the exact opposite of Marksmans and Mages, as they are designed to absorb attention from opposition, bolstered and demarcated by high defenses, and by the ability to stay in fights for a prolonged period of time through rejuvenation and healing capabilities, respectively. Yet, female characters only constitute a small proportion of Tanks and Fighters.

In addition, *League of Legends* portrays their female characters as individuals who are in need of assistance from other characters to ‘lend a shoulder’ to lean on in order to succeed, and paints them as incompetent and unreliable in terms of independence and solitude. Women constitute over one-half of the Marksmans despite an under-representation of women overall in

the game. As previously mentioned, Marksmans are also typically joined by another character in the game, presumably a Support as they are often too weak for the first initial stages of the game. Consequently, female characters are under-represented in roles that requires independence. As previously stated, women are under-represented in the Tank and Fighter roles, which allows independence on the basis that these characters can self-sustain, and the Assassin role, which emphasizes independence, as their main priority is to assassinate targets quickly and stealthily, meaning quick movement and solitude is key. On the contrary, men were over-represented in Tanks and Fighters, as well as the Assassin role, suggesting that they are independent and autonomous individuals. What this suggests is that in *League of Legends*, women are regarded as dependent individuals who are ‘not meant’ for roles that emphasizes autonomy or independence, a conclusion made by researchers regarding women in media (Davis, 1990; Craig, 1992). Women are at their ‘best’ when they have someone essentially ‘holding their hand’ throughout the stages of the game. Men on the other hand, are independent, autonomous, hard, resilient individuals who does not need assistance from others (Wood, 1994).

There is a tendency for *League of Legends* to present women in an active role or instrumental characters, placing them in roles that revolves around their aggression rather than passivity such as leadership, using violence to solve problems, protectors and defenders of their home, and deceivers to victimize individuals. Women are no longer exclusively portrayed as the typical ‘damsel in distress’ or support to the protagonist scenarios that were prevalent in earlier generations of video games popularized by the *Super Mario Bros.* and *Legend of Zelda* franchise. Female characters in *League of Legends* now have the chance to show off potential to be violent perpetrators and heroes, which were traditionally male-dominated roles/characteristics (Dietz, 1998). However, most female characters that do not rely on seduction to advance their goals like

deceivers, are nonetheless presented in the same, overtly sexualized manner, and depicted in revealing clothes, as determined by earlier research (Summers & Miller, 2014; Dill & Thill, 2007; Downs & Smith, 2010). This suggests the idea that this is the ideal way that women should be presented, and sexualization of women is essential to their femininity, despite being portrayed with male-coded characteristics. This resembles the conclusion made by Glaubke, Miller, Parker & Espejo (2001), where women and men are now synonymous in regards to their tasks and personalities, but women now have an added challenge, and it is to look sexy and attractive.

Overall, female characters are depicted in a hyperbolized version of femininity, a dominant cultural way of seeing from the view of a heterosexual male subject (Kimmel & Holler, 2017). They are frequently presented in scantily clad clothing or revealing clothes, and physical characteristics such as large breasts or buttocks (Jansz & Martis, 2007; Beasley & Standley, 2002). Female characters are depicted in the most attractive and alluring way possible; with women who were Tanks or Fighters were fully clothed. Considering that the Fighter and Tank roles are supposed to absorb the blunt force and attention from enemies, portraying them in light armour with patches of skin showing or no armour at all is arguably illogical and nonsensical as is being insufficiently dressed for cold weather. As a result, Fighters and Tanks are expected to be clothed fully in armour, leaving no part of their bodies exposed to danger. However, women are a minority in these roles, which implies that women are less likely to be fully clothed due to their lack of presence in these roles. Regardless, considering it is essentially a 'battle to the death' in an arena, insufficient armour has no place in this setting no matter what role a character possesses. In other words, if a female character was not of these two roles, they were also displayed in ways that would most reveal their bodies and physical characteristics such as curvaceous bodies, large breasts, or in scantily-clad clothing. On the contrary, men regardless

of which role they were assigned to and designed for by the game, were consistently covered from top to bottom with clothing, leaving no body parts bare.

In addition to wearing minimal clothing, most characters, in particular the women as deceivers were highlighted as attractive or beautiful either through implications or literally using the words “beautiful” and “voluptuous” in their lore. Furthermore, the creators of the character depicts the character’s beauty or alluring appearance through displays such as having the character in a seductive pose (ex. Evelyn is displayed by the game in a compromising position, as she is on her knees kneeling on top of a man, posing seductively with the tip of her index finger in her mouth), and baring a considerable amount of skin such as cleavage through lack of clothing thus highlighting their breasts and curvaceous bodies. In combination with how female characters are dressed, this suggests that *League of Legends* prefers to portray their female characters that is favourable to the heterosexual male consumer or ‘male gaze’ (Kimmel & Holler, 2017), possibly catering to an audience which they believe is to be predominantly male.

Theoretical Implications

A major concern that is derived from these results is the effect that *League of Legends* has on consumers of the product and what messages about femininity and masculinity it is conveying. These messages are communicated to consumers and teaches them about how aspects of society such gender ought to function or be like. In this case, *League of Legends* imparts knowledge on how women should look like, what should women do, and what roles do women occupy in society. Despite Gerbner (1994)’s focus on television rather than video games, choosing video games as the medium of focus does not have affect the general message he is elucidating. Media socializes, and no matter what form of media individuals are inclined to and use as preference, individuals learn about their social world through them, and are likely to

perceive the real world in ways that reflect the what they see whether in television or video games. *League of Legends* as a result would inform consumers on what the ‘ideal woman’ is in terms of appearances and roles. Even if we are not intentionally choosing to reflect the social world in ways that are highlighted in *League of Legends*, which is women as sexual objects and ‘eye candy’ despite being more ‘masculine’ in regards to personality. Ultimately, we would be more inclined or obligated to, because it is simply what we are exposed and used to.

Media provides sources of knowledge to gather from and learn from to incorporate into our ‘cultural toolkit’ as posited by Swidler (1986), we use them to our advantage and where it would be most applicable in. If an individual chooses *League of Legends* as a source of entertainment, there is no reason to suspect that an individual would think of women in another way unless other sources of media are used, replacing the ‘tools’, which is most likely as individuals are exposed to a wide range of products and media outlets such as television, music, radio, newspapers, and the press (Lister, Giddings, Dovey, Grant & Kelly, 2008; Arendt, 2010). Regardless, it provides ‘tools’ regarding femininity and women that people could use at their disposal, so it is important that *League of Legends* provides ‘beneficial tools ’to be used.

Study Limitations and Future Research

Throughout this project, there are certain limitations encountered in the duration of the study. The first issue is that the game is never stagnant, the game is always evolving. *League of Legends* sporadically releases “patches” that change the game in some manner. These patches can affect the state of the game, such as tweaking the champions in the game in regards to lore and abilities; environments in the game can be changed to make gameplay more efficient or appealing; appearances of champions can be improved and changed to be more appealing etc. As

a result, what was experienced during the data generation will be different if the study is to be replicated months or years from now.

Another limitation is the small sample size of characters selected in comparison to the total amount of characters in the game. A small sample of twelve champions were selected from a pool of forty-nine female characters. This only constitutes twenty-five percent of the potential characters that could have been chosen; meaning there is a chance that the conclusion that was derived from the data could be skewed and inaccurate. In particular, the categories that were used to define the female characters studied could be unique to those examined; meaning that those categories do not encompass any other characters other than those that were in them. This flaw could be improved upon by examinations of more characters in the game, in order to present a more rounded view on *League of Legends*' depictions of female characters.

Lastly, there is the issue of coding bias. What determined which character gets selected as the unit of analysis was dependent on if they were female. However, the character's gender, whether or not if they were female was dependent on the author's discretion and choices. In other words, if this project was done from another researcher's perspective, there is a chance that they could have interpreted the character's gender differently. There could be a larger or smaller female population than what was determined, especially if the gender of the character was not mentioned in the background story, thus relying on details that are not as conclusive such as whether or not if they looked or sounded 'feminine' with appearances and voices respectively, or had unisex names. These details are up for debate whether or not a character is female or not. In addition, whether or not a female character is sexualized is also up for debate, as calling a character 'sexualized' was under the author's discretion, meaning other interpretations are possible and these characters are not considered 'sexualized' if another researcher's perspective

was taken into account. A major factor in determining a character's gender was by looking at how the characters saw themselves, as some dialogue from the characters in the game, explicitly states their gender. For example, Elise says that "a man likes a lady with legs", or "ladies wished they had legs like mine", with the word lady being used to describe herself. In addition, looking at how the creators of the character described them, using words such as "her" or "she" to determine their gender. An area of improvement for the both of these issues would be to have more researchers take part to find a consensus on what is female or not, and what is sexualized or not.

Conclusion

The purpose of this study was to analyze and examine the female characters in *League of Legends* and how exactly they are portrayed, represented, and depicted according to the creators of the game. This study improves upon the conclusions that were drawn from previous research studies that used quantitative approaches by employing a qualitative approach that relies more on thoroughly playing a game to understand the female characters in the game instead of using covers or brief segments to represent them. Overall, results suggested that *League of Legends* reflects the conclusions that were previously drawn, such as overt sexualization of women and presenting them as individuals who are dependent on others rather than striving for independence. The messages conveyed here are detrimental to women and advancing gender equality; it gives out unrealistic expectations of women such as women are all 'sexy' and 'voluptuous', and are dependent and fragile (through characterization with weak defenses) individuals. However, *League of Legends* does include women in active roles such as being a leader or defending their home, that previously only included men (Dietz, 1998), which may be one of the first steps towards equal representations in video games (Dill & Thill, 2007).

League of Legends is an online phenomenon, meaning it is accessible to anyone as long as they have access to a computer. Combined with the popularity of *League of Legends*, it essentially becomes a phenomenon that is capable of reaching places from all around the world with ease. I would argue that since *League of Legends* has a significant audience and following, it can potentially be used as a ‘tool’ by many for learning about the female character in video games which can indirectly affect one’s perception of femininity and women in reality. However, this is not to say that *League of Legends* portrays women negatively, but creates an environment where the paradigm that women are sexualized, dependent, and defensively weak is prioritized. Similar to any other form of media that has fictionalized content, *League of Legends* should be understood as entertainment, and not representative of reality.

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