AN EXAMINATION OF SINGAPOREAN VIDEO GAMERS' PERCEPTIONS OF FEMALE VIDEO GAME CHARACTERS

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DECLARATION

I hereby declare that this thesis is my original work and it has been written by me in its entirety. I have duly acknowledged all the sources of information which have been used in the thesis.

This thesis has also not been submitted for any degree in any university previously.

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Vanessa Tan

9 February 2017

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The journey to write this thesis was long and trying, but ultimately a worthwhile one. When I first began over two years ago, it seemed like a monumental task, and at many times since then, seemingly impossible to complete. But here we are. Without a doubt, this thesis would not have been realized without the many people that stood by me throughout:

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ABSTRACT

Previous research on female representation in video games has revealed that women are often sexualised, objectified, minimised, or simply absent from games. These representations have also been found to influence and affect the psyche of video gamers. With the number of female gamers growing year upon year, there is a pressing need to continue examining how women are treated in video games, especially with the influx of games now featuring principal female characters. This study aimed to examine if how women are treated in these contemporary video games differed from older titles, and analyse if these portrayals mirrored the perceptions of video gamers. A content analysis of 34 video games released over the past five years was first conducted, and results revealed an increase in games featuring playable female characters with diminished sexualisation. However, results also showed that secondary or background female characters remain objectified and sexualised, and that the majority of female characters are young and Caucasian – highlighting the lack of racial and age diversity. Following the content analysis, interviews with 15 male and female Singaporean video gamers were conducted, and they revealed slowly changing perceptions of female characters. While participants admitted enjoyment and a demand for sexualised female characters, they also expected female characters to be independent and be able to drive the game's narrative. Participants also discussed the divide between Eastern- and Western-developed games, citing cultural factors as well as marketing overcompensation as reasons for the state of gaming today, and argued against change in the gaming industry. Finally, these findings and any implications are discussed, and possible areas for future research are suggested.

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CHAPTER 1 - INTRODUCTION

An Overview

Female representation in video games has long been a popular subject amongst researchers, as games have been historically known for sexualising, objectifying, and minimising women, or simply not featuring them at all. With the growing number of female gamers, there is a need to continually examine how games handle female representation, as it has been acknowledged that they can influence and affect the psyche of players. Recently, there has been an influx of games that feature female protagonists targeted towards female gamers, which seem to differ from previous titles. With little research on these contemporary female video game characters, this study sought to examine if how they were treated in these games were actually any different, and if these newer portrayals affected perceptions held by video gamers. With little research on these contemporary female video game characters, this study sought to examine if how they were depicted in these games differed in any way, and if these newer portrayals affected perceptions held by video gamers. To uncover if contemporary female video game characters differed from their predecessors, a content analysis was conducted. A total of 34 games released over the past five years were analysed. Following the content analysis, interviews with 15 male and female Singaporean video gamers were conducted. Chapter 1 will provide a background on video games and highlight new research directions regarding female representations in this research field. Chapter 2 will provide an in-depth examination of the current literature, in not only video games, but also across advertising, film, and television. Chapter 3 will outline this study's research goals and questions. Chapter 4 will reveal the results of a content analysis of contemporary video games. Chapter 5 will examine player perceptions of contemporary female characters and report the themes found. And chapter 6 will discuss the implications gleaned from the results, as well as suggest areas for possible future research.

A Background on Video Games

From its humble beginnings as a niche market in the 1980s, video games have developed into a multi-million dollar-a-year business with a massive global influence. In 2015, the U.S. Market spent USD 23.5 billion on video games while the global market recorded USD 91.6 billion (ESA, 2016; Minotti, 2016). In addition over 262 million units of video game consoles have thus far been sold, and there are approximately 900 million PC gamers worldwide (Evangelho, 2014). As well, the demographics of video gamers have also been changing. While previously video gamers have been predominantly male, female gamers now make up 48% of the gaming population, and adult women at 36% (in comparison to adult males at 35% and teenage boys at 17%) occupy the largest demographic segment in the gaming industry (ESA, 2014). Video games are being increasingly played by all-ages, and by both genders (Harwell, 2014).

In light of the growing diversity of video game consumers, researchers have taken an interest in researching both the content and effect of video games, as they acknowledge that it can potentially be a powerful influence on individuals (Dill & Thrill, 2007; Dill, Brown & Collins, 2008; Henning, Brenick, O'Connor & Collins, 2009). Video games have never been passive forms of media – from early text-based video games to the multiplayer open-world ones that exist now, they often force users into simulated worlds, requiring them to accept and engage the reality presented, and make choices to progress through the game (Mitchell & Montfort, 2009). It is further complicated by the fact that games are also experienced differently by different participants, with their readings of the narrative influenced by their past experiences, preferences, and cultural/social values (Montola, 2012). With many studies showcasing how games are fraught with meaning, and how nuances in design, story, and structure can affect understanding and engagement, video games are becoming more and more complex, with more power than ever to influence player perceptions and opinions (Jenkins, 2004; Vick, 2007; Mitchell, 2008). Interestingly enough, while

researchers have studied violence (Glaubke et al., 2001; Dietz, 1998), special attention has also been paid to how women have been portrayed in video games, as researchers have noticed that video games have historically catered to the male gaze by sexualising, fetishizing, and objectifying women (Schleiner, 2001; Beasley & Standley, 2002; Downs & Smith, 2007, Dill & Thrill, 2007, Jansz & Martis, 2007) and placing them in passive roles (i.e. damsels in distress, background characters, eye candy, etc.) (Dietz, 1998; Millers & Summers, 2007).

There is a pressing need then to understand female representations and their potential influence on gamers – more so in light of several recent sexist scandals that have occurred in the gaming industry. One of the most recent and well known, was the Gamergate controversy. In August 2014, the video game industry made headline news after a female developer cheated on her boyfriend with a gaming news journalist. This incident that initially dealt with the ethics of video gaming journalism, and how privileged information might have been exchanged in a sexual relationship, soon spiralled into a scandal wrought with misogyny and sexism. Many male gamers attacked the female developer on social media, and used her infidelity as an excuse to spew hatred against women in the industry (Rott, 2014). Soon after, more and more women were drawn into Gamergate as gamers began attacking them as well. Some of the women who were targeted actually fled their homes after they received death threats (Dewey, 2014; Developer #2, The Escapist, 2014). The United States' Federal Bureau of Investigations (FBI) even had to step in when Anita Sarkeesian, a noted feminist media critic, was forced to cancel a speech because she was sent an email that threatened a "Montreal [style] massacre targeting lecture attendees, faculty, staff, and the university's women center" if she went ahead with her talk on the portrayal of women in video games (McDonald, 2014).

The Gamergate controversy, with its casual and callous outpouring of violence and harassment towards women, and the eagerness of Gamergate supporters to degrade and humiliate females, both online and off (Dewey, 2014) is not surprising

when you consider the "no girls allowed" mentality that pervades the video gaming industry. Many female designers, critics, and players are quick to offer their first-hand accounts of hostility by male gamers. University of California, Los Angeles professor Rebecca Allen describes being "harassed with pornographic imagery" when she was Virgin Interactive Media's team lead, while Dr Anne-Marie Schleiner of the National University of Singapore reports that she was told to "go play with [her] Barbies" (Stratford, 2013). Many male gamers also regard such comments as trivial. With specific regard to Gamergate, many gamers brushed off those death threats and harassment against women as comments not to be taken seriously (Edwards, 2014). Worryingly, the attitudes of those who participated and supported Gamergate matched the attitudes and beliefs found in the video games they play (Brenick, Henning, Killen, O'Connor, & Collins, 2007; Elise, 2014) thus raising concerning issues of media representations and media effects.

Two years on and the issues brought up by Gamergate still persist. In 2015, South by Southwest (SXSW), a film and media conference held in Austin, Texas, cancelled two panels that planned to discuss harassment in video gaming after "numerous threats of on-site violence" were reported against three of the women who were scheduled to appear (Hern, 2015; Klepek, 2015). In July 2016, a South Korean video game voice actress was fired after numerous male gamers harassed her online, and demanded that her employer remove her from their company after she posted a photo of herself wearing a shirt that stated "Girls Do Not Need A Prince" (Kim, 2016).

This sexist culture is not altogether surprising when you examine those who produce and create these games. In 2014, the International Game Developers Association (IGDA) commissioned a "Developer Satisfaction Survey" to get a census of workplace diversity. With a total of 2,202 respondents from several countries in Asia, Europe, Latin and North America, it was reported that the "average" game developer is Caucasian and male. Only 22% of developers identify as female and

21% identify as a race other than Caucasian (Edwards, Westar, Meloni, Pearce & Legault, 2014). The lack of diversity amongst video game developers is even more alarming when you take into consideration the fact that women and non-Caucasian developers are more likely to believe that a diverse workforce "has a direct impact on the games produced" in comparison to the Caucasian male developers (IDGA, 2005, pp. 12 - 14).

Recent incidents such as Gamergate and its lingering effects shine a light on the need for diversity in the video gaming industry, and the continuous need to understand female representations and its potential influence on gamers.

Female Representation in Video Games - New Research Directions

Despite the sexist culture of the gaming community, the rise of female gamers has not gone unnoticed, especially by video game studios and publishers, which have responded to this shift in gamer demographics by attempting to include more female protagonists in video games in order to market to these new female gamers (Tassi, 2013). A wide range of titles has been released in recent years, with female protagonists taking on roles such as a highly sexualised witch to an angry, misunderstood teenager, to an adventure-seeking raider of tombs, to name a few (Nintendo, 2014; Sinclair, 2013; Scammell, 2012). Research has previously studied how females are generally portrayed in video games, but few studies have recently examined this entirely new female video game character, and its effects on video gamers. In fact, only one recent study by Lynch, Tompkins, Van Driel, and Fritz (2016) have taken a look at contemporary female video game characters, and their study only examined a very small portion of video games, i.e. 5-minute segments). More research is needed in this area to examine the changing representations of female characters and the effects of their portrayals on video gamers.

While there is a emerging evidence that newer female characters might not be all that different from previous portrayals, other forms of mass media offer an indicator that female representation in general is becoming more and more diverse. Mass media is comprised of many different of media (of which video games are simply one part). All the different elements of mass media (i.e. advertising, film, television, magazines, etc.) are closely interconnected, borrowing cues from one another, and influencing the way the other is produced (King & Krzywinska, 2002; Lambie, 2012; Hall, 2014; Suellentrop, 2013; Carlson, 2014). While previous research has highlighted that, historically, mass media has marginalised and objectified women, more recently, representations and portrayals have moved away from traditional stereotypes and are becoming more diverse (England, Descartes & Collier-Meek, 2011). Women are no longer the passive characters in films, nor are they simply just housewives and objects of beauty (Brown, 1996; Gerding & Signorielli, 2014; Zotos & Tischla, 2014). They are now the drivers of film, television, and advertisements. Along with more mundane everyday representations, women are also portrayed as heroes and villains. And considering that women finally made it into a Fédération Internationale de Football Association (FIFA) video game, for the first time in the franchise's 22-year history, perhaps the change the video game industry needs has already begun, although we need to take a closer look (Villapaz, 2015).

Researchers are already aware that gendered media representations can shape perceptions of women. It can shape how females develop self-identity and capabilities, often undermining confidence in adolescents (Woods, 1994; Aubrey & Harrison, 2004; Simon & Hoyt, 2012). Gendered media representations can contribute to body image issues when only the idealised body (e.g. the beautiful, thin-waist, large-breasted woman) is repeatedly showcased (Wilcox & Laird, 2000; Hargreaves & Tiggemann, 2004; Yamamiya, Cash, Melnyk, Posavac & Posavac, 2005; McCabe, Butler & Watt, 2007). And they can heavily impact how males

perceive women, and seed the idea that women are less capable then men, or that women are simply objects (Bligh, Casad, Schleofer & Gaffney, 2012; Galdi, Maass & Cadinu, 2014).

There is a need then, to continue studying the representations of female characters in video games, with the introduction of this new wave of female characters. There exists an opportunity to examine how the video gaming industry portrays female characters, especially with the rise of female gamers, and see if video gamers today are affected by these new contemporary female video game characters.

The goals of the present study are to build on prior research by examining the roles and representations of women in contemporary video games, but with a push towards some new dimensions. Specifically, through quantitative content analysis, the research will examine the depiction and portrayals of women in top-selling, contemporary, female-led video games. Following which, through qualitative in-depth interviews, the research will examine if any of the themes and attitudes uncovered in the content analysis of video games manifest themselves in Singaporean video gamers' real world perceptions and opinions of women.

CHAPTER 2 – THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK AND LITERATURE REVIEW

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

Cultivation Theory - Perception is Reality

Prior research has shown that video games can influence an individual's attitudes and behaviours. A number of theoretical explanations for this relationship have been sought (Bessenoff, 2006; Dill, Brown & Collins, 2008; Lemola et al., 2011). One possible explanation lies in Gerbner's Cultivation Theory (1998), which asserts that an individual's view of reality is created and moulded by mass media. Gerbner explains that exposure to mass media creates a worldview that is more similar to "mass media's reality" than to reality itself. For example, if on television, individuals are shown the same set of videos and images of violence in their country, then they would start to believe their country is more violent than it actually is. Because they were not provided any evidence otherwise, individuals will begin to believe "television's reality" is reality. Furthermore, these homogenous sets of views can also cultivate a resistance to change, as people may not see any actual problems that arise (since they only believe what is shown to them).

As with any other social theory, Gerbner's Cultivation Theory has received criticism – mainly for its oversimplification and inconsistency. Critics have argued that Cultivation Theory is too broad, allowing it to explain anything and everything, thereby preventing itself from being falsifiable (Williams, 2006). If this is the case, then any research drawing upon Cultivation Theory needs to have clearly defined variables of what it is studying (i.e. not simply "violence" in television, but "violence towards XX race") allowing results to show whether or not there has been an increase in cultivation effects. Critics also argue that Cultivation Theory contains imprecise content measures – television programmes are not uniform (e.g. heavy "night"

television viewers and heavy "day" television viewers could be exposed to wholly different shows), and so it is incorrect to measure the total time that viewers were exposed to television, but rather should measure exposure to specific programmes (Williams, 2006). Additionally, critics argue that Cultivation Theory tries to showcase a link between exposure and attitude, disregarding other contextual factors that may come into play. Boyd-Barrett and Braham (1987) posit that attitudes can be influenced not only by television, but also by other forms of mass media, as well as real-life experiences. Indeed, there are many factors that can influence or affect one's behaviour, but mass media can still be a huge force in shaping opinion and thought. The research of Shrum (1995, 1999), has worked to showcase this. In his work, he posited that heavy exposure to images on television can cause cultivation effects – when certain images are more readily available, viewers are more likely to rely on them on making mental judgments, "in a kind of cognitive shortcut" to an answer, as Stacks and Salwen (2009, pp. 117) further comment. In other words, while there are other factors that can contribute to shaping opinion, viewers who see certain images repeatedly are more likely to rely on those images in coming up with an answer or opinion.

While Gerbner's Cultivation Theory has primarily been studied in the context of television, there is some research to indicate that cultivation is possible within video games as well. Williams (2006) examined video games and video gamers to see if there were any cultivation effects that occurred after participants were subjected to violent video gameplay and footage. After exposure, it was discovered that participants did indeed have altered perceptions of real-world dangers, and actually changed some of their attitudes to align with these new perceptions (Williams, 2006). Harrison and Bond (2007) conducted a 2-wave longitudinal study to investigate if repeated exposure to male body ideals in various print magazine genres could increase drives for masculinity. After exposure, researchers reported that participants who were more exposed to video game magazines had higher cultivation effects in

comparison to those who read sports, fitness, or fashion magazines. Thus far, Gerbner's Cultivation Theory in the context of video games suggests that video games can influence perceptions of individuals who play video games (possibly increasing or even cementing certain perceptions the longer they are exposed to the medium), and offering a plausible explanation for how the representation of women in video games can affect real-world perceptions of women.

As well, there are some criticisms about Cultivation Theory and its applicability in an interactive medium such as video games, when it was originally studied within the non-interactive medium of television. While it is true that video games are more interactive than television programs, the world that is given to them is already largely predetermined. Characters, actions, the surrounding world, and the narrative have already been created by game studios, and the player only gets the freedom to interact with this existing world. If female characters in these worlds are consistently depicted a certain way, there is the possibility of cultivation effects occurring the longer players are exposed.

In the context of this study, Cultivation Theory has been used as a broad framework. Because it suggests that repeated images are more likely to influence behaviour, the research first dives into examining the content of contemporary video games, to identify the ways that video game studios currently portray and depict female principle characters. Using the findings and themes gathered from this content analysis, interview questions were then developed to explore if these perceptions, especially those held by heavy and long-term video gamers, mirrored the portrayals and themes found in the games they play.

LITERATURE REVIEW

The Representation of Women in Advertising, Film, and Television

Literature first showed that women were overwhelmingly underrepresented in media. Several content analysis studies which measured the number of times men and women appeared in media, have found that women appear less frequently in comparison to men (Collins, 2011). In advertising, an examination of 2,608 commercials aired in over eight countries found that men were still predominantly featured in comparison to women (Paek, Nelson & Vilela, 2011). In film, a five-year study examining the top-100 grossing films from each year revealed that only 28.4% of characters coded were female (Smith, Choueiti, Scofield & Pieper, 2013). And similarly in television, it was discovered that women only represent 38% of characters appearing in health-based television programs, and that women were outnumbered by males in tween programming two-to-one (Hether & Murphy, 2010; Gerding & Signorielli, 2014). And the fact that women appear less frequently on television is by no means a recent trend. As early as three decades ago, television primetime males outnumbered television primetime females 2:5 to 1 (Gerbner & Signorielli, 1979). The disparity of women in media has persisted over decades, and the consequences of this are largely unknown. Much of the literature suggest and stress that children learn about gender roles and gender-related portrayals from the media, and the underrepresentation of women could diminish their self-worth and present an idea that women are unimportant (Collins, 2011; Paek, Nelson & Vilela, 2011; Smith, Choueiti, Scofield & Pieper, 2013).

Women were also portrayed in gender stereotypical roles and featured traits that were traditionally considered feminine. Gender stereotypes, for this paper, are defined as beliefs that certain attributes differentiate women and men (Ashmore & Del Boca, 1981). Specifically, traditional female stereotypes include traits such as nurturing, gentleness, and agreement, and traditional female roles such as mothers,

homemakers, and subordinate individuals dependent on male figures (Ashmore & Del Boca, 1981). A wide range of literature showcases that media depictions of women tend to reflect gender stereotypes (Collins, 2011; Zotos & Tsichla, 2014) and that these portrayals seem to be consistent across cultures and countries. Soriano, Lim, and Rivera (2014) examined mobile phone advertising in the Philippines and discovered that advertisements featuring women tended to promote the idealised version of motherhood and the importance of being a mother. In an examination of over 115 YouTube videos, researchers discovered that the mothers were depicted as existing only to serve the needs of their family and not their own. Similarly, in studies conducted in the United Kingdom and the United States, women were portrayed as homemakers who existed to serve their family (Lysonski, 1985; Paek, Nelson & Vilela, 2011; Zotos & Tsichla, 2014). In film, less than half of the women (45.3%) were shown to be employed, and less than 5% of women actually held executive positions (Smith, Choueiti, Prescott & Pieper, 2013). Furthermore, films aimed at young children tended to have more gendered messages and stereotypes. In a study examining Disney films, female characters had idealised feminine traits, such as caretaking, nurturing, and mothering, and needed to be rescued by male characters (England, Descartes, Collier-Meek, 2011).

Women were also objectified, hypersexualised, and had their physical attractiveness and beauty heavily emphasised. Zhang et al (2010) found that in rap videos, half of the female characters (51%) were rated thin by coders. Similarly, in television programs aimed at teenagers, researchers found that women were more likely to have attractive bodies and faces in comparison to men (Gerding & Signiorelli, 2014). Furthermore, female characters in these "tween programs" were also more likely to be concerned about their appearance and would be judged on their appearance by other characters on the show. In advertising, women were predominantly displayed in "decorative roles." Studies conducted around the world also had similar findings, in which women were depicted as objects of sexual

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gratification (Wiles et. al, 1995; Doring & Poschl, 2006; Plakoyiannaki & Zotos, 2009). And all of these negative portrayals came at a price – researchers discovered that adolescent as well as adult self-esteem, body image, and emotional well-being could be compromised by media that portrayed exclusively one type of female (Grabe et. al, 2008).

Extant research has also studied whether gendered representations in media has influenced user behaviour and attitudes. Results suggest that individuals exposed to more stereotypical sexual attitudes and behaviours had an increased likelihood of performing those stereotypical sexual attitudes and behaviours themselves (Galdi, 2014). Galdi (2014) also found that after being exposed to sexist content, men were more likely to engage in gender harassment, as well as to find their female partners less competent. Other empirical studies echo these results, that content that sexually objectifies women can affect an individual's beliefs and behaviour (Ward, 2002; Martino, 2006).

In recent years however, the ways in which women are depicted and portrayed in the media have slowly begun to change. Brown (1996) explores how female characters in action films went through radical changes in the 1980s. From earlier incarnations as damsels in distress, female characters increasingly adopted masculine shape, traits and characteristics, as epitomized by Ellen Ripley from *Alien* (Brown, 1996). Advertising, as well, has attempted to broaden the customer base by marketing to more subgroups of people, and thus inadvertently reduced the use of specific gender norms in advertising in recent years (Zotos & Tischla, 2014). Similarly, in film, England, Descartes and Collier-Meek (2011) found that Disney has evolved the way Disney Princesses are portrayed, going from traditionally feminine to a mixture of both feminine and masculine traits, and showcasing Princesses with intellect and physical strength rather than just passively waiting to be rescued.

Representation of Women in Video Games

The current literature focusing on women in video games paints a grim picture of how women are portrayed and represented. Similar to the results found in other forms of mass media, such as advertising, television, and film, women in video games were found to be underrepresented, stereotyped, and heavily hypersexualised. The consistency of this one type of portrayal of a "female character" was seen over and over in many content analysis studies that were conducted.

One of the most striking findings with regard to the representation of women in video games was the outright exclusion of female characters. Several content analysis studies, which examined video games and video game-related materials (i.e. magazines, advertisements) discovered that women were vastly underrepresented. Furthermore, the literature suggests that these findings have not changed in several decades. In 1998, Dietz conducted the first significant study, which examined gender roles and violence in video games made for young children. Studying 33 popular Nintendo and Sega Genesis games, she found that the "most common portrayal of women was actually the complete absence" of them (Dietz, 1998, p. 433). One third (30%) of the games had zero female characters, and less than half (41%) contained at least one female character. Beasley and Standley's (2002) study also echoed similar findings. Examining the portrayal of women in 47 randomly selected Nintendo 64 and Sony PlayStation games, they discovered that only 13.74% were women. Furthermore, female characters had equally poor representation in games across all rating categories (Beasley & Standley, 2002). Video game advertisements fared no better – Scharrer (2004) examined 1,054 advertisements in several popular, large-circulating print video game magazines and found that male characters outnumbered female characters more than 3 to 1.

More recent studies have shown that the findings from earlier studies are still relevant. Williams, Martins, Consalvo, and Ivory (2009) conducted a large-scale content analysis study to obtain a census of gender, race, and age in video games

across 150 games from 9 gaming platforms, and 8,572 total characters were coded. Only 14.77% of total characters coded were women. Similarly, Millers and Summers (2007) examined popular video game magazines and reported that out of the 49 games highlighted by the magazines (and included in the sample), only 53 female characters (versus 282 male characters) appeared, indicating that there was 1 female for every 5.3 males. Burgess, Stermer, and Burgess (2007) echoed similar findings, reporting that with video game covers, male characters were four times more frequently portrayed in comparison to their female counterparts.

Furthermore, prior research shows that when women actually appeared in video games, they were less likely to drive action in the narrative (e.g. as protagonists or main characters) and more likely to hold only secondary, non-playable (e.g. a character that cannot be controlled by the player) roles (Miller & Summers, 2007; Mou & Peng, 2009). Male characters were five times more likely to be portrayed as a main character in comparison to females (Burgess, Stermer & Burgess, 2007) and females more likely to be decorative or bystanders (Glaubke et al., 2001).

Women also tended to be extremely stereotyped in the roles that they held in video games. They tended to fit traditional stereotypes that hold women as weak, nurturing, and objects for male consumption. In 1998, Dietz catalogued female characters into several categories she saw repeatedly occurring: damsels in distress, sex objects, prizes to be won, females as victims, and females as heroes or action characters. Only 15% of video games portrayed women as heroes, while 21% portrayed women as victims (e.g. damsels in distress), and 28% displayed women as sex objects. What's more, in addition to narratives and aesthetics, specific game design decisions, such as camera angles, encouraged players to further view characters as sex objects (Schleiner, 2001). Dill and Thrill (2007) confirm that the stereotypical female is still pervasive in many contemporary video games, with 62.6% of women coded as "visions of beauty" - a variation of Dietz's "sex objects" - objects that exist solely for male consumption. Similarly, Mou and Peng (2009)

reported significant differences in the way males and females were portrayed, with women being portrayed as more helpless and needing to be rescued.

Research also showed that there was a trend of objectifying and hypersexualising women in video games. The literature revealed that female characters had unrealistic body sizes that tended to fit in with the "thin ideal" (the concept of the perfectly slim female body) but still had exaggerated breasts and buttocks (Downs & Smith, 2010). Most concerningly, it was also found that video games with the thinnest female body imagery tended to be rated for children (Martins, Williams, Harrison & Ratan, 2009). Furthermore, women in video games were usually found wearing little to no clothing. Glaubke et al. (2001) reported that females, in comparison to their male counterparts, were twice as likely to be displayed with more revealing, tight clothing, regardless of the environmental setting of the game. In examining the top ten games for seven gaming consoles, it was discovered that "nearly one in five female characters (21%) had exposed breasts, 13% had exposed buttocks, and 20% had exposed midriffs" (p. 17). Similarly, Beasley and Standley (2002) noted that, in addition to women being more likely to be portrayed wearing less clothing in comparison to males, nearly half (41%) of female characters were coded as having large breasts. The authors further add that one third (31.03%) of large breasted women appeared in games rated E, which meant that these games were suitable, and could be played, by players of all ages, including young children.

The absence of women and the stereotypical and idealised portrayals of female characters in video games present a non-representative depiction of women to the gaming population. In reality, women represent nearly 50% of the world's population, whereas they constitute less than 20% of characters in video games. In the context of Gerbner's Cultivation theory, individuals who are repeatedly shown only thin females that are secondary to male characters and exist only to be rescued or won, might believe this to be normal, and be in danger of forming attitudes that align with this extremely distorted worldview.

With the recent rise in female gamers, a few video games (e.g. *Tomb Raider,*
Primal) have tried to incorporate more diversified representations of women by
including more competent, tougher female characters in dominant positions (Jansz &
Martis, 2007). Yet, as Glaubke et al. note, "females may be as tough as the males, and
may have to face similar missions and opponents, but they have an added challenge:
to look sexy while doing it" (p. 15). Many authors argue that these aggressive female
characters "are not true figures of liberation" (Dill & Thrill, 2007, p. 861). Simply
giving female characters one additional trait while continuing to objectify female
characters is not an attempt at changing or diversifying the representations of women
in video games. Female characters are shown as courageous and intelligent, but they
are also made up and objectified. Ultimately, the female character's powerful role is
diminished by an emphasis on her physical appearance (Behm-Morawitz & Mastro,
2009).

**Why Representation Matters - Perceptions and Effects of the Portrayal of
Women in Video Games**

Researchers have long studied the relationship of between playing video
games and the mentality and outlook of video gamers. In examining how video
games can affect self-esteem, researchers discovered a direct relationship between the
number of hours spent playing video games and a player's self-esteem. Bartlett and
Harris (2008) examined whether playing video games that emphasised the body
would increase negative body image. Not unexpectedly, women reported lower self-
esteem at the end of the study session. A study exploring the self-esteem of middle
school students and their video game playing habits also revealed similar results
(Funk & Buchman, 1996). It showed that there was an inverse relationship between
playing video games and self-esteem, where adolescent girls who spent more time
playing video games reported lower self-esteem.

Research has also focused on examining the effects of sexualised portrayals of women in video games on individuals. Results revealed that sexualised portrayals of women do affect real-life attitudes about women, undercutting their authority and their competence. Behm-Morawitz and Mastro (2009) studied how exposure to sexualised female video game characters could affect gender stereotyping and female self-concept in young adults. After playing a video game with a sexualised female character, the researchers discovered that male participants reported less confidence in the physical capabilities of women, and were more likely to be supportive of statements that "were reflective of traditional gender roles in terms of career choices and domestic work" (p. 15). Results also revealed that, after playing a video game with a sexualised female character, female participants also reported less self-efficacy, and lower confidence in completing physical tasks.

Video games also had a desensitising effect on individuals. Several studies that were conducted to examine if more hours playing video games meant more tolerance towards the negative content within demonstrated that there was indeed a relationship between the two. In a study of high school students, it was found that students who spent more time playing video games were less critical and more accepting of the negative content of video games (Henning, Brenick, Killen, O'Connor & Collins, 2009). In particular, males who played more hours of video games were six times less likely to recognise a stereotypical portrayal, and less inclined to acknowledge that these descriptions could be harmful to women. Similarly, adult men and women who had more long-term exposure to stereotyped video game representations in video games became more tolerant of sexual harassment, and men became more likely to invoke hostile sexism, be more aggressive, and make more negative remarks towards women (Dill, Brown & Collins, 2008; Fox & Bailenson, 2009).

The Singapore Context

Video games are also extremely popular in Singapore. The country's high smartphone (88%) and broadband (116%) penetration rates have fuelled mobile and online gaming (Nielsen, 2014; PWC, 2014). In a 2010 survey conducted by Synovate, it was reported that 41% of Singaporean youths owned a video gaming console (e.g. PlayStation, Xbox, Nintendo Wii) (SMU, 2014). In total, video game revenue in Singapore in 2013 amounted to USD 357 million, up 14% from 2009 (USD 313 million) (PWC, 2014).

The demographics of Singaporean video gamers, however, remain unclear. There has only been one extensive academic study conducted on video gaming in Singapore, and that was a 2010 study examining pathological gaming amongst Singaporean youth. In the study, it was found that 82.6% of youths, from Primary 3 to Secondary 2, played video games weekly, with the average child reporting that they played 20.2 hours of video games per week, which is substantially higher in comparison to other countries (American youths reported an average of 13.2 hours per week using the same measurement instruments). It was also found that more males played video games in comparison to females (Choo et. al, 2010).

The rise of Singapore's video game culture has sparked early investigations into video games and their effect on Singaporean gamers, but research still remains quite sparse. Several studies have concentrated their research on violence and shown that there is an increase of aggressive behaviour with an increase of video game exposure in both local primary school students, local secondary school students, as well as undergraduate students studying at a local university (Gentile et. al, 2014; Kie et. al, 2011). However, no study has yet attempted to investigate how Singaporean gamers perceive gender (specifically women) in video games and compare whether those views mirror the attitudes found in video games.

CHAPTER 3 – RESEARCH GOALS & QUESTIONS

To help rectify this deficit, my study attempts to understand how female video game characters are portrayed in contemporary games, so as to establish a picture of how video game studios choose to portray female characters, and to assess whether and how they are now portrayed differs from how they were depicted in the past.

RQ1: How are female characters portrayed in more recently released video games?

> **RQ1a:** Are female characters more likely to be main characters in certain genres?

> **RQ1b:** Do more recently released video games have more women assuming main character roles?

Since previous research has also highlighted that female characters tended to be more sexualised and showcased in secondary roles (Dietz, 1998; Beasley & Standley, 2002; Dill & Thrill, 2007; Mou & Peng, 2009; Downs & Smith, 2010), my research aims to examine if these themes persist in contemporary video games.

RQ2: Do different genres of video games contain different degrees of sexualisation of female characters?

RQ3: Are females stereotypically depicted and are these depictions based on traditional gender roles?

Furthermore, a large segment of video game research has been dedicated to studying the effects of video games and their treatment of women on real-life perceptions and attitudes. The recent shift in how female characters are portrayed presents an opportunity to study if video gamer perceptions of female characters mirror those seen in contemporary video games, or if they hold attitudes that align more closely with how women are portrayed in older ones.

RQ4: Do the perceptions and attitudes of females held by video gamers mirror the depictions and portrayals of female characters in contemporary video games?

CHAPTER 4: CONTENT ANALYSIS OF VIDEO GAMES

METHODOLOGY

To address the research questions, a mixed methodology was employed. A content analysis (Part 1) was first conducted, followed by in-depth interviews (Part 2).

Strategies for Sampling Selection

Purposive sampling was used in this study, with inclusion criteria adapted from previous video game studies (e.g. Jansz & Martis, 2007). In order to examine how the video game industry portrayed and represented female characters in recent video games, the following criteria was used for video game selection.

Sampling by Sales

Following the lead of previous video game research, video game sales were used as a criterion for selection. Profitability is a good indicator of video game popularity, as stronger sales indicate higher volume and therefore a wider spread of influence. Profitability as a criterion for selection is also used to exclude more niche genres of video games such as "indie games," which are video games created by any individual or group that has not received funding or financial support from established video game publishers (Dill & Thrill, 2007; Jansz & Martis, 2007). Indie games enjoy a high traffic of niche gamers but are usually restricted to circulation within one or two countries (because there might not be enough funds to publish it in an additional country), and thus are not widely purchased or played worldwide. Sampling by sales will help to exclude these niche genres that only target a small segment of the gaming market.

The video games selected for analysis have thus been chosen based on their global gross sales records. The video games selected were not taken from top-selling Singapore video games lists due to the fact that these lists are extremely difficult to acquire. This is because the Singaporean market (in comparison to the entire Asian market) is so small that the country's sales numbers are not readily available. Instead, they are combined with sales figures for the rest of the Asian (or global) market to provide a larger picture of video game sales. Therefore, since Singapore video game sales contribute to the global sales market, those lists were used in the sample selection.

To select these games, lists of "Top 100" best-selling video game lists were acquired from VGChartz. VGChartz is a business intelligence and research firm that uses several methods (e.g. combining region-specific gamer polling, region-specific retail sales, region-specific resale prices, etc.) to provide an annual report of the "Top 100" best-selling games worldwide. VGChartz is often used and cited by international news websites (i.e. Forbes, CNET, International Business Times, Bloomberg) as well as popular gaming news websites (i.e. Gamespot) (Halleck, 2014; Alpeyev, Huang & Amano, 2014; Reisinger, 2015; Pereira, 2015; Trefis Team, 2015). The sample list was generated by reviewing the list of top-selling games provided by VGChartz from the years 2010 to 2015, and then applying additional criteria listed below.

Because video game titles often appear multiple times on best-selling lists (due to the production of games for multiple gaming platforms), duplicates were eliminated. For example, *Assassin's Creed: Black Flag* appeared twice due to the fact that it was released on both the *PlayStation 3* and *Xbox 360* consoles, but I only took the first mention/highest rank of the video game (which was #14, released for the *PlayStation 4*), and used only that entry for coding.

Narrative Focused Games

Video games are generally categorized into several different genres, based on their gameplay interactions. The list of video game genres and subgenres can be endless, but most gaming studios and gamers, including the ESA, VGChartz, and the Entertainment Software Ratings Board (ESRB), the main ratings organisation in the video gaming industry, agree on major classifications, such as Action, Adventure, Fighting, Role-Playing, Racing, Strategy, Shooter, and Sports (amongst others). Examples of Action games include *The Last of Us* and the *Batman Arkham* franchise. Examples of Adventure games include the *Assassin's Creed* franchise, the *Halo* franchise, and the *Mass Effect* franchise. Examples of Fighting games include *Street Fighter* and *Injustice: Gods Among Us*. Examples of Role-Playing games include *The Sims*, *Final Fantasy XIII* and *Elder Scrolls V: Skyrim*. Examples of Racing games include *Need For Speed*. Examples of Strategy games include *Starcraft* and the *Civilization* franchise. Examples of Shooter games include the *Call of Duty* franchise and the *Battlefield* franchise. And examples of Sport games include *NBA 2K14*, *FIFA 14,* and *Madden NFL 25*.

Jansz and Martis (2007) chose to exclude certain genres from their study, namely Sports, Racing, and Fighting games. Because these games are often "level-based," meaning that they are usually short person-to-person or person-to-computer battles, based entirely on an individual player's skill level, the narratives in these games are often very thin, and often end when the level played ends. Taking instruction from Jansz and Martis (2007), games from the Action, Adventure, Shooter, Strategy, Survival, and Role-Playing genres were also selected for analysis in this study, as they usually contain narrative storytelling. It was necessary that video games selected for analysis included a narrative storyline to study how female characters were not only portrayed, but also established and developed over the course of the video game.

Presence of Female Principle Characters

In order to examine how the video game industry portrays females, games selected had to include female characters. To ensure the presence of female characters in the video game, extensive research was conducted on each title in the sample list, to ensure that at least one female main or supporting character would be present. Most video game studios market or promote their video game protagonists to attract gamers to purchase their product. Therefore official marketing material was researched to see if they featured a female main character or supporting character. The presence of female principal characters in the sample of games acquired (from the top-selling lists) was determined from video game cover image, the video game launch trailer, video game official synopsis, and the video game website. Video games that featured a female principal character in *at least one* official video game material (e.g. an official video game cover image, launch trailer, official synopsis, or game website) was included in the list of games to be examined. The full list of video games examined in this study can be found in Appendix A.

Gaming Platforms

The video games included in this study came from five top-selling video game platforms: PlayStation 3, Xbox 360, PlayStation 4, Xbox One, and PC. As with the selection of video games by sales, top-selling video game platforms were used because they reached the largest segment of the gaming population. Mobile games were excluded from the sample list, as they are oftentimes "level-based," casual games, and do not include much narrative storytelling. Despite the increasing growth of mobile gamers, for now, the narrative storyline of mobile games remain sparse, as mobile games contain little to no dialogue, and thus very little character progression.

Summary

In conclusion, the video games selected for analysis were narrative focused games (Action, Adventure, Shooter, Strategy, Survival, and Role-Playing) that were in the "Top 100" selling lists worldwide and could be played on popular gaming platforms (See Appendix 1). As mentioned above, additional criteria for game selection were developed in order to further examine female characters in video games. While it may seem that the exclusions made were numerous, the included genres still make up a majority of the top-selling games on the gaming consoles and desktop computers (56.6% on console, 75% on computers in 2010; 56.9% on console, 73.6% on computers in 2011; 60.6% on console, 68.3% on computers in 2012; 69.2% on console, 67.2% on computers in 2013; 69.5% on console, 71.6% on computers in 2014; 70.5% on console, 71.4% on computers in 2015) (ESA, 2011; ESA, 2012; ESA, 2013; ESA, 2014; ESA, 2015; ESA, 2016). Since these games comprise a large part of the video game market, it is worth taking the time to closely examine their content.

DATA COLLECTION

Unit of Analysis

Previous research studies have tried to tackle what an adequate unit of analysis is in video games. As analysing video game footage can be time-consuming, some researchers suggested examining magazine depictions of characters (Scharrer, 2004; Miller & Summers, 2007) or depictions on video game covers (Burgess, Stermer & Burgess, 2007). Others who have examined actual video game content have only looked at introductory cinematic sequences (Jansz & Martis, 2007), random intervals of timed gameplay (Beasley & Standley, 2002), or short segments of gameplay, such as the first 30 minutes of the game (Williams, Martins, Consalvo & Ivory, 2009; Downs & Smith, 2009). For my research, I took into consideration the

suggestions of previous research studies, and chose to analyse the video game in different sections.

The first section selected for analysis was the first two hours of the video game (e.g. from the start screen or the introductory cinematic sequence). The start of the game was important, as it usually includes the "introductory cinematic," which provides an introduction of the game, the game world, its main characters, and the dominant storyline. The game's female lead, as well as how female characters would be treated in that video game, would likely appear in the introduction of the video game.

A second section in the latter half was also selected for analysis, since examining only content from the beginning of the game would be unrepresentative – there could be new female principal characters introduced later in the game. Therefore, a segment of the second half was randomly selected to be analysed. To obtain the segment, a random number from 50 to 100 was generated – 76, which was then translated to a percentage. Percentage (76%) was used, instead of time (76th minute), to ensure consistency from game to game. Because game lengths can differ wildly, from a few hours to a few hundred hours, opting to analyse the 76% point of the game allowed for standardisation (i.e. coding the same point in every game). So, an hour from the 76% point of the game was also coded.

Video Game Sample

In examining previous research on video games, most researchers opted to capture video gameplay by playing the video games themselves and recording footage for coders to analyse. This is a time-consuming process that not only limits sample sizes - to get to the end of the game, the researchers would need to spend hours playing it - but also makes the material captured inconsistent, as it depends greatly on the skill of the person playing it (Schmierbach, 2009). Furthermore, any

interactivity by the researchers with the game would add the possibility of sampling bias since there would be conscious or unconscious decisions in gameplay that could possibly benefit their research hypotheses (Schmierbach, 2009). To overcome this, Schmierbach (2009) recommends using multiple players when collecting gameplay footage, as a "greater diversity of player experiences [can help] ensure that the systematic approach of a particular player doesn't overly influence the results" (pp. 161). Some more recent studies (Williams, Martins, Consalvo & Ivory, 2009) have chosen to use an expert gamer (which was not one of the researchers) to record game footage, which was later analysed.

Since the completion of most of the previous research on video games, however, the way in which video gameplay is captured and made accessible to others has changed. Previously, researchers had to personally capture footage, or find an expert gamer and record their game footage, because there was no public database of video game footage. Now, game content can be easily accessed through consumer videos that are uploaded to the Internet. Called "walkthroughs" by the gaming community, these videos are created with the intent to assist other gamers in progressing through their games. Played by skilled or expert gamers, a walkthrough provides game footage of how to progress from the start of the game to the finish (e.g. a visual step-by-step guide), and most often not only of the main narrative, but also side missions and any collectable quests. Walkthroughs therefore offer video game researchers a complete recording of the gameplay, showcasing all possibilities, as well as consistency, because these expert gamers are likely to be familiar with most gameplay genres. These walkthroughs, played by different gamers, also limit sampling bias, since they have different gaming approaches. Additionally, based on the number of views for YouTube walkthroughs for video games, it can also be assumed that the gaming community knows about them and regularly seeks them out for reference, which also showcases their reliability. For example, the walkthrough for *Alien: Isolation* has more than 397,000 YouTube views.

To obtain these video game samples, I searched the video-sharing site YouTube for the highest-rated, most-viewed walkthrough videos of the games *without* commentary, since we are examining the content of the games, and not what the content creator is narrating. The full list of video games examined can be found in Appendix 1.

CODING

To answer my research questions, each female character in the video game was analysed in terms of her physical appearance, behaviour, game goals and motivations, and her role in the video game. The codebook was designed based on previous literature (Jansz & Martis, 2007; Downs & Smith, 2009; Smith, Choueiti, Scofield & Pieper, 2013), as well as my personal observations as a female gamer – I sought to broaden coding options (i.e. for "Overall Build," including "athletic," "extremely muscular," and "curvy," in addition to the established "thin," "average," and "obese" choices) to provide richer results, while staying mindful that my adverse experiences might colour the research design. To avoid bias, a second coder helped to later refine the codebook again, and entries were modified to provide more description and clarity whilst coding. The following variables were coded (see Appendix B for the Codebook):

Identifying Characters of Importance

Borrowing the methods used by Downs and Smith (2009) and Jansz and Martis (2007), characters were first coded for their importance to the video game narrative. This method required additional investigation using online data based on each of the games. As mentioned previously, after "Top 100" selling lists of video games worldwide were acquired, video games were further examined to see if they had included important female characters in their marketing materials (e.g. video game cover, video game launch trailer, official synopsis, and official website). Fan-

based online databases (such as Giantbomb) were used to acquire additional information, as they included detailed character information as well as images of the characters.

After identifying video games with female lead or supporting characters, it was agreed that all speaking female characters in the video game would be coded and non-speaking ones omitted. This was done for two reasons. The first was that there needed to be some way to standardise coding of female characters between the two coders, and decrease the chances where a coder would miss coding a female character. And the second reason is that because video game production is extremely time consuming, creating non-speaking characters is easier than creating speaking characters that require additional animated facial features and voiceovers by human actors. Thus, speaking characters are necessarily of some importance to the narrative as they provide additional information for the player, and help to progress the overall storyline.

Table 1
Summarisation of Coding Categories and Variables

Coding Categories	Coded Variables	Variable Options
Game Information	Genre	Shooter, Action-Adventure, Role-Playing Games (RPGs), Strategy, Survival
	Year	2010, 2011, 2012, 2013, 2014, 2015
Character Game Information	Character Customisation	Full Customisation, Between Pre-Made Characters, Customisable Pre-Made Characters, Predetermined Characters
	Character Importance	Playable Main Character (PMC), Non-Playable Main Character, Secondary Character, Prop Character
Character Demographics	Age	Infant (0-5), Young Child (6-12), Teen (13-20), Adult (21-39), Middle-Aged, Elderly (65+), N/A, Can't Tell

	Ethnicity	White/Caucasian, Hispanic/Latino, Black/African-American, Middle-Eastern/Arabic, Ambiguous, Creature, Robot, N/A, Can't Tell
	Gender	Traditionally Feminine, Neutral, Traditionally Masculine, Can't Tell
Character Hypersexuality	Overall Build	Extremely Thin, Thin, Curvy, Athletic, Average, Obese, Extremely Muscular
	Chest Size	Small, Medium, Large
	Waist Size	Small, Medium, Large
	Nudity	No Nudity, Partial Nudity, Full Nudity
Narrative Variables	Role	Protagonist, Victim, Antagonist, Helper, Sidekick, Neutral, Obstacle, Prop
	Power Level to PMC	Is the PMC, Equal to the PMC, Submissive to PMC, Dominant to PMC, No Influence
	Relation to PMC	Is the PMC, Stranger, Acquaintance, Friend, Family Member, Romantic Interest, Lover, Sexual Object, Enemy
	Motivation	Survival, Saving the World, Personal Gain, Passive Motives, The Compass
	Violence	None, Some Violence, Moderate Violence, Excessive Violence,
	Violence to Character	None, Some Violence, Moderate Violence, Excessive Violence
	Violence Avoidable	Yes - Avoidable, No – Necessary, No Violence was Committed

Defining Character Variables

Character Customisation. Video game technology has improved by leaps and bounds since its first debut many decades ago, and some games now allow players to customize characters. This freedom to create the look of a character made it crucial to examine if characters in a game were created by the player or set by the video game studio. Therefore, characters were assessed for their ability to be modified. The categories that were included were: "Yes, Full Customisation," where a character can be fully modified or customised, from skin colour, to hair length and

colour, to clothing, skills and personality traits. "Yes, Between Pre-Made Characters," where players can choose to play as one of many different pre-made characters, but cannot modify their character's physical appearance, skills, and personality. "Yes, Customisable Pre-Made Characters," where players can choose from a selection of pre-made characters, and also can modify small elements such as hair colour or type of clothing. "No, Character is Predetermined and Locked by Game," where a player does not get to choose which character they will control nor modify the character in any way.

Character Importance. Characters were examined based on the importance of their role in the game story. There were four categories which characters could be sorted into. "Playable Main Characters" (PMC) are those that can be controlled by the player, appear in the majority of the game, and direct the video game narrative. "Non-Playable Main Characters" are characters that cannot be controlled by the player, but still direct the video game narrative and share approximately equal screen time with the PMC. "Secondary Characters" are those that interact with the main character, provide information to the player, and direct the video game narrative, but do not share equal screen time with the PMC. "Prop Characters" are characters that have a speaking role, but only appear once or twice in the video game, often as background characters.

Defining Demographic Variables

Age. The age of the character was coded as well; based on visible features such as hair colour, skin features (e.g. wrinkles), and other information (possibly provided by other characters in game), age was coded as one of the following: "Infant" (0–5), "Young Child" (6–12), "Teen" (13–20), "Adult" (21–39), "Middle-Aged" (40–64), "Elderly" (65+), "Not Applicable" (e.g. if character is a humanoid robot where age does not apply), or "Can't Tell."

Ethnicity. Characters were also coded for their ethnicity to the best of the coder's ability, keeping in mind that some of these games do not take place on earth or with humanoid characters. The assessment was based on visible character features such as hair colour, skin colour, and other facial features. The categories included: "White/Caucasian," "Hispanic/Latino," "Black/African American," "Asian," "Middle Eastern," "Ambiguous" (if a character was mixed race or their features contain multiple ethnic types), "Creature" (if a character was not human and human race/ethnicity did not apply to them), "Robot," "Not Applicable," and "Can't Tell."

Character Gender. Female characters were also examined in respect to their gender to see if they fulfilled either traditional gender roles or atypical gender roles. The coding for traditional gender roles was based partly on the ones employed by Dill and Thrill (2007). "Traditionally Feminine" characters are nurturing, quiet, graceful, submissive, emotional, sensitive, innocent, dependent, and soft willed. "Traditionally Masculine" characters are aggressive, violent, independent, competitive, tough-skinned, strong, hard-willed, and rebellious. "Neutral" characters exhibited an equal balance of traditionally feminine and traditionally masculine traits. Characters that expressed absolutely no personality (e.g. robot) were coded as "Not Applicable," and characters that appeared briefly, and where the coder could not accurately judge the character's gender, were coded as "Can't Tell."

Defining Hypersexuality Variables

Overall Build. Characters were also examined for their body size and type. The categories that were included were: "Extremely Thin", where characters are emaciated and skeletal, with visible bones seen protruding from skin. "Thin" characters have very little body fat and are waifish. "Curvy" characters are full-figured with discernible areas of body fat, usually on the hips and stomach. "Athletic" characters are slim, but have muscles or muscle mass. "Average" characters are those

with a normal build, with some levels of moderate body fat. "Obese" characters have an excess of body fat and are extremely overweight. "Extremely Muscular" characters are those with an excess of muscle mass. "Not Applicable" was used when characters were never shown on-screen (i.e. a narrator), or if the character was a robot, or did not have a human body shape. "Can't Tell" was used when the coder could not accurately judge the overall build, because the character was hidden in shadow or blocked by an object.

Chest Size. A character's chest size was also analysed and categorized into one of the following: "Small," if the chest was flat or almost flat, "Medium," if the character had average breast size, "Large," if the character's chest size was protruding, with ample cleavage, "Not Applicable," if the character was a robot or did not possess a human body shape, and "Can't Tell," if the coder could not accurately judge the chest size, due to the fact the character was visually blocked or hidden in shadow. A character's chest size was recorded at two intervals in the game: in the first two hours of gameplay, and then again at the 76% point of the video game.

Waist Size. Character's waist size was examined and coded as one of the following: "Small" (U.S size 00 – 4), "Medium" (U.S. size 4 – 10), "Large" (U.S. size 10 and above), ""Not Applicable," if the character was a robot or did not possess a human body shape, and "Can't Tell," if the coder could not accurately judge the waist size, due to the fact that the character was visually blocked or hidden in shadow. A character's waist size was recorded at two intervals at the game: in the first two hours of gameplay, and then again at the 76% point of the video game.

Nudity. Each character was also analysed for how much (or how little) clothing they wore. "No Nudity" was coded if characters were fully clothed. "Partial Nudity" was coded if characters displayed more skin than is considered modest (i.e. bikinis, crop tops, underwear, low shirts that display cleavage) or naked buttocks. "Full Nudity" was coded if characters were shown wearing no clothing entirely, or revealing their breasts or genitalia. Coders used "Not Applicable" if the character was

a robot or the character's body was never shown in game (i.e. narrator) or "Can't Tell" if they couldn't accurately judge, due to the fact the character's body was never fully visible or hidden in shadow. A character's nudity was recorded at two intervals at the game: in the first two hours of gameplay, and then again at the 76% point of the video game.

Defining Narrative Variables

   Character Role. All characters in a video game have a specific purpose, with regard to the video game narrative, and were coded in terms of what roles they fell into. These role categories were taken from previous studies (Dietz, 1998; Jansz & Martis, 2007), and some that I developed for the purpose of my study. Characters were coded as "Protagonist" if they protected others, or directed the narrative plot in some way, a "Victim," if they suffered repeated unprovoked attacks by other characters or suffered death, "Antagonist," if they were the main adversary or an opponent with malicious intent, "Helper," if they were character who helped other characters or PMC reach other narrative goals, "Sidekick," if they were the PMC's close friend or associate, "Neutral," if they did not seem to care to help, and were only interested in their own goals, "Obstacle," if the character hindered the PMC in small way, or impeded the progress of the game, "Prop," if they were background characters, with one or two speaking lines, "Can't Tell," and "Other." A character's role was recorded at two intervals at the game: in the first two hours of gameplay, and then again at 76% of the video game.

   Power Level to PMC. All characters were coded for their level of authority, influence, or control in comparison to the PMC. Using visual or verbal cues such as titles (e.g. Sir or Madam), gestures (e.g. military salute or bowing) or behaviours shown (e.g. fear), characters were coded into one of five categories: "Equal to the PMC," if the character was a peer of the main character, "Submissive to the PMC," if

the character took orders, was of a lesser rank, or was under control of the main character, "Dominant to the PMC," if the character was of a higher rank or seemed to wield power over the main character, "No influence," and "Can't Tell." A character's power level to the PMC was recorded at two intervals at the game: in the first two hours of gameplay, and then again at the 76% point of the video game.

     Relation to PMC. The relationship that characters had to the PMC was also coded based on visible cues (e.g. level of friendliness between characters) and other information (possibly provided by other characters in game), The categories that were included were: "Stranger," if the character did not know the PMC, "Acquaintance," if the character knew the PMC, but only slightly, "Friend," if they were close to the PMC, "Family Member," if they were biologically related to the PMC, "Romantic Interest," if the character was the love interest in the game narrative, "Lover," if both characters shared romantic feelings, "Sexual Object," if the character was just an object or an instrument for the PMC to indulge in their own sexual gratification, "Enemy," if the character was an antagonist to the PMC, "Can't Tell," and "Other." A character's relationship to the PMC was recorded at two intervals at the game: in the first two hours of gameplay, and then again at the 76% point of the video game.

     Character Motivations. Character motivations were split into seven categories: "Survival," where the character's main objective is the preservation of his or her life, "Saving the World," if the character's objective is to defeat the antagonist or save it from an evil force, "Personal Gain," if the character was simply interested in furthering their own goals and not anyone else's, "The Compass," if the character existed only to point other characters in the right direction to further the story, "Can't Tell," and "Other." Character's motivations were categorised based on the totality of the character's incentives in the game. For example, if Lara Croft from *Tomb Raider* spent 1 hour and 30 minutes trying to escape a jungle, and only 30 minutes raiding tombs, her character motivation would be coded as "survival." Character motivations

were recorded at two intervals in the game: in the first two hours of gameplay, and then again at the 76% point of the video game.

Character Violence. Any violent acts that were committed by the character being coded were also recorded. The following categories were used: "None," "Some Violence," if the character engages in violence to overcome obstacles, or commits violent acts in order to survive (consuming less than 30% of their overall behaviour), "Moderate Violence," if the character engages in multiple violent acts (consuming between 30% to 60% of character's overall behaviour), and "Excessive Violence," if the character seeks out violence and initiates most of the violent acts (consuming more than 60% of the character's overall behaviour). Character violence was recorded at two intervals at the game: in the first two hours of gameplay, and then again at 76% of the video game.

Violence to Character. In addition to character violence, any unprovoked violence committed *towards* the character was also recorded. Violence to character was coded in the following categories: "None," "Some Violence," if the character received minor unprovoked violence acts (consuming less than 30% of their social interaction), "Moderate Violence," if the character is targeted and received some unprovoked violence (consuming 30% to 60% of the character's overall social interaction) and "Excessive Violence," if the character is targeted and received multiple unprovoked violent acts (consuming more than 60% of their overall social interaction). Violence to character was recorded at two intervals in the game: in the first two hours of gameplay, and then again at 76% of the video game.

Violence Avoidable. Finally, the game was coded to see if the violence committed in game could be avoided (e.g. it was the player's decision to commit the violent acts), or if it was part of the locked game narrative. Violence Avoidable was coded as "Yes, it's avoidable," "No, the violence is a necessary part of the narrative," and "No violence was committed."

Reliability

In order to ensure reliability between the two coders (myself and an additional male coder), a period of training took place. Both coders examined the codebook, and together redefined some units of analysis. We worked together to include more detailed definitions to help create a better sense of understanding (and thus higher reliability) between the two of us. Once both coders agreed upon the codebook, we conducted several pilot tests using games released prior to 2010, which met all the requirements of the study. Training was conducted on several games - *Assassin's Creed II, Left 4 Dead 2*, *Gears of War 2*, and *Metal Gear Solid 4: Guns of the Patriots* – until a minimum score of Kappa = 0.80 was reached, following which coding for the actual study sample then commenced.

Both coders coded all 34 video games selected for analysis (see Appendix 1 for full game list). 3 out of 34 games (*Diablo 3*, *Borderlands 2*, and *Halo: Reach*) were used to test reliability. For almost all the variables, the reliability was $k > 0.90$. The only variable that fell below $k = 0.90$ was Motivations (first two hours) in *Halo: Reach* ($k = 0.80$). These results suggest that all variables coded are reliable.

RESULTS

A total of 34 video games met the selection criteria and were coded (See Appendix A for the full list of video games coded). Approximately half of the games in the sample (51.7%, $n = 165$) were from the Action-Adventure genre. The next most common genre was found to be Shooter games (28.8%, $n = 92$), and Role-Playing games (14.7%, $n = 47$) (Appendix C, Table 1). Of the 34 video games, a total of 319 female speaking video game characters were identified and recorded in the data set. Within the five-year sampling frame, 2015 had the most recorded female speaking characters (31%, $n = 99$), followed by 2013 (25.1%, $n = 80$), and 2010 (18.8%, $n = 60$) (Appendix C, Table 2). Some female characters appeared in more

than one game title, due to the game's continuation as part of a franchise. Specifically, Commander Shepherd appears in *Mass Effect 2* and *Mass Effect 3*, Lara Croft appears in *Tomb Raider* and *Rise of the Tomb Raider*, Rebecca Crane appears twice in *Assassin's Creed IV: Black Flag* and *Assassin's Creed Syndicate*, and Elena Fisher appears twice in *Uncharted 3* and *Uncharted: The Nathan Drake Collection*.

In examining female characters from the past five years, only three main characters (0.9%), from *Mass Effect* 2, *Mass Effect* 3, and *Fallout 4*, allowed for full customisation, letting the player choose between a male or female playable main character, and the ability to customise clothing and physical features. The rest of the characters (97.8%, n = 312) did not have the option of customisation (Appendix C, Table 3).

Figure 1. An image of the male and the female Commander Shepherd from the *Mass Effect* series. *Mass Effect* allowed for full customisation, letting players choose to play as the main character in either male or female form, as well as allowing them to customise personality and physical traits such as eye colour, hair colour, etc. (Gamespot, 2014).

In examining Character Customisation by year, the majority of female characters coded were either prop characters (55.5%, n = 177) or secondary characters (31.3%, n = 100). Only 9.1% (n = 29) of the total female characters coded were playable main characters, while 4.1% (n = 13) were non-playable main characters (See Appendix C, Table 4 for full results). However, more recent years show an increase in female principal characters, with 2015 having the highest number of playable female

principal characters (13.1%, *n* = 13) (See Appendix C, Table 5 for full results). A test of univariate analysis of variance (ANOVA) was conducted on production year and importance of character to see if the year the game was released was a predictor of women in more main character roles. The results show that production year and importance of character is statistically significant, F (5, 313) = 3.177, *p* < 0.01. A Post Hoc Tukey HSD test revealed that, in particular, games from 2015 is predicted to have more females in main character roles in comparison to games from 2013 (*p < 0.05*) (Appendix D, Table 6).

Further examination revealed that most female principal characters tended to be in the Action-Adventure genre (54.7%, *n* = 23), followed by Role-Playing Games (19%, *n* = 8), with the strategy genre having the fewest female principal characters (2.3%, *n* = 1). A chi-square test of independence was conducted on genre and importance of character to see if female characters were more likely to be main characters in certain genres. The results show that the importance of character is dependent on the genre of the video game, with statistically significant results χ^2 (12, n = 319), *p < 0.05* (Appendix C, Table 7).

Most of the female characters coded were adult (76.5%, *n* = 244) (Appendix C, Table 8) and Caucasian (63.9%, *n* = 204). Blacks (8.5%, *n* = 27) was the second most common ethnicity, while others such as Hispanic/Latino (2.2%, *n* = 7), Black, Asian (2.2%, *n* = 7), and Middle Eastern (0.3%, *n* = 1) were rarely featured, and outnumbered by non-human creatures such as aliens and robots (4.1%, *n* = 13). A chi-square test of independence was also performed to examine the relationship between ethnicity and character importance. The relationship between these variables was significant χ^2 (27, *n* = 319), *p < 0.05* with Caucasian female characters more likely to be more important characters in video games (Appendix C, Table 10).

Figure 2. Most female characters were found to be adult and Caucasian, much like Clara Lille, a character from *Watch Dogs*. Other ethnicities were found to be less featured. (Gamespot, 2014).

Most female characters were also found to have thin (37.3%, *n* = 119) or average (31.3%, *n* = 100) body builds (See Appendix C, Table 11 for full results). As well, they tended to have medium chest sizes (52.7%, *n* = 168) as well as medium waist sizes (53.9%, *n* = 172) (Appendix C, Table 12; Appendix C, Table 13). Further examination of female character body types within video game genres revealed that the Action-Adventure genre contained the most thin (40%, *n* = 66) body types with statistically significant results, χ^2 (28, n = 319), *p < 0.01* (Appendix C, Table 14). Female characters were also found to be fully clothed (73%, *n* = 233) in games, with few instances of female characters being partially nude (7.5%, *n* = 24), or fully nude (0.9%, *n* = 3) (Appendix C, Table 15).

Figure 2. A screenshot of Lara Croft from *Tomb Raider*, coded as "Thin" for "Overall Build" due to her body frame having very little body fat, and also lacking muscles, with a "Medium" breast size, and a "Small" waist size (Gamespot, 2013).

Figure 3. A screenshot of Sarah Kerrigan from *StarCraft 2*, coded as "Average" for "Overall Build" due to her body frame having areas of fat, while not being extremely muscular, with a "Medium" breast size, and a "Medium" waist size (StarCraft, 2013).

Figure 4. A screenshot of Agnes MacBean from *Assassin's Creed Syndicate*, coded as "Obese" for "Overall Build" due to her body frame having significant areas of fat, with a "Medium" breast size, and a "Large" waist size (MKIceAndFire, 2015).

To examine if different genres of video games contained different degrees of sexualization of female characters, a chi-square test of independence was conducted on Genre and Nudity, Genre and Chest Size, and Genre and Waist Size. The results show that all three are dependent on the genre of the video game with statistically significant results, with Nudity χ^2 (16, n = 319), *p < 0.01*, Chest Size χ^2 (16 n = 319), *p < 0.05*, and Waist Size χ^2 (16, n = 319), *p < 0.01* (Appendix C, Table 16; Appendix C, Table 17; Appendix C, Table 18).

Female characters were also examined to see if they tended to be depicted based on traditional gender roles, and most were found to be "Neutral" (47%, *n =*

150) meaning they exhibited both traditionally feminine and traditionally masculine traits (Appendix C, Table 19). Further examination revealed that main characters tended to be depicted as "Neutral," (19.3%, $n = 29$) while prop or background characters tended to be depicted as more traditionally feminine (71.8%, $n = 56$) (Appendix C, Table 20).

Figure 5. Supporting and background female characters were found to be more traditionally feminine, exhibiting traits such as "nurturing" and "caring." "Bar Woman," a background character in *The Witcher 3*, appeared in the story to take care of the main character, by offering assistance (MKIceAndFire, 2015).

With regard to their role within the video game, most females also tended to be prop or background characters (34.2%, $n = 109$), with protagonists (16.6%, $n = 53$) the second most common character role coded, and victims (8.5%, $n = 27$) the third (Appendix C, Table 21). In examining their motivations, it was found that most female characters were driven by personal goals and personal gain (48.3%, $n = 154$), with a large number of female characters also having passive motives (21.6%, $n = 69$) (Appendix C, Table 22).

A more in-depth examination revealed that while female main and supporting characters are given more action-oriented roles ("Saving the World," 11.2%, $n = 36$; "Personal Gain," 21.9%, $n = 70$), a large number of female characters are given

passive roles or are simply information hubs to further the narrative plot ("Passive

Motives," 21.6%, *n* = 69; "The Compass," 4.4%, *n* = 14).

Figure 5. Supporting or background female characters (from left to right: Kathleen from *Beyond Two* Souls, Woman in *BioShock* Infinite, Prostitute in *The Order 1886*) were found to be passive – oftentimes used as romantic or sexual objects, or as objects to move the narrative plot forward. (MKIceAndFire, 2013; MKIceAndFire, 2013; MKIceAndFire, 2015).

A chi-square test of independence was also conducted on motivations and importance

of character, and the relationship between these variables was significant, results χ^2

(15, n = 319), *p < 0.01* (Appendix C, Table 23).

The full results of SPSS can be found in Appendix C.

DISCUSSION FOR PART I: CONTENT ANALYSIS

This study's results offer a glimpse into how video game studios currently

portray women. Of the 34 video game titles analysed, there were 29 playable main

characters that were female, and seven that were the leads for their titles (Sarah

Kerrigan from *StarCraft II*, Commander Shepherd from *Mass Effect 2* and *Mass

Effect 3*, Clementine from *The Walking Dead: Season 2*, Lara Croft from *Tomb

Raider* and *Rise of the Tomb Raider*, Amanda Ripley from *Alien: Isolation*, Ellie

from *The Last of Us*, and Evie Frye from *Assassin's Creed Syndicate*.

The results of the study paint a clear picture of the dominant contemporary female character – she is an adult Caucasian woman, with a slim figure and ample breast size. She was mostly found to be a background character with passive motives, but also increasingly, the protagonist directing the narrative, seeking to fulfil personal goals or even save the world. The results also show that while women were represented in all video game genres, there is an association between character importance and genre, with higher frequencies of female principal characters in Action-Adventure titles. Furthermore, the results of an ANOVA test revealed that production year could be used to predict the number of female principal characters in video games. This means that games made more recently are more likely to include or have women as main characters.

As well, the results also reveal a relationship between sexualisation and genre, with slimmer characters with ample breast sizes seen in Action-Adventure titles. Also, while most female characters were found to be fully clothed, there were still three cases where female characters were found to be fully nude, two of which were from the same game (Ada Wong from *Resident Evil 6*, Deborah Harper from *Resident Evil 6*, and Yennefer from *The Witcher 3*). Further examination of the results also shows an increasing number of "Average" body types (31.3%, $n = 100$) being seen in contemporary video games, which could signal that video game studios are at least attempting to reduce the sexualisation and idealisation of the "perfect" female body (Appendix C, Table 11). These results also suggest that sexualisation of females is still prominent in video games, but less so in comparison to previous studies (Glaubke et al., 2001; Dill and Thrill, 2007; Downs & Smith, 2010).

There is also an association between gender stereotypes and female characters, with a large segment of female characters (47%, n = 150) exhibiting both traditionally masculine and traditionally feminine traits (Appendix C, Table 19). But the issue seems to be more complicated than that – while most main characters are "Neutral," in terms of gender stereotypes, most prop or background characters

display traditional female traits such as submissiveness and gentleness (Appendix C, Table 19). In other words, while most main characters are action-oriented, and similar to their male peers, most background characters remain unchanged, acting as damsels in distress or eye-candy. This mixed messaging of how female characters are portrayed in contemporary video games is an interesting contrast and a clear struggle of the video game studios, as they attempt to redefine the role of female characters in games.

The results of this study offer a contrast to the studies that came before it (Dietz, 1998; Burgess, Stermer & Burgess, 2007; Miller & Summers, 2007; Mou & Peng, 2009; Williams, Martins, Consalvo & Ivory, 2009) where women were largely absent or simply passive characters. This signals a trend towards the increasing prominence of female video game characters, and female video game lead characters, but more long-term research is needed to support this assertion. Future studies can consider expanding the sample size, for games made in 2010 to 2015, as well as tracking these changes in the long term, to see if the prominence of female video game characters increases as new games are released.

However, while the results point to the fact that there has been an increase in female characters, and an increase in female principal characters, the results also clearly show that the video game studios only promote and portray one type of female character – an adult Caucasian woman, with one body type (e.g. slim with ample breasts), and one goal (e.g. must overcome extreme odds to succeed). Despite the increase in female characters, there appears to be a lack of diversity in how this female character looks and what she does. This contemporary female character does not truly represent the females of the world, with more than 5000 ethnicities present (Ethnic Groups, n.d.), it does not even accurately represent the racial makeup of women in the United States, the country where most of these video games are developed and produced (Population Estimates, 2015). As with how males are portrayed in video games (that is to say, more diverse) – doctors, detectives, your

average man, heroes, villains, and cowards – women too are not all the same despite the narrow game portrayals that suggest the contrary. With the video game effects studies in mind (Funk & Buchman, 1996; Barlett & Harris, 2008; Behm-Morawitz & Mastro, 2009), just as there was a danger in portraying women as damsels in distress, and there is now a danger in portraying one type of hero, the female Caucasian action hero, especially to the rest of the world that does not look or act like her. While it is good to see an increase in the number of female characters in video games, there needs to be diversity in female characters, and more diversity in how women act and what they do.

Finally, echoing Williams, Martins, Consalvo, and Ivory (2009), there is a real need for further research on the effects of the depictions and portrayals of female characters on video game players, especially since the portrayal of females in games does not remain stagnant. While there have been studies that explore how these depictions can affect video gamers' perceptions and psyches (Henning, Brenick, O'Connor & Collins, 2009; Behm-Morawitz & Mastro, 2009), there has not been research published lately to examine and include how these contemporary female characters can affect how real-life women are perceived. This study offers a glimpse into this, but with any project, there are limitations, and more data is needed to sketch out a bigger, and more detailed picture. Last but not least, although narrative-based games were selected due to their content richness, level-based games might also shed new light on this matter, and thus, those games should also be taken into consideration for future work.

CHAPTER 5 – EXAMINING PLAYER

PERCEPTIONS

The examination of female video game characters in contemporary video games revealed a slight shift in the way they have been portrayed. The implications of how this affects gamers has been little studied, especially to analyse if their perceptions of female characters mirror what is shown in contemporary games, or if it is more similar to how women are portrayed in older games. To examine video gamer perceptions, a series of qualitative interviews were conducted and the responses analysed to see if it had commonalities with the results from the content analysis from Part 1. Only Singaporean video gamers were included for the interview so as to obtain more data about the gaming habits of Singaporeans (which have thus far been sparse) as well as obtain results that are more region-specific and thus more relevant.

METHODOLOGY

Participants

Any individual living in Singapore, holding a Singaporean passport or Permanent Resident card over the age of 18, who was a moderate to heavy video game player (over five or more hours a week) was invited to participate in the interviews. To increase the likelihood of data saturation within the study's time frame, a snowball method was used to recruit participants. I began by selecting several individuals whom I knew fulfilled the participation criteria and interviewed them. As the interview concluded, I asked these participants to suggest more potential participants, and invited these individuals to participate through email and/or text message. See the Table 2 for more details about the participants.

Table 2
List of Interview Participants

Participant ID	Gender	Age	Occupation	Years of Gaming Experience
R1	Male	Mid-20s	Secondary School Art Teacher	19
R2	Male	Early-20s	Student	11
R3	Male	Mid-20s	Financial Consultant	20
R4	Male	Mid-30s	Project Manager (Gaming)	28
R5	Male	Early-30s	Filmmaker	25
R6	Female	Early-20s	Student	14
R7	Female	Mid-30s	Office Manager (Gaming)	28
R8	Female	Mid-30s	Business Manager (Gaming/ Ecommerce)	20
R9	Male	Mid-30s	Systems Admin (IT)	28
R10	Male	Mid-30s	Operations Executive (Gaming)	28
R11	Male	Mid-20s	Media Producer	15
R12	Male	Early-30s	PhD Student	15
R13	Female	Mid-20s	Art Director	12
R14	Female	Late-30s	Project Director (Advertising)	16
R15	Female	Early-30s	Art Director	25

Interviews

These interviews were conducted over the course of 10 months – commencing on 1st August 2015 and concluding on 30th June 2016. A total of 15 individuals (9 males and 6 females) between the ages of 20 and 40 years were interviewed. All efforts were made to try and achieve an equal balance of male and

female participants, but potential female interviewees were more hesitant and less keen to participate.

Each interview lasted approximately 60 minutes, and was conducted at a time and location of the participant's choosing. The interview was audiotaped and then later transcribed ad verbatim. After, the transcribed interview was analysed to retrieve common themes that emerged from the data.

Data Analysis

A meaning condensation approach was used to analyse the interview transcripts (Ryan & Bernard, 2003). This approach firstly involved rereading the transcripts and identifying important words, phrases, and sentences. Secondly, through axial coding, similar ideas were clustered and sorted into broad categories. Finally, through selective coding, essential meanings were distilled from the broad categories, and presented as concepts, which are titled metathemes.

PARTICIPANT PROFILE

Participants interviewed worked in a variety of industries but all reported starting to play video games from a young age, beginning as early as five years old to around their mid-teens, with most of them having played video games for more than 10 years. With a long history of playing video games, most participants showed signs of being extremely particular and selective of the games they play, as well as protective about their choice of games. They also revealed they had a preferred game genre that they enjoyed playing. It was also discovered that interviewees are driven to play video games because of their interest in the narrative story as well as for personal achievement. With regard to the social aspect of video games, and playing

video games with friends, participants mentioned it was not a major component of playing video games, but rather a nice bonus.

FINDINGS

In each interview, participants were prompted to talk about female video game characters, specifically their perceptions about their physical appearance, their personality, and their roles in the game. Most of their responses about female video game characters' body types and physical features matched the stereotypical and sexualised portrayals found in older games, as well as the descriptions found in previous video game content analysis research – that female video game characters are pretty, with slim waists and large breasts, usually depicted with little clothing.

I did however find some interesting perspectives on the role of female video game characters that echo themes seen in more contemporary video games, which may signal changing perceptions of women in video games.

The Role of Women in Video Games

The Victim or the Hero

The first of these changing views is that women in video games are seen to be at two extremes: as either the victim or the hero. In discussing the role of women in video games, participants tended to only first discuss women as the main characters; if the female character was not the main character, then she was regarded as a victim, someone that needed to be rescued.

> *"So if it was an adventure game, probably she has to be like decently fit. Like Lara Croft or something. Uh, otherwise, your main character would be a damsel in distress I guess."* (Male, early 20s, student, game player for 11 years)

*"You get a really, pretty looking girl. That'd be the first thing. Um, hmm…
that would fit within a set trope. Always. Um, she's either, a damsel in
distress, or a strong female lead."* (Male, mid-20s, teacher, game player for
19 years)

One male participant also provided a very specific example – when talking
about famous female video game characters, he first mentioned a popular video game
heroine, and immediately after, highlighted a well-known damsel in distress.

*"I always think of… when you say female video game character… the first
thing that pops into my mind, the first character that pops into mind is Lara
Croft. Because she's so iconic as a female video game character. And then
the second character that pops into mind is Princess Peach. [Laughs]
Because she's also very iconic."* (Male, early-30s, filmmaker, game player
for 25 years)

Participants tended to view strong female leads positively, while damsels in
distress were regarded as boring and annoying.

*"Basically not the typical damsel in distress kind […] She shouldn't be
helpless, and indecisive, and basically shouldn't be useless."* (Male, early-
20s, student, game player for 11 years)

Even when female characters had important occupations, their portrayal as
characters that were dependent on others robbed them of their potency.

*"… And I think his sister was quite useless. Which is very annoying… She
was one of, like, uh, the scientists that you were supposed to help or
something so you had to escort her and carry her around and stuff. She was
quite useless."* (Male, early-20s, student, game player for 11 years)

As well, the situational framing of female characters only amplified their
helplessness even if the characters were not fundamentally disempowered:

*"Does the complaining about how a house is on far in Cities: Skyline count?
[Laughs] It's always the same graphic in Cities: Skyline, and uh, it's always*

that same person in that same spot, where fire is very accessible, and she's

always complaining. And she's always saying, "My house is on fire! Come

and save me!" And I'm like I'll build a fire station right next to your house.

But your house is always ablaze." (Male, mid-20s, media producer, game

player for 15 years)

Overall, it appears that, when discussing female characters in video games, participants tended to remember women as either a hero if she was the main character and directed action, or a victim if she needed to be helped or rescued. Most tended to speak about female heroines positively, praising her traits, while victims were regarded with disdain and irritation.

The Primary Support Character

With principal female characters, both male and female participants highlighted that oftentimes these women would be given powers and abilities that were non-aggressive, and mainly used to support male characters. While male characters were equipped with skills that focused on strength and fighting, women were usually assigned with more passive abilities that focused on stealth or healing.

"*Intelligence or agility. Which they, I don't know if it's stereotypical or what,*

but that's the usual. If you see a warrior, they're usually men." (Female,

mid-30s, business manager (e-commerce/gaming), game player for 20 years)

"Let's say you look, like, adventure, the guy's like more macho and brawn

and the girl is usually more probably intelligent. Uh, and whatever she might

not have in terms of strength capacity she makes up in brains and stuff."

(Male, early-20s, student, game player for 11 years)

Some participants also provided specific examples of this occurrence in games they have played. Regarding these principal female characters with supportive powers, interviewees seemed ambivalent towards how they are portrayed, neither really speaking about them firmly positively or negatively.

(Discussing *Star Wars: The Old Republic*) *"Like here is like a female Sith, which… you know the dark council doesn't have that many female Siths… and she's rising through the ranks, she's an up-and-coming Minister of Intelligence, stuff like that…"* (Female, early-20s, student, game player for 14 years)

"Like FF7 right […] the core healer of the group and she dies on you! And you [think] to yourself, how can first… how can you kill off a main character? And two, she was your only healer – the one with the better magic!" (Female, late-30s, project director (advertising), game player for 16 years)

"For some odd reason if you are playing Final Fantasy or any of the other Fantasy games, they always seem to be the healers." (Male, mid-20s, media producer, game player for 15 years)

"In the Final Fantasy series, the female characters tend to be a lot more submissive. They're always supporting characters, and if you look at like, the… the… the… RPGs, the way gameplay is made, the guys are always wielding swords and axes and spears… and the women are like… casting healing spells." (Male, early-30s, filmmaker, game player for 25 years)

In speaking with participants, it was gathered that in their experience, despite seeing more principal female characters in video games, these women were still stereotyped, by being given abilities that seem to accord with more traditional female traits and gender roles – such as nurturing, support, caring, etc.

A Fixation on Beauty

Interviewees were also able to quickly describe a typical female character in a video game – a scantily dressed, large breasted, pretty woman – and seemed more drawn to the way the female character looked rather than the way she behaved or had

to behave. Instead of speaking in terms of female characters' in-game actions and roles, both male and female participants tended to dwell on their physical appearance.

"Um… oh I like Tifa. Because she was pretty and had big boobs [….] [But not the Final Fantasy character Lightning] I thought she was really bland." (Male, early-20s, student, game player for 11 years)

"[In] World of Warcraft right, I love the Blood Elves because they're really pretty. [laughs] […] I will choose Blood Elves because they're pretty." (Female, early-30s, art director (advertising), game player for 25 years)

"Like we've got a more… well-rounded Lara Croft. And she's dressed slightly better." (Female, early-20s, student, game player for 14 years)

"Um, I think the females for… for Final Fantasy series are all quite nice. The rest of… the rest I don't really remember […] they look really pretty?" (Female, late-30s, project director (advertising), game player for 16 years)

When it came to the topic of changing the existing way female video game characters were portrayed, female respondents were predictably more supportive of the change than male participants. Male respondents tended to brush off comments that current portrayals were sexist, citing previous examples, and stating that these were long-accepted norms.

"I think, like, uh, there's nothing wrong, in the sense, with having a sexy female character, because if you look at, like, character tropes you have your typical femme fatale, but I think you have to draw the line […] but at the same time I don't think there's anything wrong with making a character that is so called 'sexy', but at the same time, that's not what defines the character per se." (Male, early-20s, student, game player for 11 years)

"You don't want to stare at the guy's ass! The second reason is… sex sells! Gamers tend to be nicer if they think you're a female character – you can get free gold and stuff! But as a general rule, the female form is aesthetically a lot nicer to look at than bulky male." (Male, mid-30s, project manager (gaming),

game player for 28 years)

(Regarding a tribute cover to *The Killing Joke*, a Batman comic)*"People caught wind of it and said it was overly derogatory to females… but this is a comic that came out 25 years ago! And it's critically acclaimed! Basically it's Barbara Gordon, shot by the Joker on the floor! […] Like the comic was meant to be this way! It's so popular, it's sold so many copies – it got so many people talking because of what Joker did to her. You don't suddenly go and change it… and then companies are being overly politically correct. They're trying to get a market that's not interested in their product, interested in their product, by shoving stereotypes and hyping the way things are."* (Male, mid-30s, operations executive (gaming), game player for 28 years)

But female participants tended not to agree with this logic, and seemingly more eager for a change in the way females are treated in video games and video game culture.

"Just having that opportunity for girls to be able to… relate to a character or like, you know, just immerse themselves with the story, or having fun. I think that's… kind of important, because, you know, guys always have… they do [already] have things like that. And girls… not so much." (Female, late-20s, art director, game player for 12 years)

"Whether they make her strong or, you know, that kind of thing, it's mandatory for them now – because people obviously will complain à la Assassin's Creed. They finally gave in right? They made a female assassin? I think we could see more of that? More female characters who are at the forefront of it?" (Female, early-20s, student, game player for 14 years)

(Regarding potentially why female depictions need to change)*"I heard, it was from the VP of Marketing [of the Steel Series] in a press release or press interview that 'female gamers are being sponsored or hired just because sex sells and it's not because they have the skill sets […] they can't play for nuts,*

they're just female'. And when I read that I was really very pissed off."
(Female, mid-30s, business manager (e-commerce/gaming), game player for 20
years)

Overall, while male participants defended what is regarded as stereotypical
ways of portraying women, citing reasons such as others' oversensitivity and
overreaction to a non-issue, female participants disagreed, arguing that with the rising
number of female gamers, and the negative way they are treated in the industry, more
equal representation in video games was justifiable.

Reasons for the Current State of Female Portrayals

The East-West Divide

When discussing female characters, many male participants were quick to
point out the differences between Western and Eastern game studios, citing the
cultural values ingrained in these different countries as the reason why female game
characters are portrayed so contrastingly from each other. In particular, male
interviewees mentioned that Western-made games tended to be more progressive,
featuring more female action-oriented leads directing the narrative, while Eastern-
made games were more traditional, featuring demure women in support roles.

"Whereas, you know, on the Asian end, the East Asian end, you have a very

different type of, uh, characterisation. If you look at the very traditional JRPG,

or Japanese video games [...] they may not be a strong lead, in terms that they

have a very independent personality, they tend to be a more damsel in distress

type, or a strong female character in that she has strong characterisation, but

still oftentimes falls back on a male protagonist or a male antagonist. And the

way they're dressed tends to be more [feminine] as well. You know more

dresses, softer colours, uh, softer hairstyles, and softer personalities." (Male,

mid-20s, financial consultant, game player for 20 years)

"Once again, there's a divide right? In more Western games created by Western developers, I think gender roles are fine, but games that are coming out for China, or more Asian countries, they… sex still sells, and they have to sell for that." (Male, mid-30s, project manager (gaming), game player for 28 years)

"So it's a support system, in like, a lot of the Japanese RPGs. In the Western world I think that the female characters also play some sort of support system but I think in more recent video games, they have attempted to make it a little bit more, to give the female characters a little bit more of a… uh… presence… or how would I say… I think the cultural shift in female game characters [is] more evident in the Western world than in the Asian." (Male, early-30s, filmmaker, game player for 25 years)

"And I've played a number of Japanese RPGs, like, maybe even Tails is borderline. But I've played really my fair share of […] where it's like a fanboy's dream. Every girl fawns over you…" (Male, mid-20s, teacher, game player for 19 years)

While highlighting this huge differentiator, the same male participants also mentioned that they believed that Asian gamers are usually less offended about seeing traditional or stereotypical portrayals, and that Western audiences are usually the ones who complain each time a new video game featuring a stereotypical or sexualised female character is released.

"If I go into forums and read about female characters in video games, in Japan, by Japanese people, the women don't necessarily disagree with that image. It's interesting because, I think it's more of a cultural thing and how they see themselves as part of the culture. I think it's for us to say because we often have a Western view of the world, and so we apply Western thinking to, like, anything we see. So it's easy for us to say that like, 'oh, she's portrayed as submissive or whatnot,' but if you look into the Japanese culture, a lot of the

women are okay with how the women are portrayed in their video games."
(Male, early-30s, filmmaker, game player for 25 years)

"The funny thing about all this right, [the game] Blade and Soul, they came up with a supportive class, they openly said, 'we made this class easy for female players to play', and all the female players started playing it! But that's an Asian-based game. But if they were to say this in the U.S. eh? If say [World of Warcraft] came up with 'oh we made this for females to play, what would happen? [laughs]" (Male, mid-30s, operations executive (gaming), game player for 28 years)

In interviews, only male participants brought up the differences of how female characters are portrayed in Eastern and Western games, suggesting that they are more aware of how different countries handle these portrayals. And while Eastern games tended to be more stereotypical, they highlighted that, as Asian gamers, they are less offended and are more accepting of these traditional or stereotypical portrayals in comparison to their Western counterparts.

Overcompensation by Game Studios

As well, participants also highlighted that the current state of female characters and how they are portrayed lies largely with the fact that video game studios are overcompensating in order to deliver what they think audiences want and what will sell.

> *"But it's a symptom of a larger picture. Um, I mean this boils down to minorities, and you know, racism and everything. It's overcompensating for the minorities."* (Male, mid-30s, project manager (gaming), game player for 28 years)

> *"I think a lot of games right now, they… they tend to… they know it's like a mandatory thing to include at least one female character. Whether they make her strong or, you know, that kind of thing, it's mandatory for them now."* (Female, early-20s, student, game player for 14 years)

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"Okay, I think it goes back the economics of the game companies. The game companies will always try to do stuff, in terms of gameplay, and in terms of storyline, I think they'll try to cater… to their audiences as much as possible. So, I think this growth in female characters or whether they are in supplementary role or in a main role, is largely due to the preferences of the gamers." (Male, mid-20s, media producer, game player for 15 years)

Similar to their views on Western versus Eastern game studios, participants showed awareness of the larger picture – the video game market and its players as a whole, not just the video game – and argued that the current portrayals of female characters (both negative and positive) were largely due to external factors such as cultural traditions or economic incentives.

Defending Video Games - Shifting the Blame to a "Bigger" Problem

Most participants firmly maintained that sexism and sexist occurrences came from the video gamers and not the games themselves. While video games tended to underrepresent and show stereotypical and sexualised portrayals of women, many thought the bigger, and more serious, problem lay with gamer culture and its reinforcement of bad and toxic behaviours – both by male and female gamers.

"Perhaps we can separate the gaming industry from the game makers themselves? Yeah? I find that the gaming industry is often very toxic. Because the very loud people who are yelling and shouting are always, um, the conservative male, male gamers, who feel that we are encroaching on their space." (Female, early-20s, student, game player for 14 years)

"Look at Team Siren. They're horribly bad at League of Legends, but they became famous purely on the fact, they push the fact that sex sells. […] The stereotypes exist for a reason – when there are female gamers who are pushing the stereotypes. Look at Twitch - 99% of female Twitch streamers are not there

to show you the game, they're there to show you their cleavage [...] It works both ways." (Male, mid-30s, project manager (gaming), game player for 28 years)

(Regarding playing online-based games) *"It depends though! Because you get a lot of assholes sometimes. So there was once I quit WOW because of, of the community."* (Female, early-30s, art director (advertising), game player for 25 years)

"I mean you can't blame the industry when it's the people themselves who are the problem [...] I call it the Chihuahua syndrome. Chihuahuas tend to be very bad tempered, very ill natured, because whenever they do something wrong, the owner – in this context, the owners are the males in the gaming industry – will pick it up, coddle it, think they're doing the right thing..." (Male, mid-30s, operations executive (gaming), game player for 28 years)

"I was the only person in one team and five guys were against me, and [they said] 'Man she's just a girl! Let's rape her!' It's like 'what the fuck?'" (Female, mid-30s, business manager (e-commerce/gaming), game player for 20 years)

It was observed that although some participants mentioned different degrees of abuse and harassment online, many felt that it was not particularly the fault of the video games, rather the players, or the players' parents' failure to discipline them.

"I think we read too much. They're just supposed to... they're just supposed to... you're just supposed to use them to pass time. Engage the story and move on." (Female, late-30s, project director (advertising), game player for 16 years)

"So at the end of the day, a lot of these complaints come from parents. The parents who want to push responsibility of bringing their kids up to the video game developers. That's what I don't like. You can't teach your kids not shoot guns at people. And now you're blaming them." (Male, mid-20s, teacher, game player for 19 years)

"I don't think it's any more dangerous than a book, or a film actually. To me it's just another medium. So it's not... it's not about whether or not the medium is good or bad. It's about how you actually use it." (Male, mid-20s, media producer, game player for 15 years)

Only one participant had views that disagreed with the rest of the group. Citing the influential nature of media, he expressed his belief that the main problem with video games were the messages that the games were broadcasting.

"Because, because they're not just games. I think they're, they're pieces of culture. You know, I think a lot of people play video games and get influenced by it. And they, they, they take that, and they apply, you were talking about children…. they watch those video games, and what they see on TV, and they learn from it too. So it is a part of culture. We should be more serious about what kind of messages we are uh... delivering on these video games." (Male, early-30s, filmmaker, game player for 25 years)

When speaking to participants, it was discovered they tended to feel that the stereotypical and sexualised portrayals of female characters were less of a problem in comparison to the oftentimes toxic and flaming behaviour of other players. As well, most participants also did not acknowledge that the bad behaviours of video gamers could be linked to video games, but rather caused by external factors.

A Reluctance to Change and Potential Solutions

Because many participants believed most of the problems lay with the gamer and their upbringing, many participants did not feel changing the games itself necessary. Since it was a "gamer" problem, change needed to come from the ground, from parents or guardians, who had the natural responsibility to educate individuals on proper behaviour and discipline them when they expressed negative behaviour.

"What I feel like is that you have to change the viewers, not the creators,

because when the viewers change, then the creators will. Generate awareness. Educate. And don't push for change. Because that thing isn't going to do anything, that's one game." (Male, mid-20s, teacher, game player for 19 years)

"I mean it's not just the gaming industry that's behaving like this – it's kind of a society at large issue – and people taking advantage of the situation." (Female, late-20s, art director, game player for 12 years)

"Okay, I think it goes back the economics of the game companies. The game companies will always try to do stuff, in terms of gameplay, and in terms of storyline, I think they'll try to cater… to their audiences as much as possible. So, I think this growth in female characters or whether they are in supplementary role or in a main role, is largely due to the preferences of the gamers." (Male, mid-20s, media producer, game player for 15 years)

Some minority views also emerged wherein participants argued that the video game companies and other governmental institutions should be responsible for leading the charge in educating gamers and getting rid of toxic behaviour.

"I think the most important thing is for like the companies themselves, first of all. And the second thing, If you have sexism in this industry, you know, it's not, you know, it's not going to be confined to this industry, these individuals – if they are sexist, they're going to be sexist everywhere. So, it's a systemic problem that you probably need to address with education of the whole." (Male, early-20s, student, game player for 11 years)

Most of the male and female participants interviewed admitted that toxic behaviour was becoming a serious problem in video game culture, but believed that this tendency to flame and degrade others was unrelated to negative representations in video games, and more related to the lack of discipline or education around this issue.

DISCUSSION FOR PART II: IN-DEPTH INTERVIEWS

The views of the participants regarding female video game characters do not fully mirror the portrayals seen in contemporary video games, nor even the more traditional ones, but rather are a mixture of both. While interviewees tended to describe the looks of female characters in a very sexualised and stereotypical manner, some also had expectations that female characters be more than just "eye-candy" or "damsels in distress." Participants also believed that female characters should have more action-oriented roles and be directing the game narrative. These answers are contradictory, and it might be interesting to further explore, since it may signal an internal struggle within interviewees – caught between the enjoyment of sexualised portrayals and perhaps more modern attitudes regarding women and female empowerment. The participants' added justifications of why some sexualised portrayals of female characters should be permitted might be attempts of lessening cognitive dissonance (Festinger, 1957).

Another interesting observation was the male participants' keen awareness of external factors that tend to heavily influence the video game design process. While female interviewees would simply acknowledge negative portrayals, male participants would go one step further, citing these external factors as reasons for why ostensibly negative portrayals of female characters have occurred, and continue to occur. By bringing up cultural factors or economic reasons, or even changing the subject entirely (by introducing a bigger problem – toxic behaviour), it seemed that male participants attempted to excuse or lessen the severity of sexualised or stereotyped female portrayals. This technique of neutralisation (Sykes & Matza, 1957; Ingram & Hinduja, 2008) was seen in multiple interviews, and could be interpreted as a method to validate activities of misconduct and neutralise any feelings of dissonance. In a more local explanation – since all participants were Singaporean, with distinct Asian upbringing – this behaviour could also be seen as attempts "saving face," (Hu, 1944), a unique Asian trait. Explaining that culture or

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catering to a specific audience were reasons why game studios design female characters in a certain way could be an attempt to help preserve the integrity of the game studios, and pointing out different industry problems might be a quick way of defending themselves for admitting enjoyment of an accepted sexualised female portrayal.

As well, it was interesting to observe that while most participants agreed that there were problems with the current state of female video game character portrayals, most were unconvinced that it needed changing. In fact, many participants expressed an appreciation for attractive female characters – male participants were more vocal about this, but most female participants, as well, admitted being drawn to games with pretty heroines. Perhaps the reason for this lies in the fact that most of the participants I spoke to believed that video games could not influence actual behaviour, and that it was just a medium to escape reality and live out their fantasies, without consequences. With this logic, participants would be hesitant to alter an existing system that offered them many moments of gratification. Another plausible explanation lies in the fact that participants believe that changing the negative portrayals of female characters is simply "someone else's problem." In interviews, participants discussed having parents or guardians, organisations, and the game companies take responsibility, but never explicitly discussed actions they could themselves take to rectify the situation.

This research also tried to explore if there were any cultivation effects linked with exposure to video games as well as the genre of games these participants play. While the participants with the longest exposure to video games (R4, R9, R10) held more sexualised views in comparison to the other participants, more research, and perhaps more follow-up interviews are needed to explore if these views can be attributed more towards the genre of games they play, and if these sexualised views increase over time.

The findings gleaned from these interviews showcase the passionate and deeply knowledgeable nature of Singaporean gamers, whose perceptions of female video game characters seem to be derived from playing a mixture of both older and more contemporary games. It contributes some modest insights into local research on video games, which thus far have primarily focused only on how video game violence can affect Singaporeans (Choo et. al, 2010; Kie et. al, 2011; Gentile et. al, 2014). As this study is limited in its scope, more interviews, with a wider, more diverse pool of participants, is needed to sketch out a more detailed picture. But hopefully, this offers a departure point to develop future research interest in this area, specifically that which examines how portrayals of contemporary female video game characters can affect gamer perceptions, and even with particular focus on Asian gamers and Asian games.

CHAPTER 6 – FINAL THOUGHTS AND FUTURE DIRECTIONS

Women in video games have always been a controversial subject amongst gamers and industry professionals. From inaccurate representations to outright hostility towards female gamers and designers, it seems that change is most certainly needed, but occurring at a glacial pace. Lately, there have been great strides to include more women in video games, especially women in lead roles, to cater to the ever increasing numbers of female gamers. This paper's findings show that while some progress has been made regarding female representation in video games, representations remain problematic, with females still under-represented.

Content analysis conducted in the current study showed that while the number of women has increased in games released in the past five years, the majority of women still occupy secondary or background character roles. Furthermore, most female characters, almost all supporting and background characters, are shown to exhibit stereotypically feminine traits such as nurturing, caring, and submissiveness, while principal female characters are more neutral, showcasing a combination of traditionally male (i.e. aggressiveness) and female traits. Furthermore, emphasis is placed on the principal female character and how "strong" she is, and how important she is because she has overcome tremendous adversity as a hero. While refreshing compared to the damsels and sex objects of the past, such portrayals are dangerous because they are unrealistic; the female character's core value is her strength, and only that (e.g. showing no weakness) makes her valuable. On the other hand, male characters have the opportunity to have self-contradictions – Joel from *The Last of Us* is solitary, abrasive, selfish, sad, brave, and determined, while Booker DeWitt from *BioShock Infinite* is ruthless, serious, self-loathing, caring, and fearful – and are still considered great characters. Yet the standard for female characters is an unfair one, where they have to be unequivocally "strong" in order to be considered great, with no

room for vulnerability. No one ever asks if a principal male character is "strong," because it is assumed. To emphasise female characters' importance through them overcoming adversity sends a dangerously one-sided message to all gamers (McDougall, 2013).

The results of the content analysis also revealed that video games are extremely lacking in diversity. While the results show the frequency of women in games has increased, the overwhelming majority of female characters portrayed are young and Caucasian. Unfortunately, this finding echoes prior research, confirming that video games are overwhelmingly whitewashed (Glaubke et al., 2001; Williams, Martins, Consalvo & Ivory 2009). With hundreds of ethnic groups in the world, and women of all ages, this one type of female is unrepresentative, and sends again a dangerous message to players, that only young, white women are of importance. When even non-human creatures (i.e. aliens, robots) outnumber certain ethnicities such as Hispanics, Blacks, Asians, and Middle Easterners (Appendix C, Table 9) the industry needs to reflect and consider what they are telling audiences, especially audiences of these races who play these games, since it seems that only Caucasian youths are deemed important enough to be seen on screen.

As well, how contemporary female video game characters affected video gamers was also examined in this study, to analyse if perceptions of female characters were entrenched in how older games portrayed them, or if they had shifted to reflect the more modern views of contemporary games. Interview data revealed conflicting perceptions, with participants acknowledging a love of sexualised female characters but equipped with more proactive, action roles. It seems that decades of sexualised female portrayals has had a big influence, since participants were fixed on the idea of women in games being pretty and attractive, even going to lengths to defend this behaviour, using history or culture as justifications. And while participants admitted sexism was a big issue in gaming, few actually felt that major action need be taken against it. With a defence of the entrenched system (mostly males) or a resignation

towards it (mostly females), it seems any new portrayal or change to how females are portrayed will face many criticisms.

The results of this research highlights the need for continued change with not only the way female video game characters are represented, but also how female players and women in the industry are treated by the larger community. When examined as a whole, female video game characters were largely homogenous, showcasing the lack of effort by gaming studios to include diversity in body type, race, and age. Perhaps a content guideline for game studios needs to be published, highlighting areas where female characters were found to largely identical (filtered by genres, game publishers, country of origin) and suggestions made as to where more diverse characters could be included. As well, many interviewees highlighted toxic behaviour in the community, with some female participants mentioning personal experiences regarding sexism and misogyny. Perhaps more public education materials need to be developed – for parents, these materials would focus on how video games skew reality and how to speak to their children regarding behaviours (especially toxic behaviours) that are learnt from gaming; for players, materials would offer suggestions on how to deal with negative behaviour, or how to help others when they see toxic behaviour occurring. As well, there should also be more platforms where video gamers and industry professionals can discuss sexism and misogyny in the industry and exchange ideas on how the industry can deal with and improve on these areas, through policy or education.

As with any research, there are limitations to be addressed with this study. Due to time and resource constraints, only 34 games could be analysed and only 15 participants interviewed. A larger study containing more games and more interview participants could provide more comprehensive results. Nevertheless, the content analysis of 34 games, using pre-established criteria, instead of random sampling, allowed for more detailed results and insights into contemporary games, and can complement previous research. Also, my study attempted to solve the tricky issue of

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selecting game material by analysing not only a segment of the game's beginning, but also a standardised point of the game. I also suggested taking advantage of published walkthroughs on YouTube, which overcomes time constraints as well as skill constraints of the researcher. Results revealed a shifting state of female portrayals, but more data must be captured to examine if female portrayals continue to progress, or if they revert back to more traditional portrayals. Future research can also further examine how race is treated – for example, is one group of women more likely to be submissive or to be portrayed with certain stereotypes? Race is another area in video game research that requires greater scrutiny.

As well, the number of participants interviewed was limited. I made the decision of including only Singaporean participants so that more specific insights could be gleaned and reported. And while contributing some interesting findings to the relatively sparse Singapore video game research field, obviously including a wider pool of interviewees, and perhaps expanding it to include different nationalities would provide more comprehensive results, which could then allow researchers to uncover similarities and pinpoint unique behaviours. Nevertheless, my goal for my study was to contribute to an area of video gaming research that needed more examination, especially with the additions of new types of female characters. With the continued increase of female gamers, and the history of poor representations of women in video games, this is an area worth continually exploring, to track if these new characters are a welcome change, or if they pose more problems towards female representations in gaming.

Finally, in looking back at this research, much was focused upon games being a medium where content could be absorbed – but games are not simply passive mediums, they are dynamic and interactive, also relying on interaction to progress through the game. In-game decisions and how the player interacts with the character and the game are other avenues where they can be influenced. Thus, the content analysis and subsequent interviews attempted to showcase how these could

potentially affect the player (see Appendix B, questions #17 and #29, and Appendix D). However, the data collected and the results were neither substantial nor conclusive. It is my recommendation then, that because games are interactive media, future studies should expand upon game mechanics and player decisions. With the content analysis, perhaps more in-depth questions about players' decisions could be added (e.g. exploring why they chose to commit violence or engage in sexual acts when it could be avoided – does it unlock further parts of the game? Or was it simply gratuitous?). With the interviews, more questions could have been added to examine the participant's playing style (e.g. exploring if they choose more aggressive playing styles or to avoid conflict). Future research that includes these additions will provide more insights as to how game mechanics influence female perceptions in gaming.

As a gamer, I understand the pleasure and satisfaction that comes from being able to live out fantasies and the sense of achievement that comes from gameplay. I understand that video games are meant to give players a break from reality and real-life stresses. And I am even aware that video games need to be profitable, and thus must cater to the largest audience. The racist, sexist, and outdated stereotypical portrayals might have been accepted in the past, when gamers were predominantly male, but with the numbers of female gamers, of all ages and of all races, growing and overtaking the male gamer segment, the video game industry cannot use the excuse that it is catering to the masses any longer. As a mass medium and huge influencer of popular culture, the video game industry needs to take responsibility in the type of messages it sends out, especially now with the addition of new demographics of gamers. With every new game released that perpetuates the same type of female portrayal, it solidifies the idea that the gaming industry is afraid of change. Inclusivity and diversity can only strengthen stories and the game itself, since it would offer new avenues and options for storytelling and world building, and have more material for gamers to engage and relate with.

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APPENDIX

APPENDIX A: VIDEO GAME LIST

2010
Halo: Reach (*Xbox 360*)
Mass Effect 2 (*PlayStation 3, Xbox 360, PC*)
Final Fantasy XIII (*PlayStation 3, Xbox 360, PC*)
Fable 3 (*Xbox 360*)
Heavy Rain (*PlayStation 3*)
BioShock 2 (*Xbox 360, PlayStation 3*)
StarCraft II (*PC*)

2011
Gears of War 3 (*Xbox 360*)
Uncharted 3 (*PlayStation 3*)

2012
Mass Effect 3 (*PlayStation 3, Xbox 360, PC)*
Resident Evil 6 (*PlayStation 3, Xbox 360, PC*)
Borderlands 2 (*PlayStation 3, Xbox 360, PC*)
The Walking Dead: Season 2 (*PlayStation 3, Xbox 360, PC*)

2013
The Last of Us (*PlayStation 3*)
Tomb Raider (*PlayStation 3, Xbox 360, PC*)
BioShock Infinite (*PlayStation 3, Xbox 360, PC*)
Beyond Two Souls (*PlayStation 3*)
Saints Row IV (*PlayStation 3, Xbox 360, PC*)
Diablo 3 (*PC*)
Assassin's Creed IV: Black Flag (*PlayStation 3, PlayStation 4, Xbox 360*)
Gears of War: Judgment (*Xbox 360*)

2014
Watch Dogs (*PlayStation 3, PlayStation 4, Xbox 360, Xbox One, PC*)
Alien: Isolation (*PlayStation 3*, *PlayStation 4, Xbox 360, Xbox One, PC*)
Destiny (*PlayStation 3, PlayStation 4, Xbox 360, XOne*)

2015
Fallout 4 (*PlayStation 4, XOne, PC*)
Uncharted: The Nathan Drake Collection (*PlayStation 4*)
Halo 5 (*XOne*)
Batman: Arkham Knight (*PlayStation 4, XOne*)
The Witcher 3: Wild Hunt (*PlayStation 4, XOne*)
Assassin's Creed Syndicate (*PlayStation 4, XOne*)
The Order 1886 (*PlayStation 4*)
Until Dawn (*PlayStation 4*)
Rise of the Tomb Raider (*XOne*)
Final Fantasy Type-0 HD (*PlayStation 4*)

APPENDIX B: CODEBOOK

Game Title: *Please write the entire name of the game, as listed in the Game List*
Coder Name: *Name of the individual who coded the game*
Point of View: *Please mark down the point of view of the game (i.e. first person or third person)*

Genre: *Please list the genre of the video game as categorized by ESRB*
    0. Shooter - Players are required to use weapons to participate and progress through the video game. Can be First-Person Shooter or Third-Person Shooter. (*i.e. Call of Duty, Battlefield, Counterstrike*)
    1. Action-Adventure: Players are challenged to solve puzzles by interacting with people or the environment. Puzzles can be both physical puzzles and unsolved stories (or both).
    2. Role-Playing Games (RPGs): Players assume the role of the main playable character, where they are tasked to act on these roles within the video game narrative, through decision-making. (*i.e. The Sims*)
    3. Strategy - Players are required to use careful planning and skilful thinking to outthink their opponent and achieve victory. Opponents can be other (human) players or computers. Strategy games usually involve symmetry - where both sides are given similar resources and actions, and tasked to reduce the strength of their opponent. (*i.e. Command and Conquer, StarCraft, Civilization*)
    4. Survival - Players are usually thrown into a hostile environment, where their goal is to collect enough resources and tools to survive and escape the environment. (*i.e. Alien Isolation, Dead Space*)

Character Name: *Identify the name of the character being coded.*
Brief Character Description: *Write a short blurb about the character that includes distinctive attributes (e.g. woman in black military gear carrying a rifle)*
First Appearance: *Please mark down the timecode when this character first appeared (using the format Hour, Minute, Seconds or 00:00:00)*

1. Character Customisation: *Does the game allow for any choice in the modification of this character?*
    0. Yes, full customisation (hair colour, skin colour, etc.)
    1. Yes, between pre-made characters
    2. Yes, customizable pre-made characters (options of clothing/physical appearance, etc.)
    3. No, character is predetermined and locked by game

2. If Yes, describe the customisations. If No, please write "None."

3. Character Importance: *Identify the significance of the character as one of the following options below:*
    0. Playable Main Character (PMC): Playable main character, appears in the majority of the game and directs the narrative plot
    1. Non-Playable Main Character: Non-playable main character who directs the narrative plot of the game and shares approximate equal screen time with playable main character

2. Secondary Character: Characters with names, has a speaking role and interacts with the main character, but does not share equal screen time with them

3. Prop Character: Character that has a speaking role, but just exists as a prop in the background (serves no plot purpose, just decorative or filler)

(Demographic Variables)

4. Age: *Identify the age of the character based on visible features such as such as hair colour or skin features (e.g. wrinkles). You may use other information available in game, such as objects listing the character's age or information provided by other characters.*

> 0. Infant (0-5)
> 1. Young Child (6-12)
> 2. Teen (13-20)
> 3. Adult (21-39)
> 4. Middle-Aged (40-64)
> 5. Elderly (65+)
> 97. N/A (e.g. if character is a humanoid robot where age does not apply)
> 98. Can't Tell

5. Ethnicity: *Identify the race/ethnicity of the character based on visible features such as hair, eye, or skin colour. You may use other information available in game such as character's name, accent, or information provided by other characters.*

> 0. White/Caucasian
> 1. Hispanic/Latino
> 2. Black/African American
> 3. Asian/Pacific Islander
> 4. Middle Eastern/Arabic
> 5. Ambiguous: Character is mixed race or their features contain multiple ethnic types
> 6. Creature: Character is not human and our human race/ethnicity does not apply to them
> 7. Robot: Non-human, non-living
> 97. N/A
> 98. Can't Tell
> 99. Other: Please Specify

6. Character Gender: *Identify the gender that is expressed through behaviours and actions of the character. The female character can have female physical features but showcase a different set of behaviours/actions.*

> 0. Traditionally Feminine: Character exhibits overt traits and behaviours traditionally classified of female such as nurturing, quiet, graceful, submissive, emotional, sensitive, innocent, etc.
> 1. Neutral: Character exhibits an equal amount of masculine and feminine behaviours and traits
> 2. Traditionally Masculine: Character exhibits overt traits and behaviours traditionally classified as male such as aggression, violence, independence, competitiveness, tough-skinned, strong, rebellious, etc.
> 98. Can't Tell

(Hypersexuality Variables)
7. Overall Build: *Identify the overall body weight of the female character (see end of codebook for some visual references).*

0. Extremely Thin: Emaciated, skeletal, at times visible bones can be seen protruding from skin
1. Thin: Characters with very little body fat, slim
2. Curvy: Full figured, with areas of body fat (usually on the hips and stomach)
3. Athletic: Characters who are thin, but have muscle mass
4. Average: Characters who have an normal build
5. Obese: Characters who are extremely overweight
6. Extremely Muscular: Characters who have an excess of muscle mass
96. Character does not appear in first 2 hours/76% point of game
97. N/A: If character is a robot, is not shown in game, or does not encompass a human-body shape
98. Can't Tell

8. Chest Size: *Identify the chest size of the female character.*
0. Small: Character's chest is flat or almost flat
1. Medium: Character has average breast size
2. Large: Character's chest size is protruding, with ample cleavage
96. Character does not appear in first 2 hours/76% point of game
97. N/A: If character is a robot, is not shown in game, or does not encompass a human-body shape
98. Can't Tell

9. Waist Size: *Identify the chest size of the female character.*
0. Small: (U.S. size 00-4)
1. Medium: (U.S. size 4-10)
2. Large: (U.S. size 10 and above)
96. Character does not appear in first 2 hours/76% point of game
97. N/A: If character is a robot, is not shown in game, or does not encompass a human-body shape
98. Can't Tell

10. Nudity: *Identify the amount of skin the character is showing (due to the lack of clothing).*
0. No Nudity: Character is fully clothed. Characters with short sleeved t-shirts, shorts, tank-tops, or items with thin straps are still considered as showing no nudity
1. Partial Nudity: Character displays more skin than is considered modest or shows their naked buttocks. Characters wearing bikinis, crop tops, just underwear or very low shirts (that display cleavage) fall into this category
2. Full Nudity: Character is shown wearing no clothing entirely (or revealing genitalia)
96. Character does not appear in first 2 hours/76% point of game
97. N/A: Character is a robot or character's body is never shown in game
98. Can't Tell

(Narrative Variables)
11. Character Role: *Identify the role the character is established with in the beginning of the game.*
0. Protagonist: Protects others, directs the narrative plot in some way
1. Victim: Is unprovokedly attacked by other characters, or even suffers death
2. Antagonist: An opponent with malicious intent
3. Helper: Helps other characters/PMC
4. Sidekick: PMC's close friend, associate

5. Neutral: Does not seem to care to help, perhaps only interested in themselves

6.Obstacle: Hinders the PMC or characters/impedes the progress in some way, NOT the villain, but has similar goals

7. Prop: Characters which exist as background characters

96. Character does not appear in first 2 hours/76% point of game

98. Can't Tell

99. Other: Please specify

12. Power Level to the PMC: *Identify the level of authority, influence, or control this character has to the main character based on visual or verbal cues such as title (e.g. Sir, Madam), gestures (e.g. Military salute, orders given, bowing) or behaviours shown (e.g. fear).*

0. Is the PMC

1. Equal to the PMC: Character seems to be a peer of the main character

2. Submissive to the PMC: Character seems to take orders, be of a lesser rank, or under the control of the main character

3. Dominant to the PMC: Character is a higher rank to main character, or seems to weld control/power over main character

4. No influence

96. Character does not appear in first 2 hours/76% point of game

98. Can't Tell

13. Relation to PMC: I*dentify the relation/relationship to the Controllable Primary Character.*

0. Is the PMC

1. Stranger: Does not know the PMC

2. Acquaintance: Character shows familiarity with the PMC but does not know much information about the PMC

3. Friend: Character shows a lot of familiarity with the PMC and has a good/positive relationship with them

4. Family Member: Character shares a bloodline with the PMC

5. Romantic Interest: Romantic elements surround this Character and the PMC, the two characters may or may not accept these romantic elements

6. Lover: Romantic feelings are shown to the public/player, and the two characters express love to one another (through romantic words or sexual activities)

7. Sexual Object: The PMC treats this character as an object or instrument for their own sexual gratification

8. Enemy: Character is the antagonist of the video game, and usually has/wishes ill intent to the PMC

96. Character does not appear in first 2 hours/76% point of game

98. Can't Tell

99. Other: Please Specify

14. Character Motivations: *Motives which drive the character.*

0. Survival: Character is dropped into a life threatening situation and needs to devise a plan to escape or remain alive

1. Saving the world: A country/city/town or multiple countries/cities/towns are jeopardized and the character needs to devise a way to save it

2. Personal Gain: Character wants to claim/win/achieve monetary gains or achieve personal development

3. Passive Motives: Character doesn't seem to have an pro-active motives, rather just goes along with what the other characters tell this character to do

4. The Compass: Character exists to point characters/PMC in the right direction to further the plot
96. Character does not appear in first 2 hours/76% point of game
98. Can't Tell
99. Other: Please Specify

15. Character Violence: *Any violent acts <u>committed by</u> this character.*
0. None: Character engages in no violence
1. Some Violence: Character engages in violence in order to overcome obstacles to progress the story, or commits violent acts in order to survive. Violent acts consume less than 30% of character's overall behaviour
2. Moderate Violence: Character engages in multiple violent acts. Violent acts consume between 30% to 60% of character's overall behaviour
3. Excessive Violence: Character seeks out violence and initiates most of the violent acts. Violent acts consume more than 60% of character's overall behaviour
96. Character does not appear in first 2 hours/76% point of game

16. Violence to Character: *Any unprovoked violent acts <u>committed towards</u> this character.*
0. None: No violence occurs to this character
1. Some Violence: Minor unprovoked violence occurs towards this character (e.g. another character slaps this character). Violent acts consume less than 30% of character's overall social interaction
2. Moderate Violence: Character is the recipient of some unprovoked violence. Violent acts consume between 30% to 60% of character's overall social interaction
3. Excessive Violence: : Character is targeted and receives multiple unprovoked violent acts. Violent acts consume more than 60% of character's overall social interaction
96. Character does not appear in first 2 hours/76% point of game

17. Is the violence avoidable?
0. Yes, it's avoidable
1. No, the violence is necessary part of the narrative
2. No violence was committed
96. Character does not appear in first 2 hours/76% point of game

<mark>**III. End (76% of video gameplay)**</mark>
18. Character Description: *Identify any initial visible changes you can see about the character in comparison to the first 2 hours of gameplay. Write a short blurb about the character that includes distinctive attributes (e.g. woman in black military gear carrying a rifle)*
98. Can't Tell

(Hypersexuality Variables)
19. Character's Overall Build: *Identify the overall body weight of the female character (see end of codebook for some visual references).*
0. Extremely Thin: Emaciated, skeletal, at times visible bones can be seen protruding from skin
1. Thin: Characters with very little body fat, slim
2. Curvy: Full figured, with areas of body fat (usually on the hips and stomach)

3. Athletic: Characters who are thin, but have muscle mass
4. Average: Characters who have a normal build
5. Obese: Characters who are extremely overweight
6. Extremely Muscular: Characters who have an excess of muscle mass
96. Character does not appear in first 2 hours/76% point of game
97. N/A: If character is a robot, is not shown in game, or does not encompass a human-body shape
98. Can't Tell

20. Chest Size: *Identify the chest size of the female character.*
0. Small: Character's chest is flat or almost flat
1. Medium: Character has average chest size,
2. Large: Character's chest size is protruding, with ample cleavage
96. Character does not appear in 2 hours/76% point of game
97. N/A: If character is a robot, is not shown in game, or does not encompass a human-body shape
98. Can't Tell

21. Waist Size: *Identify the chest size of the female character.*
0. Small (U.S. size 00-2)
2. Medium: (U.S. size 2-10)
3. Large (U.S. size 10 and above)
96. Character does not appear in first 2 hours/76% point of game
97. N/A: If character is a robot, is not shown in game, or does not encompass a human-body shape
98. Can't Tell

22. Nudity: *Identify the amount of skin the character is showing (due to the lack of clothing).*
0. No Nudity: Character is fully clothed. Characters with short sleeved t-shirts, shorts, tank tops, or items with thin straps are still considered as showing no nudity
1. Partial Nudity: Character displays more skin than is considered modest or shows their naked buttocks. Characters wearing bikinis, crop tops, just underwear or very low shirts (that display cleavage) fall into this category
2. Full Nudity: Character is shown wearing no clothing entirely (or revealing genitalia)
96. Character does not appear in first 2 hours/76% point of game
97. N/A: Character is a robot or character's body is never shown in game
98. Can't Tell

(Narrative Variables)
23. Character Role: *Identify the role the character is established with in the beginning of the game.*
0. Protagonist: Protects others, directs the narrative plot in some way
1. Victim: Is unprovokedly attacked by other characters, or even suffers death
2. Antagonist: An opponent with malicious intent
3. Helper: Helps other characters/PMC
4. Sidekick: PMC's close friend, associate
5. Neutral: Does not seem to care to help, perhaps only interested in themselves
6.Obstacle: Hinders the PMC or characters/impedes the progress in some way, NOT the villain, but has similar goals
7. Prop: Characters which exist as background characters

96. Character does not appear in first 2 hours/76% point of game
98. Can't Tell
99. Other: Please specify

24. Power Level to PMC: *Identify the level of authority, influence, or control this character has to the main character based on visual or verbal cues such as titles (e.g. Sir, Madam), gestures (e.g. Military salute, orders given, bowing) or behaviours shown (e.g. fear).*

0. Is the PMC
1. Equal to the PMC: Character seems to be a peer of the main character
2. Submissive to the PMC: Character seems to take orders, be of a lesser rank, or under the control of the main character
3. Dominant to the PMC: Character is a higher rank to main character, or seems to weld control/power over main character
4. No influence
96. Character does not appear in first 2 hours/76% point of game
98. Can't Tell

25. Relation to PMC: *Identify the relation/relationship to the Controllable Primary Character.*

0. Is PMC
1. Stranger: Does not know the PMC
2. Acquaintance: Character shows familiarity with the PMC but does not know much information about the PMC
3. Friend: Character shows a lot of familiarity with the PMC and has a good/positive relationship with them
4. Family Member: Character shares a bloodline with the PMC
5. Romantic Interest: Romantic elements surround the Character and the PMC, the two characters may or may not accept these elements
6. Lover: Romantic feelings are shown to the public/player, and the two characters express love to one another (through romantic words or sexual activities)
7. Sexual Object: The PMC treats this character as an object or instrument for their own sexual gratification
8. Enemy: Character is the antagonist of the video game, and usually has/wishes ill intent to the PMC
96. Character does not appear in first 2 hours/76% point of game
98. Can't Tell
99. Other: Please Specify

26. Character Motivations: *Motives which drive the character.*

0. Survival: Character is dropped into a life threatening situation and needs to devise a plan to escape or remain alive
1. Saving the world: A country/city/town or multiple countries/cities/towns are jeopardized and the character needs to devise a way to save it
2. Personal Gain: Character wants to claim/win/achieve monetary gains or achieve personal development
3. Passive Motives: Character doesn't seem to have an pro-active motives, rather just goes along with what the other characters tell this character to do
4. The Compass: Character exists to point characters/PMC in the right direction to further the plot
96. Character does not appear in first 2 hours/76% point of game
98. Can't Tell
99. Other: Please Specify

27. Character Violence: *Any violent acts <u>committed by</u> this character.*
  0. None: Character engages in no violence
  1. Some Violence: Character engages in violence in order to overcome
  obstacles to progress the story, or commits violent acts in order to survive.
  Violent acts consume less than 30% of character's overall behaviour
  2. Moderate Violence: Character engages in multiple violent acts. Violent
  acts consume between 30% to 60% of character's overall behaviour
  3. Excessive Violence: Character seeks out violence and initiates most of the
  violent acts. Violent acts consume more than 60% of character's overall
  behaviour
  96. Character does not appear in first 2 hours/76% point of game

28. Violence to Character: *Any unprovoked violent acts <u>committed towards</u> this character.*
  0. None: No violence occurs to this character
  1. Some Violence: Minor unprovoked violence occurs towards this character
  (e.g. another character slaps this character). Violent acts consume less than
  30% of character's overall social interaction
  2. Moderate Violence: Character is the recipient of some unprovoked
  violence. Violent acts consume between 30% to 60% of character's overall
  social interaction
  3. Excessive Violence: : Character is targeted and receives
  multiple unprovoked violent acts. Violent acts consume more than 60% of
  character's overall social interaction
  96. Character does not appear in first 2 hours/76% point of game

29. Is the violence avoidable?
  0. Yes, it's avoidable
  1. No, the violence is necessary part of the narrative
  2. No violence was committed
  96. Character does not appear in first 2 hours/76% point of game
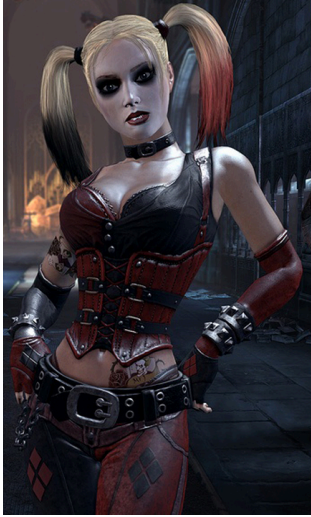
Visual References:

Character's Overall Build

Example of **Extremely Thin** (Emaciated, skeletal, at times visible bones can be seen protruding from skin)	 Harley Quinn, *Batman: Arkham Asylum* (2009)
Example of **Thin** (Very little body fat, slim)	 Jill Valentine, *Resident Evil 3* (1999)

Example of **Curvy** (Full figured with areas of body fat around the hips and stomach)	 Cortana, *Halo 4* (2012)
Example of **Athletic** (Slim, but have muscle mass)	 Sonya Blade, *Mortal Combat X* (2011)

Example of **Average** (Normal build)	 Elise, *Assassin's Creed: Unity* (2014)
Example of **Obese** (Characters who have an excess of body fat)	 Ellie, *Borderlands 2* (2012)
Example of **Extremely Muscular** (Characters who have an excess of muscle mass)	

Chest Size

Example of **Small Chest Size**	 Paine, *Final Fantasy X-2* (2003)
Example of **Medium Chest Size**	 Jacqui Briggs, *Mortal Combat X* (2011)

| Example of **Large Chest Size** |

Lara Croft, *Tomb Raider: Underworld* (2008) |
| --- | --- |

Waist Size

| Example of **Small Waist Size** |
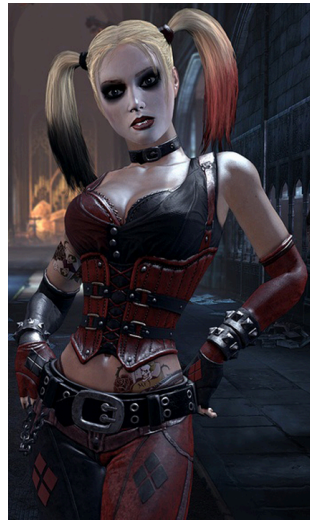
Harley Quinn, *Batman: Arkham Asylum* (2009) |
| --- | --- |

Example of **Medium Waist Size**	 Elena Fisher, *Uncharted 2: Among Thieves* (2009)
Example of **Large Waist Size**	 Ellie, *Borderlands 2* (2012)

APPENDIX C: SPSS RESULTS AND TABLES

Table 1
Descriptive Results for Genre

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Shooter	92	28.8	28.8	28.8
	Action-Adventure	165	51.7	51.7	80.6
	Role-Playing Games	47	14.7	14.7	95.3
	Strategy	8	2.5	2.5	97.8
	Survival	7	2.2	2.2	100.0
	Total	319	100.0	100.0	

Table 2
Descriptive Results for Year

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	2010	60	18.8	18.8	18.8
	2011	12	3.8	3.8	22.6
	2012	49	15.4	15.4	37.9
	2013	80	25.1	25.1	63.0
	2014	19	6.0	6.0	69.0
	2015	99	31.0	31.0	100.0
	Total	319	100.0	100.0	

Table 3
Descriptive Results for Character Customisation

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Yes, Full Customisation	3	.9	.9	.9

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
	Yes, Customizable Pre-Made Characters	4	1.3	1.3	2.2
	No, Character is Predetermined and Locked by Genre	312	97.8	97.8	100.0
	Total	319	100.0	100.0	

Table 4

Descriptive Results for Character Importance

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Playable Main Character	29	9.1	9.1	9.1
	Non-Player Character	13	4.1	4.1	13.2
	Secondary Character	100	31.3	31.3	44.5
	Prop Character	177	55.5	55.5	100.0
	Total	319	100.0	100.0	

Table 5

Descriptive Results for Character Importance by Year

			Year						Total
			2010	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015	
Importance	Playable Main Character	Count	7	0	3	5	1	13	29
		% within Importance	24.1%	0.0%	10.3%	17.2%	3.4%	44.8%	100.0%
		% within Year	11.7%	0.0%	6.1%	6.3%	5.3%	13.1%	9.1%
		% of Total	2.2%	0.0%	0.9%	1.6%	0.3%	4.1%	9.1%
	Non-Player Character	Count	3	0	0	6	1	3	13
		% within Importance	23.1%	0.0%	0.0%	46.2%	7.7%	23.1%	100.0%
		% within Year	5.0%	0.0%	0.0%	7.5%	5.3%	3.0%	4.1%
		% of Total	0.9%	0.0%	0.0%	1.9%	0.3%	0.9%	4.1%
	Secondary Character	Count	20	4	16	13	2	45	100
		% within Importance	20.0%	4.0%	16.0%	13.0%	2.0%	45.0%	100.0%
		% within Year	33.3%	33.3%	32.7%	16.3%	10.5%	45.5%	31.3%
		% of Total	6.3%	1.3%	5.0%	4.1%	0.6%	14.1%	31.3%
	Prop Character	Count	30	8	30	56	15	38	177
		% within Importance	16.9%	4.5%	16.9%	31.6%	8.5%	21.5%	100.0%
		% within Year	50.0%	66.7%	61.2%	70.0%	78.9%	38.4%	55.5%
		% of Total	9.4%	2.5%	9.4%	17.6%	4.7%	11.9%	55.5%
Total		Count	60	12	49	80	19	99	319
		% within Importance	18.8%	3.8%	15.4%	25.1%	6.0%	31.0%	100.0%

% within Year	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%
% of Total	18.8%	3.8%	15.4%	25.1%	6.0%	31.0%	100.0%

Table 6

One-Way ANOVA Results for Character Importance & Year

	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error	95% Confidence Interval for Mean		Minimum	Maximum
					Lower Bound	Upper Bound		
2010	60	2.22	.993	.128	1.96	2.47	0	3
2011	12	2.67	.492	.142	2.35	2.98	2	3
2012	49	2.49	.794	.113	2.26	2.72	0	3
2013	80	2.50	.886	.099	2.30	2.70	0	3
2014	19	2.63	.831	.191	2.23	3.03	0	3
2015	99	2.09	.970	.097	1.90	2.28	0	3
Total	319	2.33	.923	.052	2.23	2.43	0	3

ANOVA

Importance

	Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Between Groups	13.080	5	2.616	3.177	.008
Within Groups	257.698	313	.823		
Total	270.777	318			

Post Hoc Tests

Multiple Comparisons

Dependent Variable: Importance

Tukey HSD

(I) Year	(J) Year	Mean Difference (I-J)	Std. Error	Sig.	95% Confidence Interval	
					Lower Bound	Upper Bound
	2011	-.450	.287	.620	-1.27	.37
	2012	-.273	.175	.623	-.77	.23
2010	2013	-.283	.155	.449	-.73	.16
	2014	-.415	.239	.508	-1.10	.27
	2015	.126	.148	.958	-.30	.55
	2010	.450	.287	.620	-.37	1.27
	2012	.177	.292	.991	-.66	1.01
2011	2013	.167	.281	.991	-.64	.97
	2014	.035	.335	1.000	-.92	.99
	2015	.576	.277	.303	-.22	1.37

	2010	.273	.175	.623	-.23	.77
	2011	-.177	.292	.991	-1.01	.66
2012	2013	-.010	.165	1.000	-.48	.46
	2014	-.142	.245	.992	-.84	.56
	2015	.399	.158	.122	-.06	.85
	2010	.283	.155	.449	-.16	.73
	2011	-.167	.281	.991	-.97	.64
2013	2012	.010	.165	1.000	-.46	.48
	2014	-.132	.232	.993	-.80	.53
	2015	.409*	.136	.034	.02	.80
	2010	.415	.239	.508	-.27	1.10
	2011	-.035	.335	1.000	-.99	.92
2014	2012	.142	.245	.992	-.56	.84
	2013	.132	.232	.993	-.53	.80
	2015	.541	.227	.167	-.11	1.19
	2010	-.126	.148	.958	-.55	.30
	2011	-.576	.277	.303	-1.37	.22
2015	2012	-.399	.158	.122	-.85	.06
	2013	-.409*	.136	.034	-.80	-.02
	2014	-.541	.227	.167	-1.19	.11

*. The mean difference is significant at the 0.05 level.

Homogeneous Subsets

Importance

Tukey HSD[a,b]

Year	N	Subset for alpha = 0.05
		1
2015	99	2.09
2010	60	2.22
2012	49	2.49
2013	80	2.50
2014	19	2.63
2011	12	2.67
Sig.		.132

Means for groups in homogeneous subsets are displayed.

a. Uses Harmonic Mean Sample Size = 30.668.

b. The group sizes are unequal. The harmonic mean of the group sizes is used. Type I error levels are not guaranteed.

Table 7

Chi-Square Results for Character Importance & Genre

			Importance				Total
			Playable Main Character	Non-Player Character	Secondary Character	Prop Character	
Genre	Shooter	Count	3	5	21	63	92
		% within Genre	3.3%	5.4%	22.8%	68.5%	100.0%
		% within Importance	10.3%	38.5%	21.0%	35.6%	28.8%
		% of Total	0.9%	1.6%	6.6%	19.7%	28.8%
	Action-Adventure	Count	17	6	56	86	165
		% within Genre	10.3%	3.6%	33.9%	52.1%	100.0%
		% within Importance	58.6%	46.2%	56.0%	48.6%	51.7%
		% of Total	5.3%	1.9%	17.6%	27.0%	51.7%
	Role-Playing Games	Count	6	2	13	26	47
		% within Genre	12.8%	4.3%	27.7%	55.3%	100.0%
		% within Importance	20.7%	15.4%	13.0%	14.7%	14.7%
		% of Total	1.9%	0.6%	4.1%	8.2%	14.7%
	Strategy	Count	1	0	5	2	8
		% within Genre	12.5%	0.0%	62.5%	25.0%	100.0%
		% within Importance	3.4%	0.0%	5.0%	1.1%	2.5%
		% of Total	0.3%	0.0%	1.6%	0.6%	2.5%
	Survival	Count	2	0	5	0	7
		% within Genre	28.6%	0.0%	71.4%	0.0%	100.0%
		% within Importance	6.9%	0.0%	5.0%	0.0%	2.2%

		0.6%	0.0%	1.6%	0.0%	2.2%
	% of Total					
	Count	29	13	100	177	319
	% within Genre	9.1%	4.1%	31.3%	55.5%	100.0%
Total	% within Importance	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%
	% of Total	9.1%	4.1%	31.3%	55.5%	100.0%

Chi-Square Tests

	Value	df	Asymp. Sig. (2-sided)
Pearson Chi-Square	25.652[a]	12	.012
Likelihood Ratio	28.936	12	.004
Linear-by-Linear Association	12.229	1	.000
N of Valid Cases	319		

a. 11 cells (55.0%) have expected count less than 5. The minimum expected count is .29.

Symmetric Measures

		Value	Approx. Sig.
Nominal by Nominal	Phi	.284	.012
	Cramer's V	.164	.012
N of Valid Cases		319	

Table 8

Descriptive Results for Age

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Infant (0-5)	1	.3	.3	.3
	Young Child (6-12)	12	3.8	3.8	4.1
	Teen (13-20)	22	6.9	6.9	11.0
	Adult (21-39)	244	76.5	76.5	87.5
	Middle-Aged (40-64)	25	7.8	7.8	95.3
	Elderly (65+)	3	.9	.9	96.2
	N/A	8	2.5	2.5	98.7
	Can't Tell	4	1.3	1.3	100.0
	Total	319	100.0	100.0	

Table 9

Descriptive Results for Ethnicity

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	White/Caucasian	204	63.9	63.9	63.9
	Hispanic/Latino	7	2.2	2.2	66.1
	Black/African-American	27	8.5	8.5	74.6
	Asian/Pacific Islander	7	2.2	2.2	76.8
	Middle Eastern/Arabic	1	.3	.3	77.1
	Ambiguous	10	3.1	3.1	80.3
	Creature	12	3.8	3.8	84.0
	Robot	1	.3	.3	84.3
	N/A	11	3.4	3.4	87.8
	Can't Tell	39	12.2	12.2	100.0
	Total	319	100.0	100.0	

Table 10

Chi-Square Results for Ethnicity & Character Importance

			Importance				Total
			Playable Main Character	Non-Player Character	Secondary Character	Prop Character	
Ethnicity	White/Caucasian	Count	24	12	66	102	204
		% within Ethnicity	11.8%	5.9%	32.4%	50.0%	100.0%
		% within Importance	82.8%	92.3%	66.0%	57.6%	63.9%
		% of Total	7.5%	3.8%	20.7%	32.0%	63.9%
	Hispanic/Latino	Count	0	0	5	2	7
		% within Ethnicity	0.0%	0.0%	71.4%	28.6%	100.0%
		% within Importance	0.0%	0.0%	5.0%	1.1%	2.2%
		% of Total	0.0%	0.0%	1.6%	0.6%	2.2%
	Black/African-American	Count	2	1	7	17	27
		% within Ethnicity	7.4%	3.7%	25.9%	63.0%	100.0%
		% within Importance	6.9%	7.7%	7.0%	9.6%	8.5%
		% of Total	0.6%	0.3%	2.2%	5.3%	8.5%
	Asian/Pacific Islander	Count	0	0	3	4	7
		% within Ethnicity	0.0%	0.0%	42.9%	57.1%	100.0%
		% within Importance	0.0%	0.0%	3.0%	2.3%	2.2%
		% of Total	0.0%	0.0%	0.9%	1.3%	2.2%
	Middle	Count	0	0	1	0	1

Eastern/Arabic	% within Ethnicity	0.0%	0.0%	100.0%	0.0%	100.0%
	% within Importance	0.0%	0.0%	1.0%	0.0%	0.3%
	% of Total	0.0%	0.0%	0.3%	0.0%	0.3%
	Count	2	0	4	4	10
Ambiguous	% within Ethnicity	20.0%	0.0%	40.0%	40.0%	100.0%
	% within Importance	6.9%	0.0%	4.0%	2.3%	3.1%
	% of Total	0.6%	0.0%	1.3%	1.3%	3.1%
	Count	1	0	7	4	12
Creature	% within Ethnicity	8.3%	0.0%	58.3%	33.3%	100.0%
	% within Importance	3.4%	0.0%	7.0%	2.3%	3.8%
	% of Total	0.3%	0.0%	2.2%	1.3%	3.8%
	Count	0	0	1	0	1
Robot	% within Ethnicity	0.0%	0.0%	100.0%	0.0%	100.0%
	% within Importance	0.0%	0.0%	1.0%	0.0%	0.3%
	% of Total	0.0%	0.0%	0.3%	0.0%	0.3%
	Count	0	0	3	8	11
N/A	% within Ethnicity	0.0%	0.0%	27.3%	72.7%	100.0%
	% within Importance	0.0%	0.0%	3.0%	4.5%	3.4%
	% of Total	0.0%	0.0%	0.9%	2.5%	3.4%
	Count	0	0	3	36	39
Can't Tell	% within Ethnicity	0.0%	0.0%	7.7%	92.3%	100.0%

	% within Importance	0.0%	0.0%	3.0%	20.3%	12.2%
	% of Total	0.0%	0.0%	0.9%	11.3%	12.2%
	Count	29	13	100	177	319
	% within Ethnicity	9.1%	4.1%	31.3%	55.5%	100.0%
Total	% within Importance	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%
	% of Total	9.1%	4.1%	31.3%	55.5%	100.0%

Chi-Square Tests

	Value	df	Asymp. Sig. (2-sided)
Pearson Chi-Square	46.509[a]	27	.011
Likelihood Ratio	55.715	27	.001
Linear-by-Linear Association	20.883	1	.000
N of Valid Cases	319		

a. 29 cells (72.5%) have expected count less than 5. The minimum expected count is .04.

Symmetric Measures

		Value	Approx. Sig.
Nominal by Nominal	Phi	.382	.011
	Cramer's V	.220	.011
N of Valid Cases		319	

Table 11

Descriptive Results for Character Build

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
	Extremely Thin	1	.3	.3	.3
	Thin	119	37.3	37.3	37.6
	Curvy	8	2.5	2.5	40.1
	Athletic	20	6.3	6.3	46.4
Valid	Average	100	31.3	31.3	77.7
	Obese	5	1.6	1.6	79.3
	N/A	38	11.9	11.9	91.2
	Can't Tell	28	8.8	8.8	100.0
	Total	319	100.0	100.0	

Table 12

Descriptive Results for Chest Size

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
	Small	29	9.1	9.1	9.1
	Medium	168	52.7	52.7	61.8
	Large	52	16.3	16.3	78.1
Valid	N/A	39	12.2	12.2	90.3
	Can't Tell	31	9.7	9.7	100.0
	Total	319	100.0	100.0	

Table 13

Descriptive Results for Waist Size

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
	Small	69	21.6	21.6	21.6
	Medium	172	53.9	53.9	75.5
	Large	7	2.2	2.2	77.7
Valid	N/A	39	12.2	12.2	90.0
	Can't Tell	32	10.0	10.0	100.0
	Total	319	100.0	100.0	

Table 14

Chi-Square Results for Character Build & Genre

		Shooter	Action-Adventure	Genre Role-Playing Games	Strategy	Survival	Total
Build	**Extremely Thin**						
	Count	0	1	0	0	0	1
	% within Build	0.0%	100.0%	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	100.0%
	% within Genre	0.0%	0.6%	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	0.3%
	% of Total	0.0%	0.3%	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	0.3%
	Thin						
	Count	35	66	16	0	2	119
	% within Build	29.4%	55.5%	13.4%	0.0%	1.7%	100.0%
	% within Genre	38.0%	40.0%	34.0%	0.0%	28.6%	37.3%
	% of Total	11.0%	20.7%	5.0%	0.0%	0.6%	37.3%
	Curvy						
	Count	0	5	2	0	1	8
	% within Build	0.0%	62.5%	25.0%	0.0%	12.5%	100.0%
	% within Genre	0.0%	3.0%	4.3%	0.0%	14.3%	2.5%
	% of Total	0.0%	1.6%	0.6%	0.0%	0.3%	2.5%
	Athletic						
	Count	3	14	3	0	0	20
	% within Build	15.0%	70.0%	15.0%	0.0%	0.0%	100.0%
	% within Genre	3.3%	8.5%	6.4%	0.0%	0.0%	6.3%
	% of Total	0.9%	4.4%	0.9%	0.0%	0.0%	6.3%

Build								
Average	Count		25	49	22	1	3	100
	% within Build		25.0%	49.0%	22.0%	1.0%	3.0%	100.0%
	% within Genre		27.2%	29.7%	46.8%	12.5%	42.9%	31.3%
	% of Total		7.8%	15.4%	6.9%	0.3%	0.9%	31.3%
Obese	Count		1	2	1	1	0	5
	% within Build		20.0%	40.0%	20.0%	20.0%	0.0%	100.0%
	% within Genre		1.1%	1.2%	2.1%	12.5%	0.0%	1.6%
	% of Total		0.3%	0.6%	0.3%	0.3%	0.0%	1.6%
N/A	Count		15	19	1	3	0	38
	% within Build		39.5%	50.0%	2.6%	7.9%	0.0%	100.0%
	% within Genre		16.3%	11.5%	2.1%	37.5%	0.0%	11.9%
	% of Total		4.7%	6.0%	0.3%	0.9%	0.0%	11.9%
Can't Tell	Count		13	9	2	3	1	28
	% within Build		46.4%	32.1%	7.1%	10.7%	3.6%	100.0%
	% within Genre		14.1%	5.5%	4.3%	37.5%	14.3%	8.8%
	% of Total		4.1%	2.8%	0.6%	0.9%	0.3%	8.8%
Total	Count		92	165	47	8	7	319
	% within Build		28.8%	51.7%	14.7%	2.5%	2.2%	100.0%

	% within Genre	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%
	% of Total	28.8%	51.7%	14.7%	2.5%	2.2%	100.0%

Chi-Square Tests

	Value	df	Asymp. Sig. (2-sided)
Pearson Chi-Square	51.691[a]	28	.004
Likelihood Ratio	50.458	28	.006
Linear-by-Linear Association	1.645	1	.200
N of Valid Cases	319		

a. 27 cells (67.5%) have expected count less than 5. The minimum expected count is .02.

Symmetric Measures

		Value	Approx. Sig.
Nominal by Nominal	Phi	.403	.004
	Cramer's V	.201	.004
N of Valid Cases		319	

Table 15
Descriptive Results for Character Nudity

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	No Nudity	233	73.0	73.0	73.0
	Partial Nudity	24	7.5	7.5	80.6
	Full Nudity	3	.9	.9	81.5
	N/A	34	10.7	10.7	92.2
	Can't Tell	25	7.8	7.8	100.0
	Total	319	100.0	100.0	

Table 16
Chi-Square Results for Nudity & Genre

			Genre					Total
			Shooter	Action-Adventure	Role-Playing Games	Strategy	Survival	
Nudity	No Nudity	Count	59	127	37	4	6	233
		% within Nudity	25.3%	54.5%	15.9%	1.7%	2.6%	100.0%
		% within Genre	64.1%	77.0%	78.7%	50.0%	85.7%	73.0%
		% of Total	18.5%	39.8%	11.6%	1.3%	1.9%	73.0%
	Partial Nudity	Count	4	13	7	0	0	24
		% within Nudity	16.7%	54.2%	29.2%	0.0%	0.0%	100.0%
		% within Genre	4.3%	7.9%	14.9%	0.0%	0.0%	7.5%
		% of Total	1.3%	4.1%	2.2%	0.0%	0.0%	7.5%
	Full Nudity	Count	2	0	1	0	0	3
		% within Nudity	66.7%	0.0%	33.3%	0.0%	0.0%	100.0%

							Total
		% within Genre	2.2%	0.0%	2.1%	0.0%	0.0%	0.9%
		% of Total	0.6%	0.0%	0.3%	0.0%	0.0%	0.9%
N/A		Count	15	18	1	0	0	34
		% within Nudity	44.1%	52.9%	2.9%	0.0%	0.0%	100.0%
		% within Genre	16.3%	10.9%	2.1%	0.0%	0.0%	10.7%
		% of Total	4.7%	5.6%	0.3%	0.0%	0.0%	10.7%
Can't Tell		Count	12	7	1	4	1	25
		% within Nudity	48.0%	28.0%	4.0%	16.0%	4.0%	100.0%
		% within Genre	13.0%	4.2%	2.1%	50.0%	14.3%	7.8%
		% of Total	3.8%	2.2%	0.3%	1.3%	0.3%	7.8%
Total		Count	92	165	47	8	7	319
		% within Nudity	28.8%	51.7%	14.7%	2.5%	2.2%	100.0%
		% within Genre	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%
		% of Total	28.8%	51.7%	14.7%	2.5%	2.2%	100.0%

Chi-Square Tests

	Value	df	Asymp. Sig. (2-sided)
Pearson Chi-Square	45.905[a]	16	.000
Likelihood Ratio	41.167	16	.001
Linear-by-Linear Association	4.388	1	.036
N of Valid Cases	319		

a. 13 cells (52.0%) have expected count less than 5. The minimum expected count is .07.

Symmetric Measures

		Value	Approx. Sig.
Nominal by Nominal	Phi	.379	.000
	Cramer's V	.190	.000
N of Valid Cases		319	

Table 17
Chi-Square Results for Chest Size & Genre

			Shooter	Action-Adventure	Genre Role-Playing Games	Strategy	Survival	Total
ChestSize	Small	Count	10	18	1	0	0	29
		% within ChestSize	34.5%	62.1%	3.4%	0.0%	0.0%	100.0%
		% within Genre	10.9%	10.9%	2.1%	0.0%	0.0%	9.1%
		% of Total	3.1%	5.6%	0.3%	0.0%	0.0%	9.1%
	Medium	Count	43	85	33	2	5	168
		% within ChestSize	25.6%	50.6%	19.6%	1.2%	3.0%	100.0%
		% within Genre	46.7%	51.5%	70.2%	25.0%	71.4%	52.7%
		% of Total	13.5%	26.6%	10.3%	0.6%	1.6%	52.7%
	Large	Count	9	32	10	0	1	52
		% within ChestSize	17.3%	61.5%	19.2%	0.0%	1.9%	100.0%
		% within Genre	9.8%	19.4%	21.3%	0.0%	14.3%	16.3%
		% of Total	2.8%	10.0%	3.1%	0.0%	0.3%	16.3%
	N/A	Count	15	20	1	3	0	39
		% within ChestSize	38.5%	51.3%	2.6%	7.7%	0.0%	100.0%
		% within Genre	16.3%	12.1%	2.1%	37.5%	0.0%	12.2%
		% of Total	4.7%	6.3%	0.3%	0.9%	0.0%	12.2%
	Can't	Count	15	10	2	3	1	31

								Total
Tell	% within ChestSize	48.4%	32.3%	6.5%	9.7%	3.2%		100.0%
	% within Genre	16.3%	6.1%	4.3%	37.5%	14.3%		9.7%
	% of Total	4.7%	3.1%	0.6%	0.9%	0.3%		9.7%
Total	Count	92	165	47	8	7		319
	% within ChestSize	28.8%	51.7%	14.7%	2.5%	2.2%		100.0%
	% within Genre	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%		100.0%
	% of Total	28.8%	51.7%	14.7%	2.5%	2.2%		100.0%

Chi-Square Tests

	Value	df	Asymp. Sig. (2-sided)
Pearson Chi-Square	39.760[a]	16	.001
Likelihood Ratio	42.428	16	.000
Linear-by-Linear Association	2.539	1	.111
N of Valid Cases	319		

a. 12 cells (48.0%) have expected count less than 5. The minimum expected count is .64.

Symmetric Measures

		Value	Approx. Sig.
Nominal by Nominal	Phi	.353	.001
	Cramer's V	.177	.001
N of Valid Cases		319	

Table 18
Chi-Square Results for Waist Size & Genre

		Shooter	Action-Adventure	Genre Role-Playing Games	Strategy	Survival	Total
	Small						
	Count	26	32	10	0	1	69
	% within WaistSize	37.7%	46.4%	14.5%	0.0%	1.4%	100.0%
	% within Genre	28.3%	19.4%	21.3%	0.0%	14.3%	21.6%
	% of Total	8.2%	10.0%	3.1%	0.0%	0.3%	21.6%
	Medium						
	Count	36	98	32	1	5	172
	% within WaistSize	20.9%	57.0%	18.6%	0.6%	2.9%	100.0%
	% within Genre	39.1%	59.4%	68.1%	12.5%	71.4%	53.9%
	% of Total	11.3%	30.7%	10.0%	0.3%	1.6%	53.9%
WaistSize	**Large**						
	Count	1	4	2	0	0	7
	% within WaistSize	14.3%	57.1%	28.6%	0.0%	0.0%	100.0%
	% within Genre	1.1%	2.4%	4.3%	0.0%	0.0%	2.2%
	% of Total	0.3%	1.3%	0.6%	0.0%	0.0%	2.2%
	N/A						
	Count	15	20	1	3	0	39
	% within WaistSize	38.5%	51.3%	2.6%	7.7%	0.0%	100.0%
	% within Genre	16.3%	12.1%	2.1%	37.5%	0.0%	12.2%
	% of Total	4.7%	6.3%	0.3%	0.9%	0.0%	12.2%
	Can't Count	14	11	2	4	1	32

Tell	% within WaistSize	43.8%	34.4%	6.3%	12.5%	3.1%	100.0%
	% within Genre	15.2%	6.7%	4.3%	50.0%	14.3%	10.0%
	% of Total	4.4%	3.4%	0.6%	1.3%	0.3%	10.0%
Total	Count	92	165	47	8	7	319
	% within WaistSize	28.8%	51.7%	14.7%	2.5%	2.2%	100.0%
	% within Genre	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%
	% of Total	28.8%	51.7%	14.7%	2.5%	2.2%	100.0%

Chi-Square Tests

	Value	df	Asymp. Sig. (2-sided)
Pearson Chi-Square	44.261[a]	16	.000
Likelihood Ratio	42.825	16	.000
Linear-by-Linear Association	1.221	1	.269
N of Valid Cases	319		

a. 14 cells (56.0%) have expected count less than 5. The minimum expected count is .15.

Symmetric Measures

		Value	Approx. Sig.
Nominal by Nominal	Phi	.372	.000
	Cramer's V	.186	.000
N of Valid Cases		319	

Table 19

Descriptive Results of Character Gender

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Traditionally Feminine	78	24.5	24.5	24.5
	Neutral	150	47.0	47.0	71.5
	Traditionally Masculine	25	7.8	7.8	79.3
	N/A	12	3.8	3.8	83.1
	Can't Tell	54	16.9	16.9	100.0
	Total	319	100.0	100.0	

Table 20
Chi-Square Results for Character Importance & Character Gender

			Importance				Total
			Playable Main Character	Non-Player Character	Secondary Character	Prop Character	
Gender	Traditionally Feminine	Count	5	1	16	56	78
		% within Gender	6.4%	1.3%	20.5%	71.8%	100.0%
		% within Importance	17.2%	7.7%	16.0%	31.6%	24.5%
		% of Total	1.6%	0.3%	5.0%	17.6%	24.5%
	Neutral	Count	19	10	66	55	150
		% within Gender	12.7%	6.7%	44.0%	36.7%	100.0%
		% within Importance	65.5%	76.9%	66.0%	31.1%	47.0%
		% of Total	6.0%	3.1%	20.7%	17.2%	47.0%
	Traditionally Masculine	Count	5	1	12	7	25
		% within Gender	20.0%	4.0%	48.0%	28.0%	100.0%
		% within Importance	17.2%	7.7%	12.0%	4.0%	7.8%
		% of Total	1.6%	0.3%	3.8%	2.2%	7.8%
	N/A	Count	0	1	3	8	12
		% within Gender	0.0%	8.3%	25.0%	66.7%	100.0%
		% within Importance	0.0%	7.7%	3.0%	4.5%	3.8%
		% of Total	0.0%	0.3%	0.9%	2.5%	3.8%
	Can't Tell	Count	0	0	3	51	54
		% within Gender	0.0%	0.0%	5.6%	94.4%	100.0%

	% within Importance	0.0%	0.0%	3.0%	28.8%	16.9%
	% of Total	0.0%	0.0%	0.9%	16.0%	16.9%
	Count	29	13	100	177	319
	% within Gender	9.1%	4.1%	31.3%	55.5%	100.0%
Total	% within Importance	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%
	% of Total	9.1%	4.1%	31.3%	55.5%	100.0%

Chi-Square Tests

	Value	df	Asymp. Sig. (2-sided)
Pearson Chi-Square	74.864[a]	12	.000
Likelihood Ratio	86.494	12	.000
Linear-by-Linear Association	28.595	1	.000
N of Valid Cases	319		

a. 8 cells (40.0%) have expected count less than 5. The minimum expected count is .49.

Symmetric Measures

		Value	Approx. Sig.
Nominal by Nominal	Phi	.484	.000
	Cramer's V	.280	.000
N of Valid Cases		319	

Table 21
Descriptive Results of Character Role

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
	Protagonist	53	16.6	16.6	16.6
	Victim	27	8.5	8.5	25.1
	Antagonist	18	5.6	5.6	30.7
	Helper	32	10.0	10.0	40.8
Valid	Sidekick	17	5.3	5.3	46.1
	Neutral	47	14.7	14.7	60.8
	Obstacle	15	4.7	4.7	65.5
	Prop	109	34.2	34.2	99.7
	Can't Tell	1	.3	.3	100.0
	Total	319	100.0	100.0	

Table 22
Descriptive Results of Character Motivations

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
	Survival	35	11.0	11.0	11.0
	Saving the World	46	14.4	14.4	25.4
	Personal Gain	154	48.3	48.3	73.7
Valid	Passive Motives	69	21.6	21.6	95.3
	The Compass	14	4.4	4.4	99.7
	Can't Tell	1	.3	.3	100.0
	Total	319	100.0	100.0	

Table 23

Chi-Square Results for Character Motivations & Character Importance

			Importance			Total
			Playable Main Character	Non-Player Character	Secondary Character	Prop Character	
Motivation	Survival	Count	6	2	10	17	35
		% within Motivation	17.1%	5.7%	28.6%	48.6%	100.0%
		% within Importance	20.7%	15.4%	10.0%	9.6%	11.0%
		% of Total	1.9%	0.6%	3.1%	5.3%	11.0%
	Saving the World	Count	12	3	21	10	46
		% within Motivation	26.1%	6.5%	45.7%	21.7%	100.0%
		% within Importance	41.4%	23.1%	21.0%	5.6%	14.4%
		% of Total	3.8%	0.9%	6.6%	3.1%	14.4%
	Personal Gain	Count	10	7	53	84	154
		% within Motivation	6.5%	4.5%	34.4%	54.5%	100.0%
		% within Importance	34.5%	53.8%	53.0%	47.5%	48.3%
		% of Total	3.1%	2.2%	16.6%	26.3%	48.3%
	Passive Motives	Count	1	1	10	57	69
		% within Motivation	1.4%	1.4%	14.5%	82.6%	100.0%
		% within Importance	3.4%	7.7%	10.0%	32.2%	21.6%
		% of Total	0.3%	0.3%	3.1%	17.9%	21.6%
	The	Count	0	0	5	9	14

Compass	% within Motivation	0.0%	0.0%	35.7%	64.3%	100.0%	
	% within Importance	0.0%	0.0%	5.0%	5.1%	4.4%	
	% of Total	0.0%	0.0%	1.6%	2.8%	4.4%	
	Count	0	0	1	0	1	
Can't Tell	% within Motivation	0.0%	0.0%	100.0%	0.0%	100.0%	
	% within Importance	0.0%	0.0%	1.0%	0.0%	0.3%	
	% of Total	0.0%	0.0%	0.3%	0.0%	0.3%	
	Count	29	13	100	177	319	
Total	% within Motivation	9.1%	4.1%	31.3%	55.5%	100.0%	
	% within Importance	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	
	% of Total	9.1%	4.1%	31.3%	55.5%	100.0%	

Chi-Square Tests

	Value	df	Asymp. Sig. (2-sided)
Pearson Chi-Square	57.879[a]	15	.000
Likelihood Ratio	60.050	15	.000
Linear-by-Linear Association	.407	1	.523
N of Valid Cases	319		

a. 12 cells (50.0%) have expected count less than 5. The minimum expected count is .04.

Symmetric Measures

		Value	Approx. Sig.
Nominal by Nominal	Phi	.426	.000
	Cramer's V	.246	.000

APPENDIX D: INTERVIEW GUIDELINES FOR GAMERS

Subject Pillar	Questions
Gamer Profile	- How long have you been playing video games? - Which platform do you prefer? - How often do you play video games? (Probe: By yourself or with other gamers?) - What types of video games do you play? (Probe: Explain why you like to play this type game?) - What types of games do you normally look for? - Please elaborate on why you play video games? - For entertainment? Social with friends? Loyalty to a franchise? - What are some of the current games you've been playing? (Follow up: What are your responses to the depiction of women in these games?) - What types of characters do you like to play with? - Examples?
Female Characters	- In your own words, please describe a typical female character? (Probe: Typical female protagonist?) - Do you like how the gaming industry portrays and represents female characters in video games? - If yes, what parts of the portrayals/representations do you like? - If no, what parts of the portrayals/representations do you not like? - Do you play with any female characters? - Describe? - With games that offer the option of female playable main character, do you choose her? - What are some of your favorite female characters? - What are some of your least favorite female characters?
Video Gaming Industry	- Do you follow any industry news? - Probe: Please list and describe - Did you read any news about E3 or any other gaming conventions? - Thoughts on the new slate of games coming out? - Probe: Dishonored 2, Tomb Raider 2 - Probe: Are you excited for any new games coming out? - Are you satisfied with where the gaming industry is right now? - If yes, what type of games do you want the gaming industry to keep making? - If no, what are the some of the games you wish the gaming industry made?
Gaming and Politics	- Video game industry has made some mainstream news headlines. Thoughts on this? - In your opinion, are games just games? - Separation between virtual reality and actual reality?

Female Characters in Gaming Industry	● Do you follow any gaming news?
	● Have you been following/are you aware of this movement in the gaming industry to get gaming studios to include more female characters in games? Or a better phrasing, to include a more diverse set of female characters in games?
	    ○ What is your response to this?
	    ○ Do you think it necessary?
	    ○ Do you think it unnecessary?
	  ● Gamergate Controversy
	    ○ What is your response to this?
	● Which side of Gamergate do you feel more inclined to side with? And why?

APPENDIX E: CODING THEMES LIST

Axial Coding - Broad Categories and Raw Interview Quotes

Participants started playing video games from a young age
R1: I've been playing video games since I was…. probably 6, when I moved here. From Indonesia.

R2: Uh…. 10, 10 coming 11 years. (Interviewer's note: Estimated age started 8 or 9)

R4: I've been playing video games for about 20 years now. I would say.

R8: I've been playing video games since I was probably 5 or 6 years old.

R13: Well… I started playing video games when I was 15, 16? So about 10, 12 years?

R14: Since 2000. Because like…. I mean when I was a kid I had those, um… what do you call them, imitation consoles. And then after that I got my first PS, and then I followed the series - PS2, PS3, PS4.

R15: Yeah. Since I was a kid. I think…. 8 years old? Yeah. 8 years old.

R6: Since I was 6.

R12: Uh since secondary school.

R11: Okay. How long… oh okay… uh…. About 15 years I guess.

R10: Primary school lor, Primary one lor, Sega […] I was 7 years old.

R8: Mine is probably around 14?

R7: 1989, I was 7.

R4: I started at 7.

Participants and the games they play

R1: I bought my PS3 for Persona 5. It's not coming out till next year [*lower voice, disgruntled*] and I was like "*oh right, oh whatever*."
Vanessa: You bought PS3 for a game that's coming out next year?
Al: It was supposed to come out this year! 10 years in the making…. so… [*trails off*]

R15: In general, I don't really play a lot of games. I only play those games I just listed. And a little bit of some PS3 games, some old ones.

R5: I think that I'm more intrigued by stories? I think video games allow me to explore worlds that film and… storybooks don't? Like you're actually… when you're in world you're actually kind of experiencing it? Like you go to every corner of it. So it's a different kind of experience and it… it adds a lot of depth and texture to the story *at hand*. And I'm a storyteller myself, so I like to see how, you know, stories are being told across different types of mediums and platforms.

R6: Recently played, like, Mass Effect and that kind of thing? Yeah. Because I was really into the story. I think I… play console games and I play PC games mostly because I, I like the story.

R3: I play a lot of, um, MOBAs, a few RPGs, and a couple of RTS-es […] So obviously for the RPGs I look into more of the story and the character, you know. Is there the background interesting enough for me to start playing that? For a MOBA, you know, or FPS, it really doesn't matter. It's more about the gameplay. And what the competitive scene is like. Whereas for, like an RTS, you're looking at, once again, is the lore interesting enough, is the background interesting enough, and is the gameplay interesting enough, on that level.

R14: I think most of the stuff have been roleplayings but not so mission, not so storyline based. I think the storyline based stuff, maybe it's because it's the way they're developed they usually are one person.

Social as an element of the video game
R1: I don't know. I end up playing by myself most of the time. Because… it's not easy to get people to play at the same time as you. Not unless you're online. In person it's really hard.

R2: Friends is… hard to coordinate. For one thing. And, you need like internet and all that. And I think, uh, usually multiplayer is just very… I don't know…. when I think of playing with friends I think of like, your Halo and your Call of Duty, just like jump in and just like shoot… there's no like story or anything I guess.

R3: I like both, and it, you know, once again it comes back to the question, is, you know if I'm playing a single-player game, then obviously it's more for my own enjoyment. Uhm…. actually I'll take that back. I mostly play solo, even when I'm playing multi-player games, I'm playing against random strangers online.

R15: Yeah I like to play with other people, but don't really have a lot of friends to play with. In WOW. It depends though! Because you get a lot of assholes sometimes. So there was once I quit WOW because of, of the community. Yeah. They were, they are, they were elitist. I think there are still elitists now.

R6: Um… actually I, I don't really [*laughs*] play with other people that much yeah. But I did make, uh, a couple of friends on World of Warcraft. I haven't really branched into the community in Star Wars. Mostly because, you know, it's just fun to play with friends.

R10: Sneaky rogues! Because my main, whenever I play an MMO, the thing I like to do the most is annoy people. So I'll be the rogue that just runs around snapping you, gouging you, stabbing you, not actually killing you. Just there to annoy you [*laughs*]. Either that or I play those kinds of warrior types that charge in and go crazy, kill 3 people and die.

Perceptions of Female Characters
R1: You get a really, pretty looking girl. That'd be the first thing. Um, hmm… that would fit within a set trope. Always. Um, she's either, a damsel in distress, or a strong female lead.

R2: So if it was an adventure game, probably she has to be like decently fit. Like Lara Croft or something. Uh, otherwise, your main character would be a damsel in distress I guess. So you gotta be a little bit mentally strong. I guess.

R10: Sylvanas Windrunner from WoW. I mean she's across most major platforms, you can find a version of her. I like her character because the character for motivation is revenge, and want to turn everyone into something like her.

R11: There seems to be two tracks actually. Um.. one is always the cutesy, demure kind of character. So like um, I'm thinking, like, uh Final Fantasy, you know, slightly more slanted towards the Japanese side. And, the other ones would be obviously, physically, what's the nicest way to - well-endowed - yeah, so uh, the attraction then would seem to be designated to be more of a sexual attraction kind of thing. For the gamers. Off the top of my head, what's that game? Dead or Alive? Yeah that one [*laughs*] is just full blown. And uh.. especially for the Japanese game players, like Bayonetta, she's uh… she seems to be exceptionally towards that kind. Wait, actually there's a third kind, now that I think about it. Um… the assistant, the secretarial figure, that appears in almost all the strategy games.

R14: She's usually booby, she wears very little clothes. Um… she's got lots of um, magnified curves. Long hair, very colourful. Like, like if the guy's outfits are grey, blue, black, she's wearing something pink, bright green, you know, stuff like that. Hair is always obvious color like fluorescent neon pink, red, more exciting to play with lah […] So you can wear different types of clothes, change your hairstyle change your color. But for the guys the haircuts that you change, after a while they look the same.

R6: They're really pretty. Got like [*laughs*] sizeable bosoms. [*laughs*] Yeah.

R4: Okay so female characters in video games tend to be gender-biased and stereotyped, to a- they tend to get relegated to a more, um, supportive bland role. Recent times however, game developers have been overcompensating on female characters, and giving them, uh, so they either tend to get relegated to a supporting role or they overcompensate on story. […] Uh, they give them, uh, uh, character development is overdone and they get a really huge backstory, in their motivation of the game. Uh, so they tend to fall on two ends of the spectrum. Either that or very very very prominent.

R1: I like um… favourite female. I have to go like one-by-one. [*laughs*] and figure out if I like them. Um, most of the characters come with FF. Um… oh I like Tifa. Because she was pretty and had big boobs.

R5: I always think of.. when you say female video game character… the first thing that pops into my mind… the first character that pops into mind is Lara Croft. Because she's so iconic as a female video game character. And then the second character that pops into mind is Princess Peach. [*Laughs*] Because she's also very iconic

R8: I wouldn't say… okay I just say Dota for example, majority of the female characters, that is in Dota in itself, they have very very low hit rates.

R7: They're usually intel or agility.
R8: Intelligence or agility. Which they, I don't know if it's stereotypical or what, but that's the usual.
R7: I think it's the perception. Males are still more, like, like, strength-

R8: If you see a warrior, they're usually men.
R8: But that depends on the game also lah! If you look at Dota you've got radio commander which is female. She's one of the only three characters in the game that has infinite scalability.

R15: Typical female character…. Usually they're the heroines. They are… they usually are… casters… usually. Hmmmm… dunno. Usually they're hot [*laughs*]. They're good, they're courageous, usually. Typical female characters. Yeah, usually they're courageous. That's all I think.

R2: Well, contrasted to- okay let's say you look like, adventure, the guy's, like, more macho and brawn and the girl is usually more probably, like, intelligent. Uh, and whatever she might not have in terms of strength capacity she makes up in brains and stuff I guess.

Participants are sensitive to different ideals of beauty (East vs. West)
In particular, participants mention that while Western games are more progressive, Eastern games are still much more stereotypical and traditional in nature.

R3: So you're looking at a more, strong female lead. Oftentimes the female lead tends to be very tomboyish though or exhibits traits that are traditionally associated with, with uh, male characters. Whereas, you know, on the Asian end, the East Asian end, you have a very different type of, uh, characterisation. If you look at the very traditional JRPG, or Japanese video games, your characters are depicted as, they may, they may not be a strong lead, in terms that they have a very independent personality, they tend to be a more damsel in distress type, or, or a strong female character in that she has strong characterisation, but still often times falls back on a male protagonist, or a male antagonist. And the way they're dressed tends to be more feminist[1] as well. You know more dresses, softer colors, uh, softer hairstyles, and softer personalities. Um, you will find however, that sprinkled in, you will find the occasional character- the occasional female character that has a stronger personality, you know, um, Tifa Lockhart from Final Fantasy 7, Raina from Final Fantasy 8. Final Fantasy 10 doesn't really exhibit one during the main game, but on the spin offs you do with Yuna becoming more forward. They tried that with Lightning in Final Fantasy 13, although it should be noted that 13 wasn't a commercial success. Um, so you know that leads to some debate now going forward right? And then, sorry, and going back in the context of League of Legends, which has an abundance of female characters, all of them are very strong personalities but depicted in a very, in terms of appearance, they tend to be very 70s pin-up girl era kind of graphics or characterisation.

R4: Yeah I mean, in the last, like I said, it used to be uber sexualised. But uh, um, breadth of character is there now. Uh, I wouldn't say it's getting better, I think that right now in it's current state it's fine actually. For me. Once again, there's a divide right. In a more Western, uh, games created by Western developers, um, I think gender roles are fine, but games that are coming out for China, or more Asian countries, they, sex like you said, sex still sells, and they have to sell for that.

R5: So it's a support system, in like, for a lot of like, the Japanese RPGs. In the Western world I think that the female characters also play some sort of support system but, I think in more recent video games, they have attempted to make it a little

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[1] Participant probably means "feminine," when refering to "dresses, softer colours, softer hairstyles" rather than "femininst."

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bit more, to give the female characters a little bit more of a… uh… presence… or how would I say… I think the cultural shift in female game characters are more evident in the Western world than in the Asian. I don't think that, you know, I think it's more of a political thing. Because when you look at the cultural of Japan, I think that a lot of, you know, if i go into forums and read about of female characters, in video games, in Japan, by Japanese people, the women don't necessarily disagree with that image. It's interesting because, and I think it's more of a cultural thing and how they see themselves, as part of the culture. I think it's *for us* to say because we often have a Western view of the world, and so we apply Western thinking to like anything we see. So it's easy for us to say that like, oh, she's portrayed as submissive or whatnot, but if you look into the Japanese culture, a lot of the women are okay with how the women are portrayed in their video games.

R5: Lara Croft has also changed a lot in the years… but I guess… um… I think the typical video female game character… that's… um… I, I don't know what typical is because I think there's… there's so many… when I think of all the games I've played, there's so many variations. Especially in the North American video games and then the Japanese video games. They're very distinct differences between how the female characters are written- Um… I think… Okay, for example, in the Final Fantasy series, the female characters tend to be a lot more submissive. They're always supporting characters, and if you look at like, the, the, the, RPGs, the way gameplay is made, the guys are always welding swords and axes and spears… and then the women are like, uh, uh, casting healing spells.

Overcompensation of the Video Gaming Industries to cater to the crowd
(Regarding personality) R1: Very girly. […] Um… no, and there's another one - super tomboy.

R6: Personality um… I mean… it could go both ways, like… I've seen a lot of female characters where, they're really bitchy and they…they… exude that "ice queen" kind of… kind of persona, but they're really softies on the inside. That kind of thing. Like speaking specifically of, like, Miranda Lawson. And… um… yeah. You know that kind of, that kind of image? […] But they… they usually, like, nowadays there's a trend of… the female character being very tough. Very combat ready. That kind of thing. Um… about the same actually except… a little bit more evil. Like, you know, they've… they have um….they're more…okay maybe not driven, I, I find that a lot of female characters or even male characters they are kind of like polar opposites except that one has a.. more… like… *eviler* agenda.

R4: Okay so female characters in video games tend to be gender-biased and stereotyped, to a- they tend to get relegated to a more, um, supportive bland role. Recent times however, game developers have been overcompensating on female characters, and giving them, uh, so they either tend to get relegated to a supporting role or they overcompensate on story.

R4: which is probably the case. Gamergate's mostly blow over. People are sick of the topic. But it's a symptom of a larger picture - Um, I mean this boils down to minorities, and you know, racism and everything. It's overcompensating for the minorities.

R6: Uhhh.. hmmm. I think a lot of games right now, they… they tend to… they know it's like a *mandatory* thing to include at least one female character. Whether they make her strong or, you know, that kind of thing, it's mandatory for them now. Because people obviously will complain a la Assassin's Creed. They finally gave in

right? They made a female assassin? I think… uh…. we could see more of that? More female characters who are at the forefront of it?

Conflicting opinions on female characters - keep the sexy looks, change the personality
Vanessa (interviewer): Why did you hate Lightning?
R1: I thought she [in personality] was really bland. [*laughs*]

R2: Basically not the typical damsel in distress kind lah. I can't give a set of characteristics I think, a female character should have. But I know, like, things that she shouldn't have. She shouldn't be helpless, and indecisive, and basically shouldn't be useless lah.

R2: He's like, he's the guy that helps Snake. And I think his sister was quite useless. Which is very annoying… She was one of, like, uh, the scientists that you were supposed to help or something so you had to escort her and carry her around and stuff. She was quite useless.

R3: Um…. I mean, not to say I dislike them, but there are definitely some female characters which, which were intended to be more of a supporting cast, or a, or a protagonist that really kind of faded? There weren't really very strong. Yuna from Final Fantasy 10 was one in my mind. Um, Lightning actually from 13 is another. Actually going back to 10, there's also Lulu, which kind of fades away. Nina and Selfy from Final Fantasy 8 don't particular have very strong characterisations. Um, Tris in the Witcher also kind of fades away. Although that's more of a deliberate storyline plot. Because she's not really a main character in any of the novels either, so I can't really fault that as an example. Um, yeah.

R6: Okay. Um… I think it could be better? It's definitely improved till now. I mean…. yeah. Perhaps years ago we couldn't have seen so many female protagonists already? Like we've got a more… well rounded Lara Croft. And she's dressed slightly better [*laughs*]. That's true. That's a good question. Um…hmmm. I think she's… more relatable? Yeah. Like you can really *root* for her now. It's kind of a-, It's kind of a sketchy topic. Because it's like, you know, she's only relatable when she goes through so much hardships and stuff like that, which shouldn't be the case, but it's how the game portrays her. Like it's how the game forces you to learn-

R11: No it doesn't really bother me. In fact, I think they add a second dimension to the… second dimension to the storytelling. Because for once, the protagonist doesn't have to fall in love with the good… the good character. So it's… it's… that's the whole plot that drives Starcraft 2. The good guy that falls in love with the bad person. The bad… yeah

R5- Um, I think the one big thing that they could change is… to have more lead female characters, as main characters, as playable characters in the game. To carry the game through. And I think that that's the one thing that I would like to see that's different. As far as the characters themselves, I think that they're already at, you know, at a point, where, where, where… the um… the women characters, sometimes, in the video games, are way more interesting than the male characters.

R13: I wouldn't know about, like, whether they're like, *overly* sexualised. It could be? Like, especially, like, in comparison with their, like, male counterparts. If um, on the whole, trying to get the male gamers in. Yeah. Um… like a strong, silent type?

R15: Okay for example for World of Warcraft right, I love the Blood Elves because they're really pretty. [*laughs*] Firstly! Secondly they have Warlocks. So, Blood Elves are a race, it's like humans, blood elves, undead and stuff. I will choose Blood Elves because they're pretty.

R14: Um, I think the females for… for Final Fantasy series are all quite nice. The rest of… the rest I don't really remember […] They look really pretty?

Catering to female gamers - when it comes to changing female video game characters, female respondents were predictably more eager for change than the male participants.
(Females)
R13: I guess on that point, the games being games point. Um, games have always been an escape from real life? So um, like, just having that opportunity for girls to be able to, um, become, relate to a character or like, you know, just immerse themselves with like, the story, or having fun. I think that's… kind of like, *important,* because like, you know, guys always have, they do have things like that. And girls, not so much. Like whether it's like society we're saying like, little girls should not be playing with video games, they should be playing with like dolls or whatever. Um, I mean, I'm not sure like which one is the cause and which one is like the effect? So, yeah.

R8: Okay, it bothers me, in terms of base sexist, only one thing I heard, it was from the VP of Marketing, it's steel series, their VP of Marketing, in a press release or press interviews stated that "female gamers are being sponsored or hired just because sex sells and it's not because they have the skill sets, or whatsoever, in terms of gamers, they can't play for nuts, they are just female". And so he said that in that, I can't remember which article, when I read that I was really very pissed off.

[*Asking about the ideal female character*]
R6: [*clears throat*] Closest thing is complex. Like you can never underestimate - you shouldn't underestimate her. She's uh, she's got a very strong personality, in the sense that she doesn't like to be led along by - she has her own opinions and she's not afraid to let you know what she thinks of the situation. But she's still loyal, in a sense, she has respect, yeah. And she gains respect as well.
Vanessa (interviewer): So you've basically just described a normal woman.
R6: Yeah [*laughs*].

(Males)
R10: The thing is it's not just affected gaming, it started to leak out into everything. I mean look at, um, you know The Killing Joke, the Batman comic? So as a tribute to it, someone wanted to do a full cover illustration of one of the females in one of the comic books, people caught wind of it and said it was overly derogatory to females.. but this is a comic that came out 25 years ago! And it's critically acclaimed! Basically it's Barbara Gordon, shot by the Joker on the floor! […] Like the comic was meant to be this way! It's so popular it's sold so many copies, it got so many people talking because of what Joker did to her. But you don't suddenly go and change it, and then companies are being overly politically correct. They're trying to get a market that's not interested in their product, interested in their product, by shoving stereotypes and hype the way things are. That's what I don't like about it.
Diva: It bothers me when it affects that I like.

R2: I think, like, uh, there's nothing wrong, in the sense, with having a *sexy f*emale character, because if you look at, like, character tropes you have your typical femme fatale, but I think you have to draw the line between where, you know, but at the

same time I don't think there's anything wrong with making a character that is, like, so called sexy but at the same time, that's not what defines the character per say.

R4: You don't want to stare at the guy's ass! [*A laughs*] The second reason is… sex sells! [*D laughs*] Gamers tend to be nicer if they think you're a female character. You can free gold and stuff. But as a general rule, the female form is aesthetically a lot nicer to look at than bulky male.
Di: And in a game like WoW where you're constantly button mashing and your character keeps going "Not enough energy! I need more energy!" I don't want to hear a guy yelling that at me!

R1 I don't really have an issue with, um, the video game industry as it is now, because uh, actually with movies, for example, because you've got this zeitgeist right, where everything looks the same within this period of time. You have that for games as well. Because it's the same damn designers doing the same things. Like oh this is cool, that armour is cool, let's just lump everything into that and we're cool again. But they've got gameplay to make up for that. Right. So… that one saves them somewhat. Issues with the video game industry? Hmmm…. not… not really. Yeah.

R10: One thing that you need to write about Dota characters right, at least half of the characters are based off fan suggestions. And the fan base tends to be mostly male! Uh, they give them, uh, uh, character development is overdone and they get a really huge backstory, in their motivation of the game. Uh, so they tend to fall on two ends of the spectrum. Either that or very very very prominent.

But most participants (male and female) agree there is a problem with sexism in the gaming industry. (There's nothing wrong with the game but the player).

R1: I think…. I think, uh, on the whole, it has definitely, like, generally women's rights and everything has gotten a bit better. I mean I think it can still go, there's still a long way to go. But you still have some strong female protagonists, like, Lara Croft is no longer, like, this bimbo, running around with the pixelated boobs. So, if you look at other games like, for example, if you look at, Half Life, even though your main character is a guy, at the same time you also have a secondary protagonist which is also a strong female character. If you look at, Portal, your main character is, even though silent, is the female as well, and she's not given anything in portrayal. But there are still some games that tend to still sexualise female characters like, for example Metal Gear Solid 5. Quiet. So, i think that there's still work that needs to be done.

R1: Oh yeah. But in a sense, even if she did that, and even though you think it's morally wrong, I think the level of criticism and harshness in the threats and the comments she received was very un- it was very like…. how do you say, it's very uh, unnecessary. I think that there's definitely, among the gaming industry, there is a lot of sexism. I mean, in general, if you look at the gaming industry is largely from the US. If you look at the US there's the whole wage gap thing. 70 cents to a dollar right. From female to male. And, uh, yeah. I just think that, and i've personally seen it, like, on forums and even on YouTube comments and all that. It's like a girl, for example, if you look at on YouTube channel, there was one… uh, there's this channel called Outside Xbox, and there's this one called PlayStation Access. I remember both of them have one female staffer who presents a lot. And then if you look at the Outside Xbox one, she's younger and prettier and she always gets, uh, very nice comments. Whereas, the other one, who's slightly older, and she's maybe a bit more on the plump side. Then they'll say like "you're very ugly," "you're very-", there was one

whole video of her getting mean tweets. Oh no, it was on her Twitter. And then she was like posting pictures of, uh, the mean tweets that she was receiving regarding her appearance. Yeah, I think definitely there's still a lot of sexism going on, and harassment and stuff.

R13: Yeah so, so there's more female gamers than male gamers, but the perception in the, even in the gaming community itself is that, you know, the male, like, like, they think they over number, like they are way more of them, than females? So um… so, so yeah, I mean even statistically wise, um, the representation, we're clearly not having like a, games with, like, male leads and female leads, um, like the same amount of games having that. Yeah. And it's, even when it *is*, it's not very, well represented.

R13: Oh no [*laughs*] I mean, I mean like, if you are kind of like pushing out, one of the biggest of the games of the year, then um, and all your protagonists, all the people you can play as, are like males, it kind of signifies, it kind of gives a message that only guys are the people that are playing. That's why the characters are modelled after the people who are, like, who want to like project themselves. So you know, the 51% cannot really identify with characters.

R8: You get special treatment, other than that you get those really sexist right? They go like "oh fuck you can't play for nuts." You play well, it's either well. So I never liked that. I also play CS, I play blind, I don't put my actual gaming nick, so I put nick like Tiger, so people don't harass like A/S/L, A/S/L. Fuck! And especially when you're good, they'll think you're hacking. You can see through. And when you find out that you're a girl, oh wow you're so good ah, can I get to know you? You know that kind of shit? It's like damn. I don't know. Guys may complain a lot, but they're still like Hi! A/S/L please?

R14: Because I… didn't want people to cut me slack because I'm female.

R15: Because you're a chick, and they're guys. [*laughs*] So usually when I play I usually try and not tell them I'm female.

R10: But the stereotypes exists for a reason mah. When there are female gamers who are pushing the stereotypes. Look at Twitch - 99% of female Twitch streamers are not there to show you the game, they're there to show you their cleavage. [*A laughs*] It works both ways what. When 99% of player base on Twitch, female players on Twitch, are not there to show you the game, they're there to show you their cleavage.

R14: No, I call it the Chihuahua syndrome. Chihuahuas tend to be very bad tempered, very ill natured, because whenever they do something wrong, the owner, in this context, the owners are the males in the gaming industry, will pick it up, coddle it, think they're doing the right thing, so yap yap yap pet pet pet, oh yes i'm being petted for barking like hell. So-

Games are just games.
R2: Uh…. I think on a certain level yeah. Some games are, I mean, you know there are games that, in some veins, you take more seriously and less seriously.

R14: I think we read too much. They're just supposed to… they're just supposed to… you're just supposed to use them to pass time. Engage the story and move on. It doesn't have to be *always* politically correct. And sometimes, the jokes, I mean, it's

funny to be, where else can you then do… or… I find some of the in game jokes where they make fun of certain things like having um, booby woman just doing nothing but jumping up and down, and all that. And that's funny! But I don't get offended by it even though I'm a woman. I'm like "wow, this is just wow, look at the gravity! Wow!" And then that's it, and then I just move on! Yeah.

R15: Yeah I think games should just be games. Because it's like when you play games that's where you want to release yourself, and you know take a break and stuff. You don't have to be so serious about everything. That's how I feel.

R11: I don't think it's any more dangerous than a book, or a film actually. To me it's just another medium. So it's not, it's not about whether or not the medium is good or bad. It's about how you actually use it. Uh, for sure the potentials of uh, the dangers of it going into other mediums is definitely there, but, I mean, it being too immersive - that's for sure, I mean, video gaming addiction is a, is a problem already. But, at the same time, I mean, it's, it's a natural progression firstly. And I don't think it's… I think it's more of how you want people to… to perceive it. Firstly. And how much society allows themselves to get into this world. I mean, there's already been, there's been pushback, especially in Korea, because, you know, video game addiction is a massive problem there. Yeah there's already been pushbacks towards video gaming and stuff like that. In Korea. That's a social reaction. However we don't see it that much in Singapore yet. But games in Singapore are still rather popular. I mean, the sales are good in Singapore. So the question is now, how much… how much do you allow yourself… how much does society allow itself to get into it? And if you are allow it to go unchecked, like the Koreans, then that's what you get. And so now there's uh, there's a pushback. While in Singapore, you get youths who have a different priority. While they enjoy gaming, you know, it doesn't impact them in the way it does on the Koreans. So, I don't think it's, it's a menace on the part of the video game. Or it's a media spinoffs. More on the part of the user. And the gamer itself.

R3: Because as any kind of, any type of media platform, right, it always comes down now to what is the, what is the artist's intent, or the developer's intent, I would say. If the intent is to create a game that has, social commentary built into it, then obviously that should be subject to a wider context. Like, what is the social issue he is critiquing, or what's this race issue about, and if any politician or civil servant wants to take a pick with that, that's fine with me. Because that game was creating with that intent. But let's say you're looking at, um, just a game meant for fun right? Whether it's an FPS, there's no real social content or intentional- Yeah, you know, like Grand Theft Auto there's no real social commentary that's built into it, it's just mean to be a fun game looking at a specific context. I don't think that those shouldn't really be, you know, really be critiqued so much, because you know, hey, there's so many other social media or media platforms out there which talk about the same issues that no one really places as much attention to.

R1: Um…. I think it's really hard to find a proper scientific correlation. Right. Whatever studies you do it's difficult and it's… right. Um… in the past I used to think…"hey, people can tell between firing a real gun and killing someone and playing a game." I still believe that to be true, but not for everyone. So, because, I was teaching the last two years right, and my stand on this is, yeah it could. But, learning to drive could turn you into a drunk driver.

Games are not just games.

R6: Um… I think… I think that's a huge can of worms. Um… I mean that everyone is different right? And everyone… everyone connects with their fictional worlds differently. I… feel that, you know, those odd eggs who, who will take what they see in fiction and apply it to real life. That kind of thing. And that's dangerous because you have games like Grand Theft Auto [*laughs*]. That kind of thing. And, um, it's kind of dumb but like all those shooter games, you know, people, people always say that… um… shooter games influence people to go and commit real life shootings. I'm not saying that's true, but, you know, there's an argument there. But, I think, it definitely affects, it definitely… reflects on what people perceive to be true. So if I play a lot of games with very strong female characters, I would say, okay, it's possible for females to be really strong characters, that kind of thing. But if I'm consistently playing male protagonists with damsels in distress, that kind of thing, um, maybe, I mean, perhaps someone would see them as weak.

R6:: Should games just be games… No, I think, I think… nowadays we… we connect more intimately with our games. And we, we consume things differently now, in that, we really attach ourselves to them. Like when I watch my TV shows, when I play my games, I'm attaching my, my emotional self to these things. So, I, maybe, perhaps it's different for other people but when I attach my emotional self to these things I want it to… be true, basically. So if I, if I see… uh… it's the same argument, like, I want to see more representation here. I want to see more representation of the real world. So when I see, like, a lot of strong female characters in a game, I believe, I believe it could be true in real life. That kind of thing.

R5: [*adamant*] Uh yes. Because, because they're not just games. I think they're, they're pieces of culture. You know, I think a lot of people play video games and get influenced by it. And they, they, they take that, and they apply, you were talking about children…. they watch those video games, and what they see on TV, and they learn from it too. So it is a part of culture. We should be more serious about what kind of messages we are uh.. delivering on these video games.

Parents should be accountable for some of the rampant sexism, not just the game creators.
Rl: So at the end of the day, a lot of these complaints come from parents. The parents who want to push responsibility of bringing their kids up to the video game developers. That's what I don't like. You can't teach your kids not shoot guns at people. And now you're blaming them

R15 : I feel that, these are just your, these are just people being human. These are natural desires and urges, and they just needed to blame it on something. Which is kinda dumb! I mean they blame it on media as well right? Not specifically on games. So, I think it's dumb. Cuz it makes no sense. If they want to blame gaming for having these kind of behaviours or whatever. They can easily blame their parents for not teaching them well. The can blame the media. They can blame any fucking thing. So I don't think this is logical.

Differing opinions on who (industry vs. the individual) should lead the charge for change.
Change from the bottom up (i.e. individuals should pressure studios)

R10: I mean you can't blame the industry when it's the people themselves who are the problem.

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R1: What I feel like is that you have to change the viewers, not the creators, because when the viewers change, then the creators will.

R1: Generate awareness. Educate. And don't push for change. Because that thing isn't going to do anything, that's one game.

R1: I'm not saying that this does nothing. Because it generates news and then people are. But that isn't the focus. Their focus is "this is wrong. change" And they don't realise that it is what it is.

R1: Yeah yeah yeah. No you have to make some noise! But I think, um, having a certain thing, having different things as your focus would change your approach naturally. And a lot of news that I see of, examples of this, there's a lot of anger. Right. There's a lot- and outrage

R3: Um, I think more awareness is always good. At the same time, you know, there's always going to be a bit more backlash, because, the key argument of this whole things is women's rights right. And women's rights when you, when you say certain things like, oh we need to, we need to treat them the same as men. And people go "okay, let's do that." For example, the U.S. draft just approved female draftees. And then all of a sudden you have a lot of women screaming out and saying that's not fair, well, everyone, if you want equal rights, you're subject to the same consequences, um, and I know that's a very specific example, but, you know, that more awareness is required, but I also will caution and say there will always be backlash, against these very strongly held beliefs. Irregardless of the media or the issue involved.

R13: I mean it's not just the gaming industry that's behaving like this, it's kind of a society at large issue, and then this is like people taking advantage of the situation.

R4: Okay, I think it goes back the economics of the game companies. The game companies will always try to do stuff, in terms of gameplay, and in terms of storyline, I think they'll try to cater… to their audiences as much as possible. So, I think this growth in female characters or whether they are in supplementary role or in a main role, is largely due to the preferences of the gamers.

R4: Uh, I mean in the casual games market, monetisation comes, 60% comes from females. Uh, so you have a more diverse audience now. If heads of companies being predominantly male it's because these are the people that started playing games earlier. Right, um, rewind about 30 years. Most of the people that played games *are male*. The girls are out. They're not sitting in front of a TV playing a console. So these guys at this point, are best equipped to run companies. Um, we're going to see a shift soon, more girls are getting into gaming earlier. Um, maybe another 10 years you'll see more female CEOs, but at this point, um, based purely on merit, it's going to be male dominated.

Change from the top down (i.e. studios should be the ones who set the standard)
R1: I think the most important thing is for like the companies themselves, first of all. And the second thing, if you have sexism in this industry, you know, it's not, you know, it's not going to be confined to this industry, these individuals if they are sexist, they're going to be sexist everywhere. So, it's a systemic problem that you probably need to address with education of the whole.

Selective Coding - Possible Metathemes and Sub-Categories

- Gamer Profile
  - Started at a young age
  - Particular about their games/defensiveness
  - Socialisation in video games
- Perceptions of Female Characters
  - Aesthetics
    - Traditional/Stereotypical descriptions
  - Personality/Goals/Motivations
    - More progressive views
    - Traditional = boring
  - Sensitivity to the East/West Divide
    - Western Games – Progressive
    - Eastern Games – Traditional
  - Overcompensation of gaming industry
    - Expectation of the studios
  - Conflicting opinions on "progressive" female characters
    - Keep the aesthetics, change the personality
    - Males vs. Female gamers
- Toxicity in the Gaming Industry
  - Sexism
  - Differentiation between the game and the player
  - Games are just games
- Solutions
  - Change begins from the bottom-up/top-down
  - Role of communities
  - Role of individuals