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Why Can't Zelda Save Herself? How the Damsel in Distress Trope Affects Video Game Players

Jared Capener Hansen
Brigham Young University

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Why Can't Zelda Save Herself? How the Damsel in Distress Trope
Affects Video Game Players

Jared Capener Hansen

A thesis submitted to the faculty of
Brigham Young University
in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of
Master of Arts

Kevin Kimball John, Chair
Pamela Jo Brubaker
Loy Clark Callahan

School of Communications
Brigham Young University

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ABSTRACT

Why Can't Zelda Save Herself? How the Damsel in Distress Trope Affects Video Game Players

Jared Capener Hansen
School of Communications, BYU
Master of Arts

Research has unearthed an abundance of objectification and hypersexualization of female characters within video games. However, the recurring element of the damsel in distress trope is also harmful to the medium. This cliché of a helpless princess in need of a man to save her is a recurring element of *The Legend of Zelda* series. This experimental design tested the effects of a prototypical “save the princess” mission on players’ agreement to sexist statements on gender roles, objectification, and female dependency, and examined the factors of self-efficacy and gamer status as potential mediators. Participants played a modified version of a classic *Legend of Zelda* game, where the genders of the hero protagonist and damsel are manipulated. This 2 x 2 study included male and female heroes rescuing male and female victims in the four different cells. Immediately following the experiment, participants then took a post-test survey to gauge if there was any difference on their agreement to sexist statements. These results were also compared to their previous responses on their self-efficacy scores and their gamer status.

Keywords: video games, media effects, Zelda, social learning theory, gender schema theory, feminism

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CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

Research into Gender Roles in Video Games

In August of 2014 a media-fueled controversy erupted in America that divided and splintered popular opinion (Molden, 2015). On one side were those who thought that video games were harmful towards women (Chess & Shaw, 2015), and on the other was the gamer culture who wanted to maintain the status quo. The GamerGate debate arose when feminist media critic Anita Sarkeesian launched a Kickstarter campaign for a series of video essays outlining the sexism of video games (Chess & Shaw, 2015). Game developers Zoe Quinn and Brianna Wu voiced their views that women are wrongly represented in video games, which resulted in them becoming victims of harassment. The vitriol and hatred escalated into death threats, doxing (releasing personal information online), and other assault (Chess & Shaw, 2015; Wingfield, 2014). The media played a significant role in this conflict, with bloggers arguing for both sides (Dulis, 2014; Hern, 2014).

The event is described as a culture war over diversification, artistic recognition, and social criticism in video games (Rott, 2014). A large group of activists sided with Sarkeesian, Quinn, and Wu, and fought in their defense. While Sarkeesian received more than twenty times her initial funding goal—and received praise from many scholars, academics, professionals, and decision makers (Chess & Shaw, 2015)—there was still a wide audience that found evidence of collusion between video game developers and journalists (Rott, 2014). Feminist gaming scholars Chess and Shaw (2015) found themselves sucked into this conspiracy theory, and they wrote a

case study outlining what they learned from this experience, as it is important to scholarly fields such as game studies.

The first female character in video games was Ms. PacMan, who was designed to attract female players to the male-dominated market; however, female characters soon became damsels in distress, such as Princess Peach and Princess Zelda (Dill & Thill, 2007). The narrative of the *Super Mario Bros.* series includes the theme of rescuing the helpless princess from the dastardly villain; Princess Peach meekly relies on and is dependent upon the masculinity of Mario as her savior (Brar, 2012). Brar notes that this trope is evidence of a need for well-rounded female characters in video games (para. 14).

Critical examination of video games can expose the increasing trends of sexism. Women are more hypersexualized than before (Downs, 2010), commonly reduced to stereotypes and tropes (Sarkeesian, 2013d), and minimized to token female roles (Pollitt, 1991). There are exceptions to these trends, such as a different Nintendo series *Metroid*, wherein the lead character is a strong independent female bounty hunter named Samus Aran (Roberts, 2012).

The Legend of Zelda (LoZ) series has sold over 75 million copies globally (*The Legend of Zelda*, n.d.), becoming one of the most successful franchises of all time (Aldama, 2012). Its games have had significant impact on the video game industry, with titles like *A Link to the Past* and *Ocarina of Time* being considered some of the greatest video games ever made (Aldama, 2012; Hunt, 2008). There is a *LoZ* game on each of Nintendo's consoles (Hunt, 2008), solidifying its reach in each and every generation of video games (Hansen, 2018). Players and fans of the series pore over every *LoZ* rumor, and create an air of excitement and high expectations for each installment (Hunt, 2008).

But even the *LoZ* games are not immune to the growing sexism in video games, with the titular character serving a supporting role as the princess in need of saving. Although, Princess Zelda has an alter ego that is not helpless, Sheik, this character is even more minor than Zelda and, while empowered, only serves as a plot device in one game. While all texts can be read from multiple and contradictory positions, it is important to critical theory to reveal hegemonic conventions (Heilman, 2003), such as the damaging nature of Princess Zelda's damseling.

Players go on these quests to discover themselves and along the way learn the gender roles contained within. Throughout the *LoZ* games there are recurring tropes and gender stereotypes common in other media: men achieve and women are objects. These games and other entertainment teach that a man's place is to be heroic and a woman's place is in the dungeon awaiting salvation (Dill & Thill, 2007). Mainstream video games continue to objectify and hypersexualize female characters (Harmann & Klimmt, 2006; Reinecke, 2007; Summers, 2014), relegating them to secondary and tertiary characters (Breuer, 2015; Downs & Smith, 2010; Lynch et.al., 2016; Roberts, 2016), affecting the players' views of gender roles. This objectification of female video game characters includes a reliance on the damsel in distress trope (Bryce & Rutter, 2003; Dickey, 2006), a key part of every *LoZ* game. However, abandoning this trope would appeal to fans and critics alike, who are asking for a new take on the *LoZ* storyline (Burks, 2016; Johnson, D., 2013; McFerran 2013; Nichols, 2016; Sarkeesian, 2013a).

In the 2014 teaser footage for the latest *LoZ* game, *Breath of the Wild*, the protagonist Link appeared androgynous, leading many fans to speculate that the newest game would feature a female Link. The series producer, Eiji Aonuma, addressed this fan theory in an interview with Stephen Totilo from Kotaku, a popular website focusing on gaming trends and culture (Totilo,

2016). At the center of each *LoZ* game is the Triforce, the principle McGuffin—or an unexplained magical item that serves as a plot device. This triangular-shaped object is tied to the three eternal characters of the series: Link, Zelda, and Ganondorf (Hunt, 2008). When asked why Nintendo shied away from making Link a girl in the new game, Aonuma responded that it would mess with the balance of the Triforce (Totilo, 2016).

The perceived balance of the three major characters and their gender identity convinced Nintendo to keep Link a male. With two females fighting one male, it would change the dimensions of the story and the history of the conflict. In the interview, Aonuma continued to explain why Link had to be the hero and why Zelda could not save herself: "...if we have princess Zelda as the main character who fights, then what is Link going to do?" (Totilo, 2016). Link is a blank slate, an empty character, on which we project ourselves. Aonuma, and the creative team behind the *LoZ* games, have purposely kept Link free from characterization to make him universally relatable (Nichols, 2016). However, Princess Zelda has characterization and is more developed than Link. By switching roles, what would the faceless hero be left to do?

This thesis aims to address the effects of the damsel in distress trope on players of video games. Building upon gender schema, social learning, and objectification theory that expose the flaws in video games, this research looks into the possible effects of the current gender roles within popular video games upon players' perceptions. This study also examines the possible mediating effects of self-efficacy and gamer status upon the dependent variables. This thesis follows an experimental design to determine the possible effects that new gender dynamics, such as a female hero and a male victim, would have upon the players of a classic video game.

CHAPTER TWO

LITERATURE REVIEW

There is an abundance of critical examination of media such as video games, exposing trends of sexism through the hypersexualization and objectification of female characters (Lynch et al., 2016). The effects of this hypersexualization and objectification can be explained by the theories of social learning and gender schema. They examine how messages in media texts can be internalized, shaping perceptions and opinions.

Social Learning Theory & Gender Schema Theory

Social learning theory offers explanation for the learning of culturally appropriate gender roles via reinforcement from others and modeling of ideal characters. Through the social learning system, new patterns of behavior are acquired through the experience of observing the behavior of others (Bandura & Walters, 1977). Learning is a cognitive process that takes place in a social context through direct instruction as well as observation. Learning also occurs through rewards and punishments, and this theory expands upon traditional behavioral theories.

Social learning theory can be used to condemn the hypersexualization of video game characters, as the majority of female characters are provocatively dressed with emphasis on their breasts and butts (Beasley & Collins Standley, 2002). Players are taught through video games that female bodies are solely for objectification through the character design and gameplay mechanics (Sarkeesian, 2016), as explored by this theory.

Social learning theory best applies to video games because of their interactive nature. They demand the player's full attention, entail active identification, and the gameplay reinforces

behaviors and actions through rewards (Egenfeldt-Nielsen, 2016). The heroes and protagonists of video games are idealized role models from which to learn models of behavior and attitudes, a key component of social learning theory. Players are primed for social learning theory with the reliance of video games upon a player's identification with avatars (Egenfeldt-Nielsen, 2016).

Gender schema theory (Bem, 1981) explains how individuals become gendered within culture, with certain sex-linked characteristics fostered and promoted. This theory outlines schemata, or networks of information, that allow this indoctrination to occur, where gender identity is shaped and formed (Bem, 1981). Children then learn from schemata what behaviors, attitudes, and clothing are appropriately masculine or feminine through accumulated experiences. When they view advertisements where women are objectified and placed as decorations to the product, children internalize the message that women are to be looked at (Zurbriggen, 2007). Video games, as a medium, contribute to the gender schema of children, and their repeated messages about feminine identity are included in their portrayal of women (Beasley & Collins Standley, 2002).

These effects are vital to feminist readings of video games as well as all mass media. Adolescent girls read romance novels in a realist manner (Willinsky, 1993), meaning that adolescents take gender roles at face value. The romance literature is filled with archetypes and tropes of what men and women do, exposing teenagers to harmful cultural norms. Children and teenagers are susceptible to harmful gender generalizations (Miller, Trautner, & Rubie, 2006), which are portrayed in video games marketed to younger audiences.

In particular, gender schema theory and the effects of media are providing links that outline a gender alignment. Women, who are presented with images of the female "ideal figure" in media, report higher levels of body dissatisfaction and depression than women who were not

presented with these images (Miller, 2007). Males, who view images of the male “ideal figure,” report higher levels of negative body image and are more likely to use steroids than males in the control group (Miller, 2007). The effects upon each gender may vary, but the research suggests that men react to images of men, and women to images of women. This gender alignment is worth investigating in video games.

Identification

While a textual analysis of the narrative of video games is important to critical theory, ludologists who study video games are torn about the limits of story and its impacts on players. The narrative content of each installment in the *LoZ* series fails to explain why each game hooks the player for a 30 to 50-hour experience, with additional replay value (Banks, 1998). The fiction within video games does not work the same as other forms of media—such as movies, books, etc.—and the application of literary theories to video games only captures a portion of the effects this interactive medium has on its users (Egenfeldt-Nielsen, 2016). The fiction of video games is different because it leads to greater levels of identification, which fulfills the uses and gratifications of players in four gaming motivations—challenge, interest, social interaction, and escapism (Van Reijmersdal et al., 2013). Van Reijmersdal and colleagues found a positive relation between identification and these four motivations among male gamers.

The activity of playing video games cannot simply be approached through a textual analysis of the content, because gaming is an activity and not just consumption of content (Banks, 1998). The damaging effect of video games is the role of identification in the user's experience. Identification is the process in which the audience member, or player, imagines themselves as the character they interact with, replacing their identity with the identity and role of the character within the text (Cohen, 2001). Identification with characters from a video game

is different than other media because games are interactive (Van Reijmersdal et al., 2013). The gender stereotypes in video games affect the behavior of players by becoming internalized and merging with the concept of identity (Eagly & Wood, 1999).

Damsel in Distress Trope

A common element of the story in video games is the hero rescuing a loved one or love interest from the evil hands of the antagonist (Sarkeesian, 2013a, 2013b, 2013c). This theme is common in fairy tales and legends, but appears in disturbing ways in video games, where the villain and hero are both defined by their aggression and tendency toward violence—in addition to prominent musculature—while the damsel is consistently portrayed as helpless and in revealing clothing (Dickerman & Kerl-McClain, 2008).

The *LoZ* games are guilty of objectification. Most of the newer *LoZ* games are either named after the item that needs to be obtained or the damsel that needs saving (Johnson, D., 2013). Each game centers on either the McGuffin or the victimized princess. This focus equates the fate of Zelda with the pursuit of magical items. She can be a stand-in for the world-saving but underdeveloped object that the hero must acquire and use.

In two partner games, *The Legend of Zelda: Oracle of Ages* and *The Legend of Zelda: Oracle of Seasons*, two powerful women are kidnapped by the villains at the start of the game, giving Link a clear objective. These two women, Nayru and Din, are named after two of the divine goddesses who created the universe, and are oracles to these deities. While never confirmed in the game, the fact that these two women are named after the goddesses of Hyrule leads players to think they are either their mortal incarnations, or the goddesses themselves. And despite these characters wielding immense power (one can control the seasons and weather, the other controls the flow of time), they are unable to evade capture and need Link to save them.

These helpless characters are eventually rescued by Link, only to be replaced by Princess Zelda as the damsel in distress. Again, the *LoZ* series relies on this trope to incite action and inspire the player to finish the game, while simultaneously diminishing the power and abilities of these female characters. Nayru, Din, and Zelda, as characters, each have connections to deity, and yet they need the heroic Link to save them from the clutches of evil. As evidenced in these *LoZ* games, women are incapable of saving themselves and only men can perform acts of heroism.

Another example of the distress these damsels find themselves in comes from *Ocarina of Time*, where the character Sheik evades capture for seven years. While Link has disappeared, Princess Zelda disguises herself as the androgynous Sheik while Ganondorf has taken over Hyrule. In disguise as Sheik, Zelda continues to fight the oppressive regime and awaits the return of the hero of time, Link. But as soon as she sheds her disguise to Link and reveals herself to be Princess Zelda, she is magically captured by Ganondorf.

In *The Legend of Zelda: The Wind Waker*, the character Tetra is a female pirate, empowered and developed. She is more than capable of slaying monsters and defending herself. But when it is revealed to her that she actually is Princess Zelda, her character completely transforms into a weak and defenseless damsel. By putting on her pink dress of helplessness, and becoming a princess instead of a pirate, Tetra/Zelda loses all of her empowerment and becomes another captured object (Johnson, D., 2013). After learning her true identity, this character completely inverts into the tropes and stereotypes she originally upset. The stark difference between Tetra and her alternate identity of Princess Zelda reveal the harmful archetype of fairy tale princesses.

The *LoZ* games rely on the capturing of Princess Zelda and her distress to drive the story along. While often not the inciting action, in every game Zelda is either kidnapped (sometimes more than once), turned to stone, placed in a coma, separated from her body and reduced to a ghost, or even rescued by characters other than Link. The abuse of this trope is harmful to Princess Zelda's reputation (Johnson, D., 2013). Consistently, in the fifteen *LoZ* games published by Nintendo, all of them include Princess Zelda as a damsel in distress. Only four *LoZ* games outside the canon break this trend, including *Hyrule Warriors*. They were developed and published by another company due to a loophole in intellectual property contracts in the 1990s. It is interesting that these non-canon games—with all their weaknesses and horrible gameplay—are the only ones to showcase Princess Zelda as the protagonist, and to remove the damsel in distress plot device (Hunt, 2008; Johnson, D., 2013).

In terms of gender roles, males are empowered while women are frequently denied the power to save themselves. Women are encouraged to be altruistic, to be compassionate, and to avoid standing up for themselves; this meekness accepts oppression because assertiveness is not a feminine trait (Vedantam, 2007). The damsel in distress stereotype branches from the universal desire of men and boys to save the world. Freud published a short piece about what he called The Family Romance, a phenomenon where a child or adolescent fantasizes about being of noble origin and designated as the hero to save the world (Freud, 1959). The Family Romance is the plot of many fantasy stories, including *LoZ*. In each installment, the protagonist is a nobody who discovers that he alone has the power to save the world. Players of the *LoZ* games return with each iteration because they enjoy this narrative. But this phenomenon can lead to lazy writing, with game designers using a damsel in distress as the call to adventure from Joseph Campbell's monomyth (Campbell, 2008). Countless video games use this trope to spark the hero's call to

action (Sarkeesian, 2013a). The over-usage of this plot device in the *LoZ* series is concerning for critical theory. Writers and designers would benefit from greater creativity to explore new narratives, new characters, and new storylines removed from tropes.

Gender Roles

Jenkins and Cassell (2008) argue that game designers focus so much on the binary of male and female that they lose track of what makes games enjoyable. To appeal to both feminine and masculine playstyles, gameplay can involve solving complex puzzles, navigating tricky situations, requiring decision making, the successful use of tools, and creative thinking (p. 43). These elements are heavily used within *LoZ*.

Women may have interests, strengths, and abilities different than men, which may lead women to prefer different types of success (Smith, 2010). Research suggests that girls want games where they can try out different identities, and that games should become less gendered and instead allow players to define the role or importance of gender themselves (Denner & Campe, 2008). The most popular gender of player-selected avatars in the popular online game *Second Life* is female; men and women enjoy playing as female characters, sometimes more so than male (Fantone, 2009).

In his research on children's literature, Kohl (2007) argued that there should be more nuances to the story than the traditional Freudian family romance. Kohl (2007) argued that through critical theory, children's literature could benefit from a focus not on the individual hero, but on the community. Instead of focusing on Link's accomplishments, the story should acknowledge a social group and its collective action and successes. Kohl also suggested that the antagonist should be three-dimensional. Rather than the routine villain that embodies everything evil, children's literature and media should explore realistic nemeses, or at least have antagonists

who are not evil in all situations. And lastly, these stories should not force a happy ending or resolution to the problem. Maybe instead of conquering the bad guy and leaving the kingdom in absolute peace, there should be a reckoning for all the evil that happened (Kohl, 2007). Link could help fix all the problems that were caused by the war for Hyrule, instead of just slaying monsters and feeling accomplished. This critical analysis of children's literature explores the weaknesses within the narrative of *LoZ*.

Another trope of children's literature is that females provide emotional support and males obtain a goal or overcome an obstacle (Barnett, 1986). Link as a male hero is goal-driven, while Zelda and female characters are the supporting cast; they supplement the type A personality of manly heroes. The damsel trope is damaging because it reduces the female character to the central object of competition: Link and Ganondorf play a game of soccer with Zelda as the ball (Sarkeesian, 2013a). Not even a character anymore, the damsel in distress has been objectified into the central cause of conflict. She is merely an article that the hero retrieves with no motivation beyond her sex.

Many argue the feminist strengths of the *LoZ* series. Females as a whole are the bringers of virtue, goodness, and wisdom. All deities are female, the major antagonist is male, and men frustrate the plot. As David Johnson (2013) points out, the games include some very strong-willed female characters who have "awesome characterization" (Ruto, Nabooru, Romani, Medli, Asbei, Telma, Karane, etc.). These characters are interesting and liked; however, they do not contribute to the storyline. Most of these characters are only there to point Link in the right direction and not do anything of substance. Confined to only in-game dialogue, or maybe even a cut scene, these female characters fail to contribute to the narrative. Johnson expressed that Link frequently saves these damseled characters. In addition, Zelda is always given the title of

princess. She is never elevated to the role of a queen or a full ruler of the kingdom, and this oppressive detail undermines her empowerment as a character (Johnson, D., 2013). Until Zelda becomes a queen she is still a victim of benevolent sexism. The story sidelines Princess Zelda and other female characters, never allowing their active participation. Their sex defines their characterization and character development through the feminine trait of submission.

However, masculine traits include independence, individualism, competition, reason, and aggression (Smith, 2010), all hallmarks of the *LoZ* series (Laurel, 2008). The protagonist Link embodies these traits through the action RPG (role-playing game) gameplay and narrative. He is the lone Hero of Time, fights and slays monsters, uses reasoning and logic to solve puzzles, and completes quests to showcase his heroism and bravery.

The video game industry is saturated with sexist content and objectification, with hypersexualization growing among female characters who serve supporting roles instead of being the lead protagonist (Breuer, 2015; Hartmann & Klimmt, 2006; Lynch, 2016; Williams, 2006). This leaves players of both genders to equate female characters as less than their male counterparts. The content of video games is not the only environment for sexist behaviors and attitudes, however.

Consalvo (2012) researched what she labeled “toxic” gamer culture and described the hate speech shared within it. This research examined the Penny Arcade Dickwolves controversy, where an online comic made light of rape victims in order to make a punchline (Consalvo, 2012). Consalvo (2012) determined that there is a need to document sexist events and practices within gamer culture and to showcase the widespread nature of such issues.

Cultivation theory explains the cumulative effects of media upon its audience, specifically heavy viewers. A study on the cultivation effects of sexism in video games (Breuer,

2015) did not find a connection between sexist games and the sexist opinions of its players; the weak effects found in this study do not deviate from the average of other media. Breuer (2015) argues that it is likely that sexist attitudes about gender roles have a greater correlation to other factors, such as personal experience and family and peer influences.

Breuer (2015) acknowledged that, though the study failed to find evidence to support the cultivation of sexist beliefs through video game exposure, more research still needs to be performed. Nonetheless, this study is limited because it fails to examine the effects of sexist content of mainstream videogames on gamer culture (Breuer, 2015). Due to the complex nature of video games and the experience of the player, the focus of new research should be on particular subgenres and individual games. In addition, Breuer admits that the multiple dimensions of sexism pertaining to gender roles, body image, and sexual harassment are assessed on tiers of effects levels. Due to the history of media effects, it is worth researching the effects that some games have on some gamers (Breuer, 2015), such as the effects of Princess Zelda's repeated damseling.

Female Dependency

A major limit to critical theory is that within the argument of feminism there can occur both sides of the argument. Most female characters can be seen as sexist stereotypes and also as role models. Early models of Lara Croft from the *Tomb Raider* series were highly sexualized, with unrealistic proportions and skin-tight, revealing outfits, which set a precedent for similar action heroines (Downs & Smith, 2010; Dickerman & Kerl-McClain, 2008; Kennedy, 2002; Summers & Miller, 2014). Fantone (2009) argues that over two decades of female characters have been sexualized and given aggressive (masculine) traits; the unexpected success of Lara Croft led developers to blend the action hero and the Barbie doll. This hybrid character mixed

stereotypes into a new environment for young men and women to explore gender roles (Fantone, 2009; Kennedy, 2002). However, this combination of masculine aggression and feminine sexuality is built upon the assumption that sexuality equals empowerment, an assumption criticized by feminist commentators (Kennedy, 2002; MacCalhum-Stewart, 2008; Salter & Blodgett, 2012; Sarkeesian, 2016). Mikula (2003) describes the attributes valued by society, found in Lara Croft: she has wealth, comes from the upper class, has a perfect appearance, is physically fit, has a strong will, is highly intelligent, and is fiercely independent. Even though Lara Croft embodies the hopes of historical feminism, is her influence marred by her large breasts (p. 80)?

In a feminist reading of *Tomb Raider*, it is easy to point out the flaws in Lara Croft and her character, while ignoring the good. As MacCalhum-Stewart (2008) stated, these critics fail to acknowledge the fun of playing as Lara, and that her dry wisecracks and her prowess as a gymnast show that she was more than just eye candy. Lara Croft's character sparks debates about the merits and demerits of a butt-kicking, buxom video game star who is both agent and object (Dill & Thill, 2007). It is argued that when playing as Lara Croft, a male player is transgendered and fuses their identity and game character in a blend of masculinity and femininity (Mikula, 2003). There is a gap in the research that investigates the effects of aggressive females, who wield the masculine violence instead of female submission (Dill & Thill, 2007).

The binary of identification versus objectification, so well developed in film theory, fails to convey the nuance of gameplay in *Tomb Raider* (Mikula, 2003). The feminist reception of Lara Croft has been ambivalent due to the argument of an either/or of Croft's character as feminist icon or sexist fantasy (Kennedy, 2002). This argument is void, as the character of Lara Croft falls into both categories as a cyberbimbo and a positive role model.

While *Super Princess Peach* did innovate in its narrative and its gameplay mechanics, it was met with some criticism. Some critics considered the feminine nature of Peach's powers and abilities too stereotypical and sexist (Alexandra & Sébastien, 2012; Sarkeesian, 2013c). A female character who is a torrent of emotion and unable to control her anger, grief, or happiness is a cliché (Alexandra & Sébastien, 2012; Sarkeesian, 2013d). This break from tradition in narrative and gameplay inspired some, and upset others, leaving the player to interpret for themselves the sexism in *Super Princess Peach*. As a character, Princess Peach continues her fairy tale look with blonde hair, blue eyes, pink dress, and golden crown that are reminiscent of Walt Disney princesses (Alexandra & Sébastien, 2012). However, she inverts the damsel in distress cliché, despite visually aligning with other kidnapped princesses.



Figure 1

North American box art versus Japanese box art. Inset images of emotions are removed, but Peach is still in a state of distress.

Another critique of feminist commentators is the box art for the game. The packaging features the image of Princess Peach in distress; with her mouth agape and her eyes widened in

fear, she is the same princess from her introduction in 1985 (Carless, 2006). Also, the box art between North America and Japan has subtle changes. As Carless (2006) pointed out, critical backlash to the emotion-based powers of Princess Peach prompted the marketing in North America to downplay the emotional component of *Super Princess Peach* (Carless, 2006), and the advertising replaced the emotions with elemental powers (Frasca, 2007).

The originality of the game's narrative can be seen at odds with the messaging within and without the game. Alexandra and Sébastien (2012) acknowledge the sexism of the game while supporting even more its potential to showcase Peach's empowerment. While critics call Princess Peach a "mood swinger" since her powers are based on emotions, there is evidence that she is an agent in her abilities and not merely a pawn (p. 178). Alexandra & Sébastien (2012) argue that Peach is not unstable because the player actively decides which emotion or power to activate, unlike the other characters within the game who are only able to display a single "vibe." (Alexandra & Sébastien, 2012). She alone uses emotional mastery to gain power.

The complexity of the issue comes from the hybrid of two opposing interpretations of the game text. On one hand, Princess Peach has all the visual indicators of being a helpless damsel in distress from a Western fairy tale, while at the same time she has the combined powers of other masculine super heroes (Alexandra & Sébastien, 2012).

Another video game protagonist with conflicting readings is Samus Aran from the *Metroid* series, who is the classic example of empowered female protagonists in video games. However, she too has ties to sexism; as a reward for completing each game Samus is shown in provocative clothing during the ending credits. The faster the completion, the better the ending, with a more revealing outfit being shown, such as form-fitting Spandex or a bikini (Roberts, 2012).

The great success of the original *Metroid* game came from this final reveal (Brar, 2012). The 1986 game shocked players who did not expect that the bounty hunter they grew to love over the course of the game was a girl, and became aware of that fact after Samus was showcased in a bikini (Brar, 2012). However, this ending also set a precedent for the sexualization of Samus as a character. The majority of complaints in online forums related to *Metroid Prime* dealt with fans complaining about the absence of an end credits objectification scene (Roberts, 2012).

There is little room for argument that the character of Samus Aran from the *Metroid* games is a tough character, and a feminist icon worthy of praise. However, her empowered nature is often bogged down by the evidence of sexualization and objectification. "Female strength has been redefined as male pleasure," (Shugart, 2003). Her frequent portrayals in end credit scenes, boasting her curvaceous figure and her scant bikini, argue that she is an object of the male gamer's gaze (Brar, 2012).

The literature on female empowerment in video games is complicated. Characters such as Lara Croft, Princess Peach, and Samus Aran fail to answer the question of "feminist icon or sexist fantasy?" (Mikula, 2003). The research on Lara Croft by feminist scholars reveals that she is indeed a sex object and indeed a positive role model (Mikula, 2003), due to the unique nature of video games to blend identification and objectification. Playing as Lara Croft and other female leads allows for both fantasy and identification to erode gender roles; while audiences may objectify female characters at first, as the game unfolds players identify with them (Kennedy, 2002).

The argument of identification versus objectification changes when applied to female characters within the interactive medium of video games. Players of video games experience

them through gameplay mechanics and responsive scenarios in involvement, unlike other media (Kennedy, 2002). Players of games such as *Metroid* and *Tomb Raider* are (predominately) male players interacting with the game space in a female body; this interface and media allows for the blending of self and other, subject and object, as the player breaks free of fixed gender boundaries (Kennedy, 2002). Players are transgendered, through the fusion of game character and player, engaging with the media as subject and object (Mikula, 2003). Lara Croft is a combination of both a highly sexualized object through female identifiers, and an aggressive subject through her masculine behaviors; this problematic combination is compounded with the implication of players adopting her as a virtual representation of self (MacCalhum-Stewart, 2008).

The feminist reception of Lara Croft as a game character has been divided, with an either/or answer of her heroic nature or her subjugated role; however, it is clear that the video games are becoming an increasingly representational and experiential medium, and researchers need to analyze the similarities and the differences to other forms of leisure consumption (Kennedy, 2002). As these heroines show, there is a blurring boundary between the identification and the objectification of video game characters, more so than with any other visual media.

Objectification

Objectification theory (Fredrickson & Roberts, 1997) best describes the process by which women and girls internalize the sexualizing messages of a culture. According to this theory, girls internalize these messages, which leads to *self-objectification*, the view that their worth is dependent upon their sexual desirability (Zurbriggen, 2007). An example is Becker's (2004) study on the effects of television on body image in the nation of Fiji. Before the introduction of Western media and television, Fijian culture emphasized a robust body shape; three years after

the introduction of television, eating disorders increased and attitudes about body type shifted (Becker, 2004). This objectification, beginning in adolescence, may lead to sexual problems in adulthood (Zurbriggen, 2007).

Other mental health disorders are also prevalent in adolescent girls who self-objectify. In early adolescence, girls who had a more objectified relationship with their bodies were more likely to experience depression, body shame, disordered eating, and lower self-esteem (Harrison & Fredrickson, 2003; Tolman et al., 2006). The near-constant monitoring of appearance that accompanies self-objectification leads to greater feelings of shame, as one's own body cannot meet the narrow ideal of sexual attractiveness (Frale, Johnson, & Kellman, 1997).

Even viewing a single episode of an objectifying television program, such as *Charlie's Angels*, may lead men to rate women as less physically attractive (Kenrick & Gutierrez, 1980). Undergraduate men who regularly view pornography spontaneously generated more sexual terms to describe the construct of "women" than those who did not, suggesting that viewing pornography leads to sexualizing women (Frale, Johnson, & Kellman, 1997). Exposure to sexist magazine ads featuring women as sexual objects produced a stronger acceptance of sex role stereotyping and of rape myths among undergraduate men (MacKay & Covell, 1997). In another study of undergraduate males, those exposed to objectifying commercials later asked more sexist questions of a female confederate posing as a job applicant, recalled more about her appearance and less about her personal background, rated her as friendlier and more suitable to hire, but less competent than the controls (Rudman & Borgida, 1995).

Women are also affected by stereotypes and sexualized media. When college-aged women were exposed to highly feminine-stereotyped television commercials that emphasized a woman's sexual attractiveness and physical beauty, the respondents indicated less interest in

vocations that emphasize quantitative reasoning—such as math and science—and also had lower leadership aspirations (Davies et al., 2002; Davies, Spencer, & Steele, 2005). Objectification and sexualized media may prime women for lower achievement.

Self-Efficacy

Self-efficacy is an individual's feeling that they are capable of performing a behavior or task. As part of social cognitive theory, it was examined by Bandura (1989, 1997, 2010). Self-efficacy is tied to behaviors (Bandura, 1997), and as such is not easily measured by universal measures, but should be assessed within the context of the task (Bandura, 2006). It has the potential to directly and indirectly impact performance (Bandura, 1986, 1997, 2004; Glasgow, 2012) and in many tasks, individuals with higher levels of self-efficacy are more likely to perform better than those with lower levels (Bandura, 1986, 1997; Themanson et al., 2011).

As it relates to video games, self-efficacy can explain much of the literature on video games and aggression. Przybylski (2010) found that frustration was the root of aggression for many video game players within experimental design situations. Przybylski theorized that reasons for this frustration could be an undermining of the participants' sense of competence (p. 164); in the case of these studies on video game aggression, participants are frequently forced to play a game they do not know for an abbreviated amount of time, which could lead to frustration.

Klimmt and Hartmann (2006) argue that video games should be framed within the motivations of self-efficacy. Video games are task-based, with objectives that are determined by the player early on (p. 135), and as such rely on Bandura's definition of self-efficacy. Klimmt and Hartmann believe that the motivations of self-efficacy, or the belief that players can complete a task or behavior, are at the core of many players' experiences with video games. The

consequences of self-efficacy on players of video games could include levels of enjoyment and also the opinions on the content of the game itself.

Video games are used as tools to measure and increase self-efficacy within research (Meluso et al., 2012; Thomas, Cahill, & Santilli, 1997). When participants play a video game version of a task, they feel an increase in their ability to perform that same task later, or an increase in self-efficacy. Terlecki and her colleagues (2011) found a gender divide between male and female gamers in terms of self-efficacy. Men felt more confident in their ability to play video games, and they were also found to have a greater history with games, and play more video games than women. However, Terlecki et al. (2011) argued that the amount of female gamers is growing, indicating that more and more women are expressing higher levels of self-efficacy with video games.

Gamer Status

A recent study by Pew Research investigated video games and perceptions of them. Part of the study included demographics that showed that 10% of American adults play video games and identify as a “gamer,” while 38% play video games but don't identify (Duggan, 2015). This means that a majority of adults (51%) have never played a video game. Within the genders, males are twice as likely to identify as a gamer than females despite that similar percentages of men and women have ever played a video game (Duggan, 2015). Pew Research also found that adults who have played video games have differing opinions on the values of video games than those who have not played—such as games promote teamwork and communication, develop good problem-solving skills, or are a waste of time.

Terlecki and her colleagues (2011) also investigated the sex differences in video game habits and consumption among undergraduate students. While 95% of men and 85% of women

in their sample reported playing video games in the past, men were more likely than women to express an interest in playing games in the future, and women were significantly less likely to be currently playing video games (Turlecki et al., 2011). Nearly half of men (49%) had been playing video games for 10 or more years compared to 14% of women. These numbers suggest that there is a greater amount of video game consumption among young adults than older adults, with undergraduate men having more experience with video games than women.

However, this demographic data does not examine what it means to identify as a “gamer.” Dawson et al. (2007) found that men and boys expected to be players for “life,” whereas women and girls were less sure. McDermott, Bavelier, and Green (2014) found significant differences in the performance of action video game players (AVGPs) and non-players (NVGPs). This division between AVGPs and NVGPs was defined by the amount of games played in a week. Bailey, West, and Anderson (2011) also tracked the differences between high and low gamers, making the division based upon a self-reported measure of the amount of video games played in a week. They found that chronic exposure to video games—that comes to heavy users of video games—is associated with picture processing, suggesting that heavy users cultivate a desensitization to violent images (Bailey, West, & Anderson, 2011).

These are but a small selection on the literature about the effects of video games. In experimental design studies, the independent variable is often gamer status, as it can suggest that there is a correlation between the amount of video games played in the past or present with the current variables being researched. This reliance upon scales for high and low gamers is similar to Gerbner's studies on heavy and light viewers of television, and is the foundation of media effects research. However, there is a difference between the amount of video games played and if a respondent identifies as a “gamer,” as evidenced by the Pew Research study (Duggan, 2015). A

greater amount of participants who have played video games do not self-identify as a gamer as opposed to those who have played and do identify. This suggests that both measures are valid in determining the difference between those who play video games and those who do not.

Research Questions

This literature set the stage for the current study to explore the effects of the damsel in distress trope on players of video games. Textual analysis of video games only exposes the red flags in sexist stereotypes, but it does not answer the question of “so what?” Does this narrative trope of rescuing a damsel in distress have an effect on the players’ views of objectification? Does it affect the players’ views on female dependency? And would changing the narrative, such as Princess Zelda saving Link, change the players’ enjoyment of the game? Below are the research questions this study seeks to answer:

RQ1: Do the genders of the hero and the victim (such as the damsel in distress trope) in video games affect agreement to statements on gender roles?

RQ2: Do the genders of the hero and the victim (such as the damsel in distress trope) in video games affect agreement to statements on female dependency?

RQ3: Do the genders of the hero and the victim (such as the damsel in distress trope) in video games affect agreement to statements on objectification?

RQ4: Does self-efficacy mediate for player agreement to statements on gender roles (RQ4a), female dependency (RQ4b), or objectification (RQ4c)?

RQ5: Does gamer status moderate for player agreement to statements on gender roles (RQ5a), female dependency (RQ5b), or objectification (RQ5c)?

CHAPTER THREE

METHODOLOGY

Outline

The third game in the *LoZ* series—*A Link to the Past*—opens with Princess Zelda speaking to Link in a dream (Figure 6, Appendix A). In this vision, she outlines her peril and enlists Link to save her so that the kingdom will not fall into the hands of the nefarious villain. Then, the opening scene features Link storming a castle to rescue Princess Zelda from the dungeon and escaping from the clutches of the wicked sorcerer before his minions catch them (Figures 7-12, Appendix A). Of all the *LoZ* games, this one—*A Link to the Past*—is ideal for the experiment because it has the quickest start into rescuing the princess, as well as the shortest quest to save her. There is also a community who modifies this game and provides help and tools to manipulate the game according to this research design.

Fans and critics have noticed Nintendo's reliance on the damsel in distress trope and have discussed the need for a change in gender roles in the future of the *LoZ* series (Johnson, D., 2013; Nichols, 2016; Sarkeesian, 2013a). This research tested how a change in the story and gameplay affected players' perceptions of gender roles and how this can improve *LoZ* games of the future.

There are some fans who changed specific *LoZ* games for feminist reasons (Burks, 2016; McFerran, 2013; Narcisse, 2012), but Warsinske took it upon herself to make Zelda the hero of her own games, twice (Warsinske, 2014). She took the classic *LoZ* and swapped the sprites so that Princess Zelda was the hero instead of Link (McFerran, 2013), and, due to the positive

reception, she did it again, this time with *A Link to the Past* (Warsinske, 2014). Her patch—or minor update to the actual game—is the foundation for this methodology, for not only did she change the character avatar, but she also made other modifications to the game—such as dialogue and the opening sequence—to make this character swap fit into the story of the game (Warsinske, 2014).

Along with Warsinske's (2014) modification to *A Link to the Past*, another patch developed by Beneficii (2013) was used as a framework for the female hero sprite modification of this experiment. The construction of this experiment also utilized the software tool Hyrule Magic to make minor edits to the game. These edits included creating four new characters—a male and female hero, as well as a male and female damsel. These new characters are key, because using the characters of Zelda and Link would add potential bias to these characters' history and development. Instead, four new characters were adapted from Beneficii's (2013) sprite patch, as well as the original Zelda and Link sprites from *A Link to the Past* (Figures 13-16, Appendix A).

Design

A sample of 120 participants were randomly assigned to a 2 x 2 factorial experimental design (see Table 1), with manipulation of the independent variable—the gender of the hero and the gender of the victim—into the binary of male and female. Participants completed a recruiting survey, played a modified game, and were given a post-test survey. Upon completing the task of playing the game, or upon exiting the study, participants were debriefed.

Participants

Each of the four games was tested with 30 participants, for a total sample size of 120. Participants included anyone on the gamer spectrum: players who would and would not label

themselves as “gamers,” and who play various amounts of video games on a weekly basis. There were some who are familiar with *LoZ* and those who are not. Those who were familiar with *LoZ* had differing results than participants who have no experience. Each modified game—which represents a different cell in the experimental design—included 15 males and 15 females, for a balance across the manipulations. The variance between the sex and the gamer status of the participants was randomized, to ensure that sex was not a lurking variable. Participants were recruited from undergraduate communications classes at Brigham Young University and each participant was entered into a drawing to receive one of five \$50 Amazon gift cards as compensation.

This experiment included two parts, starting with a recruitment survey that was taken by 476 students. All of these students then had equal opportunities to participate in the experiment session, but only 128 chose to schedule a time to complete the experiment. Of those students who participated, 1 outlier was removed as his score deviated too far from the mean (reported playing 80 hours of games a week, compared to the mean of 7.725), 5 wished to withdraw after the debriefing, and 2 more were randomly selected from the male sample for removal in order to have a standardized distribution across the four cells, as greater interest from males initially resulted in a larger male than female sample. The respondents were recruited from undergraduate communications classes, as well as undergraduate computer science courses via a weekly newsletter sent out by the computer science department.

Procedure

Participants self-reported their self-efficacy in completing a video game and their experience with video games, then participated in an experiment and took a survey measuring

their agreement to the items. This procedure lasted around one hour in length. Below is a full explanation of each step of the procedure in a linear order.

Recruitment tool. After reviewing and signing the IRB-approved consent form, a pre-test survey was given to each participant with basic questions about demographics and his or her history with popular games (including the *LoZ* game manipulated for the design). This survey identified gamer status, self-efficacy, and history with *LoZ*. It was also used as a recruitment method to gather identifiers for scheduling the procedure. This recruiting took place at least 24 hours, or at most three weeks, prior to the experiment, and happened online, on the participants' time.

Experimental manipulation. Each participant ($N = 120$) was randomly assigned to play one of four modified versions of *The Legend of Zelda: A Link to the Past*. These games showcased the two variables being explored: the sex of the hero and the sex of the victim. These games were modified through sprite swapping to change the avatar of both the hero and the victim, and also included minor edits to the in-game dialogue to align with the changes in gender. Minor edits to the game were also used to simplify the process of rescuing the victim and shorten the runtime of the experiment. There was also additional dialogue that reminded participants to turn off the game when they had completed the task.

Participants were instructed to complete the first scene of the game and rescue the victim in distress, and following this achievement to finish their play session. Participants took between 8 and 30 minutes on the experiment ($M = 21.22$, $SD = 1.13$), with the researcher ending the experiment at the 30-minute mark.

Post-test. Breuer and colleagues (2015) used Brogan and Kutner's (1976) methodology to determine if video games led to sexist views within gamers; this methodology was adapted

and revised for the questions in the post-test survey about gender roles. In addition, the objectification survey from Fredrickson and colleagues (1998) was adapted and extended to create a six-point scale to measure the variables of objectification and female dependency. Thus the post-test instrument was a hybrid, adaptation, and extension of Fredrickson and colleagues (1998) and Brogan and Kutner's (1976) measures.

After completing the experiment, participants then took the post-test survey (see Appendix A), which included 30 statements such as "In women, physical coordination is less important than firm or sculpted muscles," "Women need men to provide for and protect them," and "The idea of young girls participating in High School football is ridiculous." Participants were asked to rate their agreement to these statements on a six-point Likert scale, ranging from "Strongly Agree" to "Strongly Disagree."

Debriefing. Following the test, completed or abandoned, participants were debriefed by the researcher to explain the procedure and answer any questions they had. This process ensured that respondents knew afterwards the research questions of the experiment, and that they were comfortable with the experience.

Measures

Gender roles. Sex-role scales in sociology focus on marriage and family roles (Brogan & Kutner, 1976, p. 32); however, determining appropriate behaviors and attitudes for each gender is the definition of perceived gender roles. These attributes are primarily defined as being masculine or feminine, and Brogan and Kutner (1976) define them as being "normative conceptions of appropriate behavior for males and females," (p. 33).

This variable was important to assess, because gender roles are central to the gender schemata of participants. Determining what is appropriate for masculine characters within a

video game could influence masculine attitudes outside of the game. Accepting feminine characteristics of video game characters could also impact opinions of what is appropriate for women. It was assessed on a six-point Likert-type scale, ranging from “strongly disagree” to “strongly agree;” higher agreement with the items in the scale indicated stronger sexist attitudes. Some sample questions from this scale are: “The idea of young girls participating in High School football is ridiculous,” “It is more important for a woman to worry about her figure and dress than it is for a man,” and “A woman should refrain from being too competitive with men and keep her peace rather than show a man he is wrong.” Cronbach’s alpha is .679.

Female Dependency. Media promote ideologies that are sexist and disempower women and girls by suggesting a narrow range of appropriate activities, while at the same time empowering men and boys (Duncan & Brummett, 1993, p. 58). Duncan and Brummett (1993) proposed that the idea of power is a relationship between those who are empowered and those who are dependent. This study defines *female dependency* as the rejection of opinions that women are independent, capable, and possess the same abilities as men. Instead of females being empowered, they are dependent upon men.

Female dependency was assessed on the same six-point Likert-type scale as gender roles. It included questions such as “Women lack the skills and abilities to be great leaders,” “Women need men to provide for and protect them,” and “Men are better than women at high-risk jobs such as a surgeon or investment broker.” These questions were modeled after some items from the Brogan and Kutner (1976) scale, but they are adapted to modern situations. A higher agreement with these items indicated a lower acceptance of female empowerment, or a sexist view of female dependency. Cronbach’s alpha is .742.

Objectification. Fredrickson and Roberts (1997) defined objectification theory as the framework upon which gender oppression is analyzed through female bodies. Fredrickson and Roberts (1997) described objectification to be a uniquely female problem, which has mental health risks through the many forms of sexual objectification, and organizes the empirical data regarding the experiences of women. “When objectified, individuals are treated as bodies and, in particular, as bodies that exist for the use and pleasure of others,” (Fredrickson et al., 1998, p. 269).

This study assesses the effects of objectification, or how women are judged on their appearance alone. This may be through self-objectification, as well as the objectification of others, and was also measured on the same six-point Likert-like scale as gender roles and female dependency. Participants were asked to rate how they agree with statements such as “In women, strength is less important than weight,” and “In women, health is less important than sex appeal,” which were adapted from the methods of Fredrickson and colleagues (1998). Higher agreement with the items indicated a stronger acceptance of objectification. Cronbach’s alpha is .557.

Self-efficacy. Self-efficacy is a behavior-specific construct (Bandura, 1997), as it measures the participant’s sense of their ability to perform a task. Self-efficacy, thus, is related directly to the task at hand, and it was worded accordingly. This variable was measured in two items on the recruitment survey and one on the post-test instrument, measuring four in total. These questions evaluated the level of agreement participants had to statements such as “I feel comfortable playing video games” and “I feel that I am UNSKILLED when it comes to playing video games.” These statements were then answered on the same six-point Likert scale, which ranged from “Strongly disagree” to “Strongly agree.” Cronbach’s alpha is .596.

Gamer status. Gamer status is a designation to divide heavy and light users of video games based upon their self-reported history and habits of video game consumption. Most studies, such as McDermott, Bavelier, and Green (2014) or Bailey, West, and Anderson (2011), determined gamer status through the amount of hours played in an average week. However, in this study the variable was measured by three questions in the recruitment survey. These items were combined to determine not only the current amount of video games consumed (“How many hours of video games, on average, do you play in a week?”), but the types of games played (“Which of the following games have you played at least once?”), and if the participant would self-identify as a gamer (“I consider myself to be a ‘gamer’”). The hours of video games consumed was a text entry, and was then converted into Z scores to capture the deviation from the mean. To capture the types of games played, a list of ten games across genres was shown, and the participant would select all that apply. Participants also rated their agreement to label of being a “gamer” on a six-point Likert scale that was also used in previous measures. Cronbach’s alpha is .846.

Analysis

Statistical analyses were performed using IBM SPSS software version 24. The analytical approach utilized was one-way ANOVA—to compare the variables of hero and victim gender against the variables of objectification, female dependency, and gender roles. The data was then sorted based on the mediators—self-efficacy and gamer status—a regression analysis was run through the SPSS macro PROCESS. And finally, gender alignment was also tested to see if male participants had different responses with male heroes, or female participants had different responses with female heroes. Data was compared between subjects.

Table 1
Four Variants of A Link to the Past

Variables	Male Hero	Female Hero
Male Victim	Game 1: Male Hero, Male Victim (MHMV)	Game 3: Female Hero, Male Victim (FHMV)
Female Victim	Game 2: Male Hero, Female Victim (MHFV)	Game 4: Female Hero, Female Victim (FHFV)

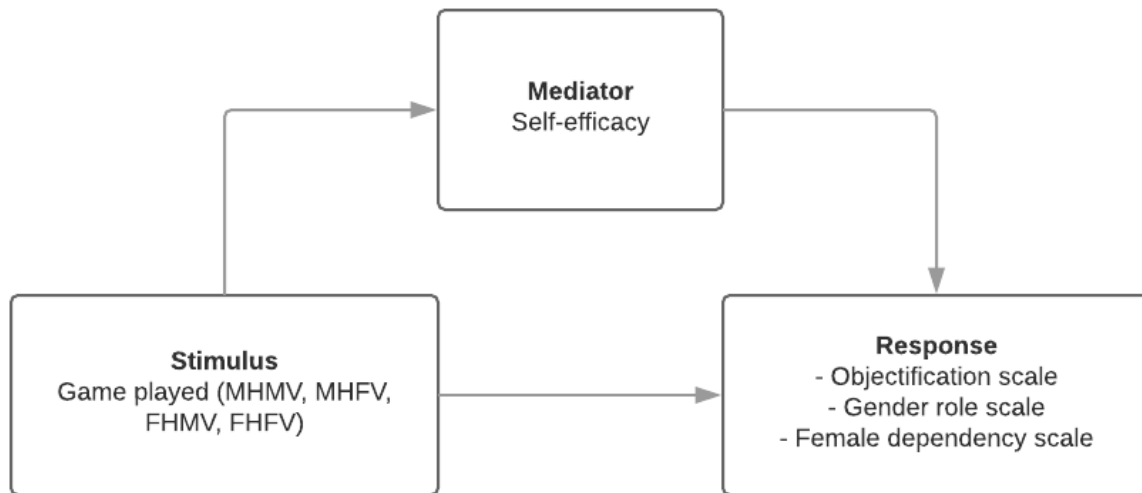


Figure 2

Proposed model of mediation

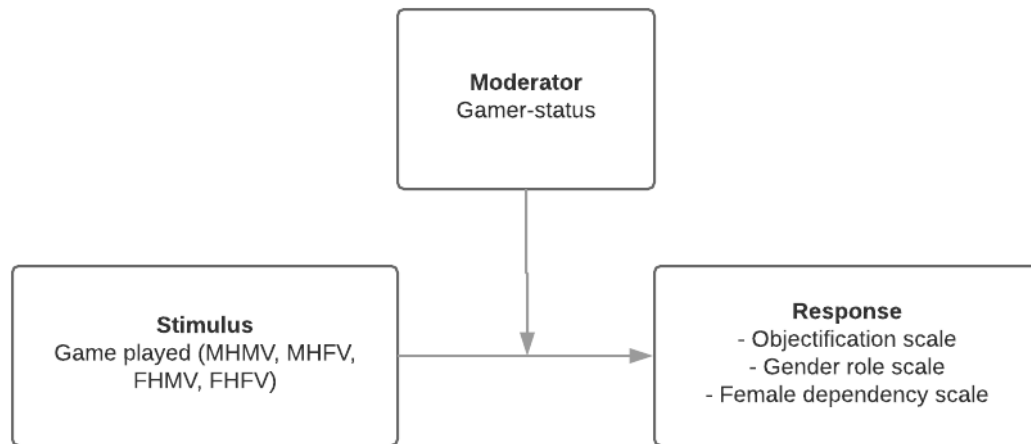


Figure 3

Proposed model of moderation

CHAPTER FOUR

RESULTS

The primary purpose of this study was to observe the relationship between the narrative of the game (the genders of the hero and the victim) and the agreement to statements on gender roles, female dependency, and objectification. It was also proposed that the lurking variables may include self-efficacy—as a mediator—and gamer status—as a moderator. After using a conditional process modeling program called PROCESS (Hayes, 2008, 2012), the researcher was able to create models to map the regression between the mediator and moderator on the response.

Frequencies

In this 2 x 2 experimental design experiment, each cell had 30 participants, with a standardized distribution of males to females in each (19 males, 11 females). In total, this amounted to 76 males (63.3%) and 44 females (36.7%) in the sample. Looking at the question “I feel comfortable playing video games,” the results were positively skewed, with most of the participants selecting “Agree” (41.7%) and “Strongly Agree” (45.8%) ($M = 5.22$, $Mdn = 5$, $SD = 1.01$). However, the question “I feel that I am skilled when it comes to playing video games” proved to be bimodal, with 25.8% of participants selecting “Strongly Disagree,” and a majority selecting “Agree” (33.3%) and “Strongly Agree” (18.3%) ($M = 3.71$, $Mdn = 5$, $SD = 1.92$). And the question “I consider myself a gamer” was also bimodal, with responses in the negative (“Strongly Disagree,” 31.7%; “Disagree,” 14.2%), peaking higher than the positive (“Strongly Agree,” 20.0%; “Agree,” 19.2%) ($M = 3.33$, $Mdn = 4$, $SD = 2.01$). These frequencies are outlined in greater depth in Table 2. The open-ended question that asked “How many hours a week do

you play video games?" skewed toward the lower end of the spectrum ($M = 7.725$, $Mdn = 2.0$, $SD = 10.0235$; see Table 3).

The final survey instrument, given after participants played the modified video game, included items in three groups, based upon the research questions of this thesis. These groups had ten items each, with 3-4 questions reverse coded. Three scales were then developed by averaging the ten items to measure each of the three respecting groupings, objectification, gender roles, and female dependency. These scales ranged from 1 (least sexist) to 6 (most sexist). These scales followed normal distributions, with objectification ($M = 3.04$, $SD = .52$) shifted slightly more positively than gender roles ($M = 2.33$, $SD = .56$) and female dependency ($M = 2.23$, $SD = .54$). These frequencies are found in Tables 5, 6, and 7, and the histograms can be compared in Figure 4. ($\alpha =$ Objectification .557, Gender Roles .679, and Female Dependency .742.)

There were two additional scales developed to measure the lurking variables of self-efficacy and gamer status. Self-efficacy was determined by combining two items—"I feel comfortable playing video games," and "I feel that I am skilled when it comes to playing video games"—into a scale that ranged from 2 (low self-efficacy) to 12 (high self-efficacy). It had a positive skew ($M = 8.93$, $Mdn = 10.0$, $SD = 2.587$). Gamer status was determined by also combining two items. However, as each of these gamer-related items were coded differently ("I consider myself a gamer" was measured on a six-point Likert scale, and the average hours of video games played in a week was open ended), their respective Z scores were first calculated, and then combined into one scale to measure their behaviors and their attitudes of gamer status. This scale for gamer status ranged from -1.93 (low consumer of games) to 4.55 (high consumer of games).

Results of Research Questions

RQ1-3 sought to measure differences between the four cells (MHMV, MHFV, FHMV, FHFV) on the three scales (objectification, gender roles, and female dependency). A set of one-way ANOVA tests revealed no statistical significance between the game type and the scales of objectification ($(3,116) = 1.49, p > .05$), gender roles ($(3,116) = .47, p > .05$), or female dependency ($(3,116) = .62, p > .05$). Stepping backward, however, when comparing the differences between gender and all of the scales (objectification, female dependency, gender roles, gamer status, and self-efficacy), independent sample t-tests found statistical significance upon most of these scales (see Table 3).

Gender has an almost significant difference ($p = .06$) upon objectification, with males having a lower score ($M = 2.97, SD = .50$) than females ($M = 3.16, SD = .55$). However, gender does have a significant difference ($p < .05$) upon gender roles (male: $M = 2.44, SD = .55$; female: $M = 2.14, SD = .52$); female dependency (male: $M = 2.32, SD = .50$; female: $M = 2.07, SD = .56$); self-efficacy (male: $M = 9.46, SD = 2.346$; female: $M = 8.00, SD = 2.745$); and gamer status (male: $M = .3625, SD = 1.95910$; female: $M = -.6262, SD = 1.50389$). Overall, with the exception of the objectification measure, males consistently scored higher on all other measures than females.

RQ4 & 5 tested if self-efficacy and gamer status could serve as a mediator and moderator, respectively, for each of the outcomes. The PROCESS tool revealed that the predictor—the game that participants played—and the outcome—the three scales, objectification, gender roles, and female dependency—were not mediated by self-efficacy ($p > .1$) nor moderated by gamer status ($p > .1$).

Those with familiarity with the *LoZ* game modified for this experiment also had different results. As revealed by an Independent t-test, a significant difference with self-efficacy ($p < .001$), gamer-status ($p < .001$), and objectification ($p = .02$) was found. While not unexpected, those who have history with this *LoZ* game prove to have higher levels of self-efficacy with video games ($M = 10.75$, $SD = 1.55$) than those who do not have a history with the game ($M = 7.71$, $SD = 2.42$); $t(118) = -7.70$, $p < .001$. And those who have played this game are higher consumers of video games (gamer status) ($M = 1.32$, $SD = 1.67$) than those who have not ($M = .88$, $SD = 1.42$); $t(118) = -7.73$, $p < .001$.

An interesting finding though is how history with this game is related to the objectification scale. Those who have a history of the game have lower scores for the objectification scale ($M = 2.90$, $SD = .54$) than those who have not played the game ($M = 3.13$, $SD = .49$); $t(118) = 2.44$, $p = .02$.

Gender Alignment

In the absence of significant differences for the research questions, examining gender alignment of the participant with either the hero or the victim, yielded some notable relationships. Alignment was measured on a nominal scale in two variables (does my gender align with the hero, does my gender align with the victim). Independent t-tests were run, and found a significant relationship with gender alignment and self-efficacy ($p = .05$), and a marginally significant relationship between gender alignment and objectification ($p = .08$). There was a significant relationship in the self-efficacy scales for participants whose gender aligned with the hero ($M = 8.32$, $SD = 2.75$) and those who did not ($M = 9.53$, $SD = 2.27$); $t(118) = 2.64$, $p = .05$. There was also a relationship that approached significant in the objectification scales for

those participants whose gender aligned with the hero ($M = 3.12$, $SD = .51$) and those who did not ($M = 2.95$, $SD = .52$); $t(118) = -1.78$, $p = .08$.

Table 2
Self-Efficacy Items and Self-Reported Gamer Measure

		n	%	M	SD
I feel comfortable playing video games	Strongly Disagree	1	.8%	5.22	1.01
	Disagree	4	3.3%		
	Somewhat Disagree	3	2.5%		
	Somewhat Agree	7	5.8%		
	Agree	50	41.7%		
	Strongly Agree	55	45.8%		
I feel that I am skilled when it comes to playing video games	Strongly Disagree	31	25.8%	3.71	1.92
	Disagree	8	6.7%		
	Somewhat Disagree	10	8.3%		
	Somewhat Agree	9	7.5%		
	Agree	40	33.3%		
	Strongly Agree	22	18.3%		
I consider myself a "gamer"	Strongly Disagree	38	31.7%	3.33	2.01
	Disagree	17	14.2%		
	Somewhat Disagree	3	2.5%		
	Somewhat Agree	15	12.5%		
	Agree	23	19.2%		
	Strongly Agree	24	20.0%		

Note: N = 120.

Table 3
Independent T-test analysis of Gender versus the Objectification, Gender Roles, Female Dependency, Self-efficacy, and Gamer Status Scales

	t	df	p	Gender	M	SD
Objectification Scales	-1.91	118	.06	Male	2.97	.50
				Female	3.15	.55
Gender role Scales	2.94	118	.004	Male	2.44	.55
				Female	2.14	.52
Female dependency Scales	2.58	118	.01	Male	2.32	.50
				Female	2.07	.56
Self-efficacy Scales	3.09	118	.003	Male	9.46	2.35
				Female	8.00	2.75
Gamer Status Scales	3.10	108.792	.002	Male	.36	1.96
				Female	-.63	1.50

Note: N = 120.

Table 4

Hours Played a Week

	n	%
0	16	13.4%
.5	3	2.5%
1	35	29.2%
1.5	1	.8%
2	6	5.0%
3	3	2.5%
4	3	2.5%
5	3	2.5%
6	3	2.5%
7	2	1.7%
8	3	2.5%
10	12	10.0%
12	6	5.0%
14	1	.8%
15	5	4.2%
16	1	.8%
18	1	.8%
20	3	2.5%
21	1	.8%
24	1	.8%
25	2	1.7%
30	1	.8%
35	7	5.8%
40	1	.8%

Note: N = 120.

Table 5

*Objectification Scale
Frequencies*

	n	%
1.8	2	1.7%
1.9	3	2.5%
2.0	1	.8%
2.1	1	.8%
2.3	2	1.7%
2.4	8	6.7%
2.5	3	2.5%
2.6	5	4.2%
2.7	9	7.5%
2.8	8	6.7%
2.9	6	5.0%
3.0	8	6.7%
3.1	14	11.7%
3.2	14	11.7%
3.3	4	3.3%
3.4	7	5.8%
3.5	8	6.7%
3.6	6	5.0%
3.7	4	3.3%
3.8	2	1.7%
3.9	1	.8%
4.0	1	.8%
4.3	1	.8%
4.5	1	.8%
4.6	1	.8%

Note: N = 120.

Table 6

Gender Role Scale Frequencies

	n	%
1.0	1	.8%
1.1	1	.8%
1.2	1	.8%
1.3	2	1.7%
1.4	2	1.7%
1.5	4	3.3%
1.6	5	4.2%
1.7	4	3.3%
1.8	8	6.7%
1.9	4	3.3%
2.0	2	1.7%
2.1	9	7.5%
2.2	8	6.7%
2.3	6	5.0%
2.4	11	9.2%
2.5	11	9.2%
2.6	12	10.0%
2.7	2	1.7%
2.8	5	4.2%
2.9	6	5.0%
3.0	4	3.3%
3.1	1	.8%
3.2	5	4.2%
3.3	1	.8%
3.4	4	3.3%
3.5	1	.8%

Note: N = 120.

Table 7

*Female Dependency Scale
Frequencies*

	n	%
1.1	1	.8%
1.2	2	1.7%
1.3	2	1.7%
1.4	6	5.0%
1.5	1	.8%
1.6	6	5.0%
1.7	7	5.8%
1.8	7	5.8%
1.9	4	3.3%
2.0	7	5.8%
2.1	11	9.2%
2.2	10	8.3%
2.3	11	9.2%
2.4	6	5.0%
2.5	7	5.8%
2.6	5	4.2%
2.7	4	3.3%
2.8	3	2.5%
2.9	8	6.7%
3.0	5	4.2%
3.1	2	1.7%
3.2	2	1.7%
3.3	1	.8%
3.5	1	.8%
3.6	1	.8%

Note: N = 12

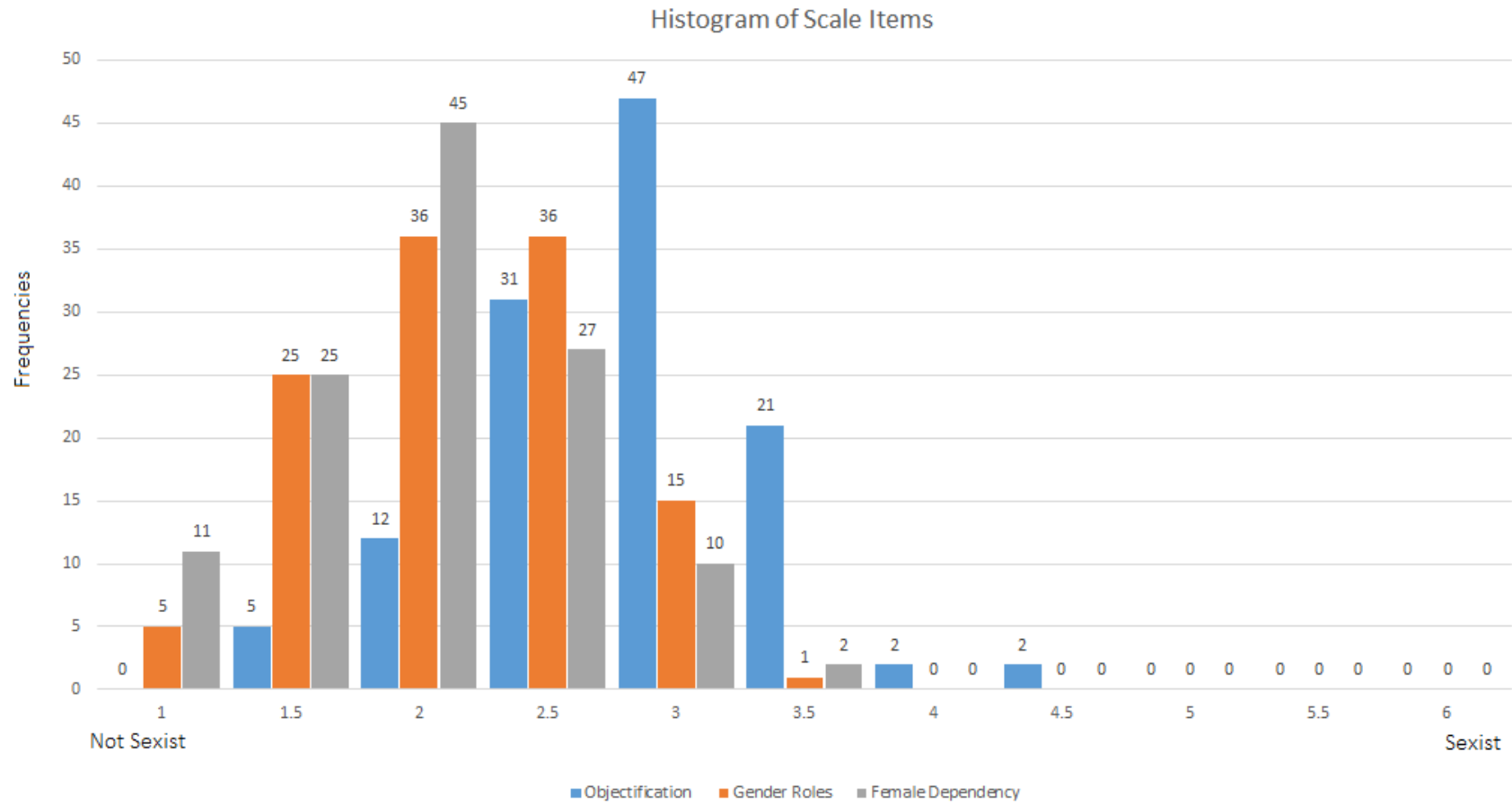


Figure 4

Combined Histogram

CHAPTER FIVE

DISCUSSION

Analysis

This study hoped to find a significant relationship between the stimulus (the game played) and the participant's agreement with sexist statements related to objectification, gender roles, and female dependency. However, the resulting relationships were not statistically significant, leading the researcher to reevaluate how to measure the effects of the damsel in distress trope. Feminism and critical analysis—as founded in gender schema theory—find problematic elements in female video game characters. While this thesis sought to study how this theoretical groundwork could be measured in an experiment, the findings were not significant.

However, this does not mean that there are no negative effects to the damsel in distress trope, but rather that they are subtler and nuanced, leading the author to conclude that more research needs to be done. A possible reason for the lack of significant results could come from the homogenization of the four games (the stimulus), which did not include any elements of sexism. The differentiating factors were minimized, leading to a lack of emphasis on the genders of the heroes and victims. Another possible explanation for the lack of significance could simply be that the experiment was too short, and the participants did not have enough time to identify with their avatar.

As prior research has suggested, gender does have a significant impact on most of the scale items of this study measuring objectification, gender roles, and female dependency. Males were significantly more prone to sexist views on gender roles and female dependency, as well as

having significantly more self-efficacy when playing video games and being more likely to consider themselves a gamer. However, females had greater levels of objectification, meaning that they were more likely to have sexist views on the female body, preferring superficial qualities over internal attributes. It is predicted that with a greater sample size, this relationship between gender and objectification would prove statistically significant, as it is already marginally so at $p = .06$, despite the current design's sample limitations.

What this finding proposes is that even within video games, there is still a recurring culture of self-objectification. As the items in this scale were adapted from the study by Fredrickson and colleagues (1998), which measured how self-objectification can be triggered by wearing a swimsuit, this scale hints that women objectify themselves more than men. The culture of objectification is being built outside of video games and has ties to gender schema theory.

Another finding concerning objectification is that, compared to the three sexism scales, it was shifted towards higher levels. The scales for gender roles and female dependency had lower means than the scale for objectification, highlighting how these views of objectification are stronger or more sexist than the other two.

The final finding about objectification relates to gender alignment. While the researcher hypothesized that higher levels of objectification would manifest when the player's gender aligned with the victim, the data suggests that alignment with the hero could have an almost statistically significant correlation to higher levels of objectification. Again, this relationship would probably prove significant with a larger sample, but this finding suggests that when men play as male characters, or women play as female characters, they are more conscious of their own body. The items in the objectification scale compared the importance of superficial qualities in women (such as bust size and sexual attractiveness) over non-superficial qualities (such as

talents and abilities). Players might conceivably compare themselves to their avatar—despite its primitive appearance in this experiment—leading them to think more about objectification following the exposure.

Gender alignment with the hero did have a significant effect on self-efficacy. Those participants who did not align with the hero had higher levels of self-efficacy than those who did align with the hero. Somehow this alignment with the hero and the protagonist in the video game could predict lower feelings of skill and comfort playing video games. This finding sounds intriguing, as it proposes new relationships between the gender and abilities of players. While female participants had lower levels of self-efficacy than males, this finding suggests that when men play as male characters, their skill could be less than if they played as a female avatar. Or that women playing as men have higher levels of efficacy than when they have female avatars. How this finding relates to identification is an area that needs to be explored further.

Gender Stereotypes in Video Games

These discussions about sexism, feminism, and video games are tied to changes in video game avatars. While one may not impact the other, there is evidence that a change is occurring. As part of the GamerGate discussion, one blogger noticed the transformation that occurred in Lara Croft by lamenting, “Does anyone know what happened to the sexy Lara Croft?” (Chess & Shaw, 2015, p. 216). Chess and Shaw (2015) echo the sentiment of this blogger by agreeing that the recent interpretations of the character have shed her outlandish figure for a more accurate body type, from less clothing to more. Hernandez (2014) chronicled the evolution of the character by comparing the marketing image of Croft to her in-game avatar over the history of the franchise, noting that Lara Croft’s character has been desexualized.

In March of 2016, Nintendo released a port of a non-canon *LoZ* game to the 3DS system. This facsimile of the original game also included a new playable character, Linkle. Linkle is the female version of Link and was announced during a live-stream press event for the 3DS game *Hyrule Warriors: Legends* (Goldfarb, 2015). This new playable character has raised controversy, seen by many as pandering to feminists (Fitzgerald, 2016), while also being praised as a new incarnation of the legendary hero (Ashcraft, 2016). However, this character initiates a discussion about how Nintendo can approach their depictions of gender stereotypes.

The character of Linkle, and her recent introduction into the *LoZ* video games exposes the possibility of female leads in the beloved series. The *LoZ* games currently rely on the very masculine theme of an epic struggle between good and evil (Brunner, 2008). However, these games also appeal to both genders through their usage of puzzle solving, decision making, tricky bosses, and creative thinking (Brunner, 2008). While this research did not find any significant relationships related to its research questions, it still opens up new discussions on how gender stereotypes can impact players of video games. The creators of Lara Croft are willing to release games that downplay her sexuality, and the creators of *LoZ* are willing to test female versions of their protagonist.

Identification and Alignment

As mentioned earlier in the literature, Lara Croft's character sparks debates about the merits and demerits of a butt-kicking, buxom video game star who is both agent and object (Dill & Thill, 2007). The majority of literature on Croft by feminist scholars reveals that she is indeed a sex object and also a positive role model (Kennedy, 2002; Mikula, 2003) due to the unique nature of video games to blend identification and objectification. Playing as these fantasy female

figures allow for identification to erode gender roles; while players may objectify these avatars at first, they begin to identify with these characters as the game unfolds (Kennedy, 2002).

However, there is a gap in the research that investigates the effects of aggressive female characters and this transgendering process of male players (Dill & Thill, 2007). Unlike other media, players interact with female characters through mechanics and involvement (Kennedy, 2002). Players of games such as *Metroid* and *Tomb Raider* are often male players experiencing the game as a female virtual body, in a combination of subject and object and the blending of gender roles and gender identity (Kennedy, 2002; MacCallum-Stewart, 2008).

Researchers assume that the avatar is an extension of the self (Song & Jung, 2015), meaning that playing as a female fantasy figure merges the gender identity of the player with their character. Song and Jung found that when players gender swap in massively multiplayer online games (MMOs), they are likely to treat that avatar differently, with greater emotional attachment and different purchasing behaviors (p. 3555). Other players also treat avatars differently based on the sex of the avatar, leading to in-game benefits (Song & Jung, 2015).

However, the identification that gamers feel is only being amplified by advances in technology. Greater fidelity in graphics and processing make immersive and interactive experiences found in virtual reality (VR) possible. Developers of VR attempt to provide the illusion that players have entered a virtual world (Zyda, 2005). These immersive and interactive environments create greater identification from players (Wong, 2016).

The results of this study matter because they contextualize the debate of identification in video games. The lack of significance questions how players interact with their virtual avatar, how they identify with these female characters or objectify them, and how these interactive experiences relate to gender schema theory. As the foundation of this study, gender schema

theory outlines how perceptions of gender and the adjectives of masculine or feminine are shaped by the media, and how these gender schemas influence self-esteem. If there are harmful effects of the sexist stereotypes in video games, this study did not find them. The literature predicted that exposure to different scenarios—where players were able to identify with new avatars and remove the objectification of the damsel in distress stereotype—would yield different results in player agreement to sexist statements.

The results of gender alignment are important because they contextualize how identification occurs within video games. While the previous research has tried to explain the transgendering of (predominately) male players interacting with a female body, this experiment found that when the player's gender aligns with their avatar, there are significant differences in their self-efficacy and agreement to statements on objectification. This finding shapes the industry by proving that there are effects not only on the gameplay or story but also on the player when designers select the gender of the protagonist's avatar. This research on identification through gender alignment should be further explored, leading to more findings that could shape why video games should allow more customization of avatar genders.

Measures and Socially Desirable Outcomes

This thesis adapted existing measures that have been used in previous literature to capture objectification and gender roles. These measures (Fredrickson et al., 1998 and Brogan & Kutner, 1976) have been used in multiple studies, however, when applied in this thesis, their reliability hindered the results. Each of the three dependent variables (objectification, gender roles, and female dependency) had undesirable Cronbach alphas ($\alpha = .557, .679, \text{ and } .742$ respectively), meaning the scales were not as reliable as they should have been. These scales were not reliable in measuring what they meant to measure, leading to the researcher to question the measures. As

mentioned earlier, perhaps the BSI would have been more reliable, as these measures by Fredrickson and Brogan Kutner were not.

However, even if the measures had alphas much closer 1, they still suffer from the social desirability effect. These measures were attempting to capture sexist beliefs in their respondents, leading to participants probably attempting to answer in the most socially desirable way possible. The differences in objectification scores could be evidence of this, as the objectification items came first in the instrument. As the purpose of the survey eventually sank in with participants, socially desirable answers probably surfaced and manifested in the lack of significance. Moving forward the researcher will attempt to use measures that are more reliable, and attempt to find a way to minimize social desirability as a lurking variable to the research questions.

Limitations

This study sought to measure the effects of one exposure on participants through playing a video game for 30 minutes or less. As such, the dosage was smaller than necessary to prompt dramatic shifts in participant views and opinions. Due to the limitations of this study, it could not measure the cultivation of repeated exposures over a longitudinal period. The researcher argues that there is a cultivation effect manifested in heavy consumers of video games who hold different opinions on gender roles than light consumers. Further research should consider how to measure cultivation of sexism, much like Breuer et al. (2015). Also, as was mentioned previously, this study pulled from two very different demographics. The undergraduates from Communications classes may be quantifiably different than those in Computer Science classes—with a higher proportion of females in the former, and males in the latter. Examining whether participants came from a Communications or Computer Science background could account for the higher levels of self-efficacy and gamer status from some participants.

This study is also limited in that it homogenized the variations in video games as much as possible. The in-game dialogue was kept as close to the original game as possible, only making slight gender pronoun adjustments when needed. There could be greater differences in the scales if the differences in the four cells included an emphasis upon the genders of the hero and victim, perhaps even playing up their relationship in order to expose more gender-based stereotypes. This research also modified a 16-bit video game, meaning the resolution and detail in the avatars were minimal. With greater fidelity in the avatar could come greater effects in the respondents as they identify more with the protagonist or the victim.

Future research should consider a greater examination of gender stereotypes within video games. Perhaps an implementation of the Bem Sex-Role Inventory (BSRI; Bem, 1974) could measure gender roles more effectively. And while the research on video games extends into many areas, there is little literature on the depiction of gender stereotypes (Dickerman & Kerl-McClain, 2008). Research is needed that focuses on the constructs and effects of this gender-role stereotyping (Zurbriggen, 2007). This research could include more situations within the game where gender stereotypes are projected upon the player. This could include derogatory in-game dialogue, or sexualized heroes and victims. While research has been done on these gender stereotypes in video games with female characters having large breasts and male characters being muscular (Dill & Thill, 2007), this experiment tried to keep sexualization as minimal as possible in the avatars for the hero and victim.

Additional research should also look into how objectification is tied to victims and heroes specifically, and if players are more likely to objectify their avatar or the victim they are rescuing. These effects of objectification could even be divided into self-objectification and other-objectification, to capture how heroes are objectified through internal comparison and

identification, versus how non-playable side characters (such as the victim) are turned into commodities and objects that lose their humanity.

Conclusion

Why can't Zelda save herself? I feel that Zelda should be allowed to save herself, or at least allowed the opportunity to save a prince in distress. Changing the story to allow new situations that do not trap women into helpless roles has ramifications upon identification, gender schema, and also gender alignment. And as mentioned previously, the researcher is not giving up on finding the effects of the damsel in distress trope on players of video games. There are hints at how this medium is influencing its audience through objectification and gender alignment, and their correlation to self-efficacy. In subsequent research, the author will seek to portray common video game gender stereotypes such as hyper-masculinity and hypersexuality, which this study does not address. In an attempt to minimize bias, this study and its sterilized stimuli probably did not reflect the current trends in video games, and should instead seek to measure the effects of other stereotypes, instead of just the damsel in distress narrative trope.

This research does not move the needle in the discussion on gender roles in video games, even though it attempts to tie into the discussions that arose from the GamerGate event years ago. However, it is a foundational approach to studying video games, media effects, and their intersection with gender roles. This study contributes to the academic discussion on the benefits and detriments of identification, the effects of digital avatars, and the prevalence of an objectification culture.

FIGURES

Figures



Figure 5

The opening dream sequence, the call to action.



Figure 6

The protagonist storming the castle in search of the victim.



Figure 7

The hero is given a sword from their uncle in order to fight the enemies.

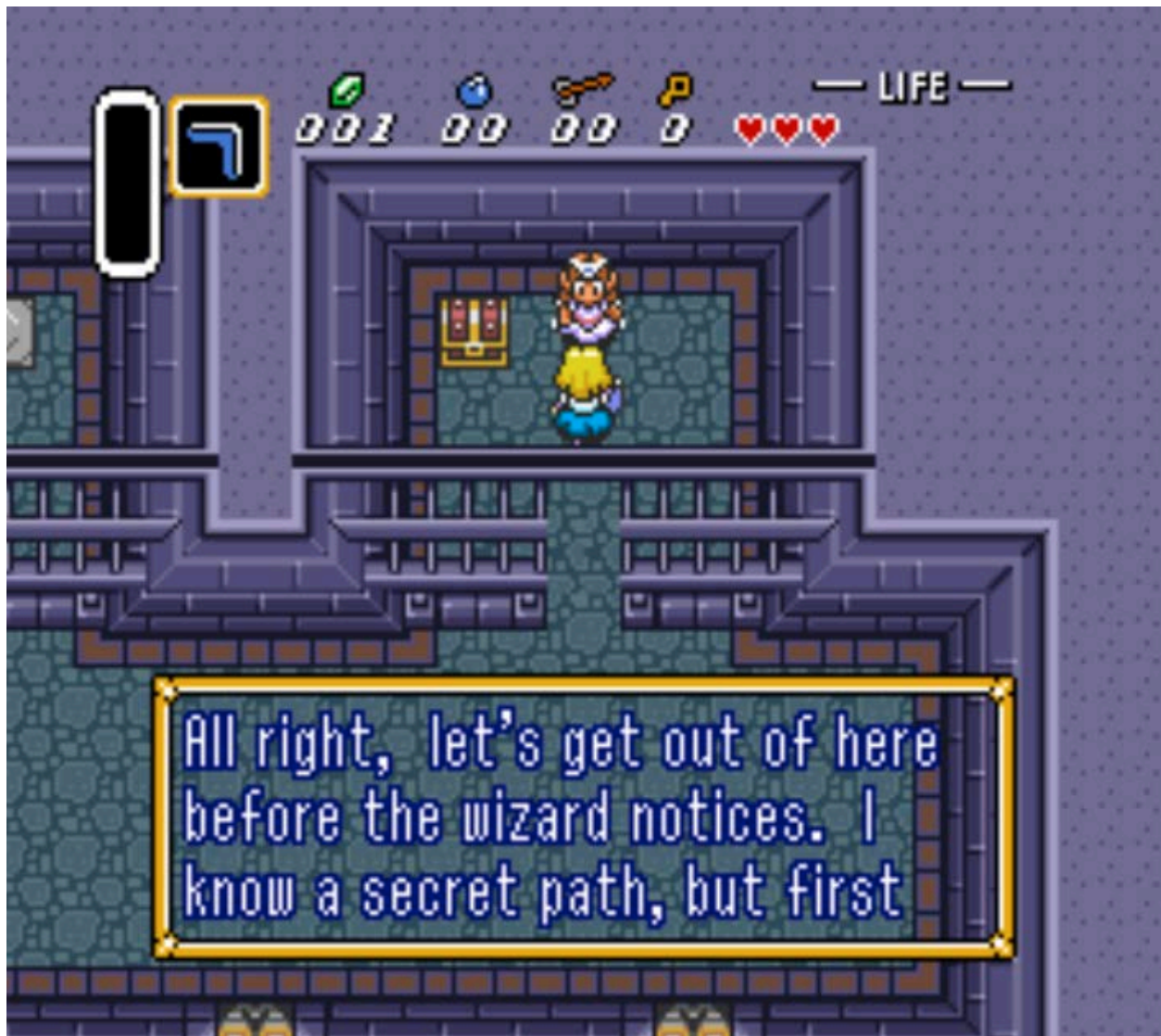


Figure 8

The protagonist rescues the victim from the dungeon.



Figure 9

The hero must escape the castle and fight enemies with the victim in tow.



Figure 10

They use a secret tunnel that leads through the sewers to escape.



Figure 11

After reaching the sanctuary does the task end.



Figure 12

Liam, used as the male hero character.



Figure 13

Prince Zane, used as the male victim character.

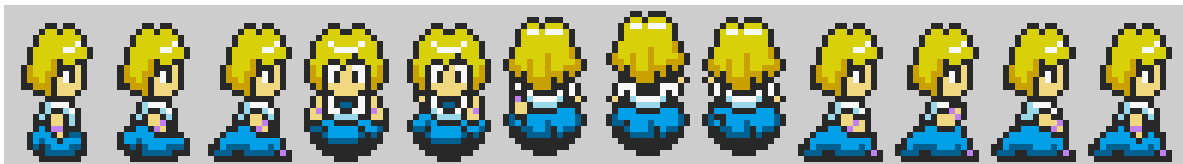


Figure 14

Lian, used as the female hero character.



Figure 15

Princess Sayre, used as the female victim character.

APPENDIX

Methodology

Recruitment Survey. This recruitment survey served two purposes: to recruit participants as well as gauge gamer status, assess familiarity with *A Link to the Past* (the game used in the study), collect demographics, and measure self-efficacy. The starred question is coded in reverse, as it suggests the opposite.

1. I feel comfortable playing video games.
 - a. 6-point Likert scale
2. I feel that I am UNSKILLED when it comes to playing video games. ***
 - a. 6-point Likert scale
3. Rate your agreement to the following statement: "I consider myself to be a 'gamer'."
 - a. 6-point Likert scale
4. How many hours of video games, on average, do you play in a week?
 - a. Text entry
5. Which of the following video games have you played at least once? (SELECT ALL THAT APPLY)
6. What gender do you identify with?
7. Are you willing to participate in a study, where you will play a video game and answer some questions about your experience? This study will take 1 hour to complete, will take place on BYU Campus, and you will be compensated with extra credit for your Comms 100 class AND A CHANCE TO WIN one of two \$50 Visa gift cards.

- a. Yes, I am willing to participate
 - b. No, I am not willing to participate
8. (Only if they answer yes to the above question) Since you are willing to participate, will you enter some contact information so that we can schedule a time to conduct the study?
- a. Text entry

Post Test Survey. Each question in the following instrument was measured on a six-point Likert scale that measured agreement to the statements. This scale ranged from “Strongly agree” to “Strongly disagree.” Starred questions are coded in reverse, as they suggest the opposite.

(Objectification)

1. In women, physical coordination is less important than firm or sculpted muscles.
2. In women, strength is less important than weight.
3. In women, health is less important than sex appeal.
4. In women, energy level (e.g., stamina) is less important than physical attractiveness.
5. In women, measurements (e.g., chest, waist, hips) are less important than physical fitness level. ***
6. In women, the ideal figure is less important than perseverance or endurance. ***
7. In women, dexterity is less important than bust size.
8. Dieting is important to your physical and mental well-being.
9. Women should not act ditzy or ignorant to be attractive to men. ***
10. Men are attracted to all body types. ***

(Gender Roles)

1. The idea of young girls participating in High School football is ridiculous.

2. The amount of time and energy devoted to a career versus a family should be determined by one's personal desires and interests rather than by one's sex. ***
3. It is more important for a woman to worry about her figure and dress than it is for a man.
4. The old saying that "a woman's place is in the home" is still basically true and should remain true.
5. A woman should refrain from being too competitive with men and keep her peace rather than show a man he is wrong.
6. It is generally better to have a man at the head of a department composed of both men and women employees.
7. It is certainly acceptable for boys, as well as girls, to play with dolls. ***
8. Women should not feel inhibited about competing in any form of athletics. ***
9. Parents should encourage just as much independence in their daughters as in their sons.

10. In elementary school, girls should wear dresses rather than slacks to school.

(Empowerment)

1. Men are better than women at coordinating and negotiating high power business deals.
2. Men are better than women at high-risk jobs such as a surgeon or investment broker.
3. Athletic competitions, such as sporting events, are more suited for men to participate in than women.
4. Bravery, courage, and heroism are attributes equally found in women as men. ***
5. In women, being agreeable is less important than being independent. ***
6. Women need men to provide for and protect them.

7. When it comes to certain things (like changing a tire, fixing a toilet, etc.), women are helpless and need assistance.
8. Rosa Parks, Joan of Arc, Sacajawea, Mother Teresa, Amelia Earhart, and Princess Diana have defined history through their contributions and examples. ***
9. Wonder Woman, Katniss Everdeen, Nancy Drew, Elizabeth Bennet, and Mary Poppins make great heroines and protagonists in their own stories. ***
10. Women lack the skills and abilities to be great leaders.

*** These items are phrased in a nontraditional way.

Each answer will then be coded on the following scale to determine a subject's sexism score. With the total sum of numerical responses to 36 items, the total score could range from 36 to 216. The lower the total score, more sexist the subject is in terms of objectification, opinion of gender roles, and female dependency; the higher the total score the less sexist the subject is.

Starred items will be coded:

- Strongly agree = 6
- Moderately agree = 5
- Agree slightly more than disagree = 4
- Disagree slightly more than agree = 3
- Moderately disagree = 2
- Strongly disagree = 1

Other items will be coded:

- Strongly agree = 1
- Moderately agree = 2
- Agree slightly more than disagree = 3

- Disagree slightly more than agree = 4
- Moderately disagree = 5
- Strongly disagree = 6

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