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Daniel Malzer

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1. Introduction

A few years ago, I played a massively multiplayer game set in a fantasy world filled with magic, monsters, heroes and thousands of other players. Every player, upon starting the game, was able to select their playable character, choosing from a variety of different races and classes ranging from battle hardened, sword wielding warriors, spell-casting wizards and healing priests. To work through some of the levels, players were required to group up with additional players controlling a balanced setup of different classes pivotal to the success of the endeavour. A friend of mine recently made a new character, a blue troll with large teeth, elegant robes and long red hair: a female priest. Upon asking why he had chosen to play as a female character, he retorted that he felt a female character to be more fitting for a healing class. His other character was a male warrior, charging into battle on first sight.

This anecdote alludes to an overarching problem, one that not only pertains to video games. Numerous studies have analysed depictions of male and female characters in films, books, newspapers, in music videos, and naturally also in video games. Especially concerning video games, research established an almost common consensus that women in games are predominantly depicted as passive damsels in distress, victimised, and in contrast to the powerful male hero, objectified and marginalised, reduced to their sexuality and body. Similarly, the audience and the industry as a whole have faced regular scandals and public controversies based on displays of misogyny, most prominently the *GamerGate* controversy: a "culture war" between mostly female game designers and critics advocating for "greater inclusion in gaming" and "misogynists, antifeminists [...] and traditionalists who just don't want their game to change" (Dewey 2014). Therefore, despite video games having long lost the stereotype of a niche hobby with over 164 million adults in the U.S. playing regularly (ESA 2019: 3) and 5.3 million in Austria (Ovus 2019), and men and women almost equally playing games (54% male players as opposed to 46% female players in the U.S. as well as in Austria, see ESA 2019: 5 and Ovus 2019)[1], video games are still consistently regarded as toxic environment for women (O'Halloran 2017).

[1] These yearly surveys of the gaming industry assess a wide variety of further statistics, showing the wide appeal and heterogeneous audience of the medium also in respect of income class, political orientation, or level of education. See ESA 2019 and the report by the Österreichische Verband für Unterhaltungssoftware 2019 for further details.

However, marginalisation of women does not only occur through visual elements in video games. As an example, *Borderlands 2* (Gearbox Software 2012), one of the games analysed in this thesis, advertised a playable female character, Gaige, as "girlfriend mode" (Yin-Poole 2012) based on her simple abilities. The implications of a newcomer friendly character being ideal for the apparently inept woman naturally were faced with widespread criticism: "'Girlfriend Mode' implies heteronormative gender roles, presuming that women perform the support and affective labour in relationships" (Rakomaew Butt 2016: 20).

This last example hints at an intrinsic problem of studying video games. The controversy revolving around the character Gaige did not allude to displays of sexuality or victimisation, nor to her being a passive side character. Gaige is not sexualised, or powerless in the game environment, but the supposed "girlfriend mode" pertained to her abilities and the ease of use. Another example is the portrayal of Princess Peach in *Super Princess Peach* (Nintendo 2005). Visually, *Peach* adheres to beauty ideals, appearing to be weak and fully pertaining to the damsel in distress trope. However, contrary to other games in the *Super Mario* universe, Peach is the active protagonist, capable of fighting enemies and saving Mario, the former hero rescuing Peach in previous games of the series. Then again, a closer examination of her abilities subjugate her heroicness by relating them to stereotypically female traits used to overcome enemies: the channelling of emotions (see in detail Ferreira and Hock-Koon 2011).

However, video games are complex, can last for hundreds of hours, and oftentimes have skill inhibitors requiring a certain amount of dedication and investment to overcome challenges posed by the game design. All these factors contribute to the difficulty of analysing video games as a medium. Considering these analytical challenges, it is not surprising that a large majority of research has resorted to a methodology assessing the visual representation of characters only. But it cannot be ignored that video games are a multi-faceted medium, requiring the player not only to observe, but to act, interact, decide on approaches and even on how the story unfolds. This interactive element would be completely amiss by the analysis of visual portrayals only.

Consequently, to assess games from a more comprehensive point of view, this thesis aims to widen the scope of the analysis of games from a methodological standpoint by analysing the available abilities of each playable character and thereby deducing the role offered by each protagonist to the player. Additionally,

the available abilities and their visualisation will be assessed on the implied sources of power for each character, thereby adding a narrative element to the overall analysis of each character. However, the findings of previous studies emphasising the overarching stereotypisation of female characters on a visual level cannot be disregarded. Thus, adhering to the overall concept of a comprehensive methodology, a visual analysis will be conducted as well. This, additionally, offers the possibility of comparing results on all three layers (the visual, the role assumed in game play, and the source of power as narrative element) and enables the study to assess if visual design is predicting game play experience, or whether the roles of characters subvert the visual stylisation.

In order to illustrate the importance of assessing popular media with respect to gender, the following theoretical chapters will in a first step detail the most prevalent theories on how media influence audiences and how repeated stereotypical input can generate or perpetuate perspectives. Additionally, as this thesis is emphasising the need to enlarge the scope of analysis to elements best subsumed under the interactive nature of video games, the first chapter will also highlight the most pertinent factors distinguishing video games from films.

Consequently, gender theory will briefly be considered to allow for a basis for the analysis of male and female stereotypes alike. Furthermore, as the analysis of roles is primarily based on the assessment of stereotypical displays of either male or female traits, special focus will be placed on the definition of stereotypes as a concept, as well as the typical and overarching stereotypes ascribed to men and women.

Following these theoretical chapters, a comprehensive literature review will further demonstrate the need to develop additional tools of analysis. Finally, the empirical section of this thesis will analyse thirty-three individual characters of seven different games utilising the proposed holistic analytical method: the visual analysis of the characters, followed by the assessment of abilities in order to subsume each character under an archetype accompanied by the stereotypes transported by these archetypes, as well as an analysis of the sources of power in order to add a narrative layer to the overall evaluation of each protagonist.

2. Media theory and the distinctiveness of video games

Media shape perceptions and transport cultural and societal values via their communication channels (see Bogost 2007: 24). This ubiquitous notion can simply be based on economical considerations: companies invest billions each year in marketing campaigns and advertising, not only to raise awareness to newly released products, but also to shape the profile and perceived identity of brands and products. The positioning of a company and the connotational value attributed to it by consumers clearly is not an arbitrary process.

In a thesis dealing with portrayals and perceptions of gender, the question of how and why media does transport, solidify or create entirely new aspects of popular opinion is crucial to the significance of the research. As the thesis is grounded on the assumption that video games as a popular medium intrinsically purport value systems, be it over visual imagery, narrative elements, or roles occupied by gender, it is essential to evaluate the dominating theories analysing effects of media consumption. Thus, the following segment will outline Gerbner‘s cultivation theory and Bandura‘s concepts of social cognitive theory to lay the theoretical foundations for the research. Cultivation theory bases the effects of media on recurring patterns of displays and ramifications on the audience. Hence, recurring patterns of sexualisation or victimisation of female characters in video games would strongly affect the perception of the player, according to this theory. However, as video games are an active rather than a passive endeavour, social cognitive theory, additionally, builds on the conceptualisations of learning based deduction of social models. Hence, not only the visual depiction of characters would have the potential to influence the audience, but also the active participation in playing and “learning” from potentially stereotyped roles. Moreover, both theories have been applied to video game research in previous studies (see below).

Building on this framework, the subsequent section will detail the specific features of video games which distinguish this medium from films, books or television, by discussing Csikszentmihalyi‘s flow theory, conceptualisations and effects of immersion and presence in video games, and finally, Bogost‘s theory of procedural rhetorics, particularly assuming persuasive processes in video games conveyed through the active participation of the player.

2.1. Popular Media and the effects on their audience

2.1.1. Cultivation theory

In its most basic sense, cultivation theory, developed over several decades in various works by communications expert George Gerbner, "suggests that exposure to television viewing over time 'cultivates' viewers' perception of reality" (Chong et al. 2012: 953). Gerbner emphasises that recurring portrayals and images would eventually lead to a mental alignment between imagery perceived on television and perceptions of the real world. Moreover, Gerbner regards this process as a "major function of the dominant communication agencies of any society" (1966: 102). These conceptions of dominant imagery and related ramifications of perceived world and society are deeply rooted in cultural theories themselves[2]. However, Gerbner specifically sees television as one of the major, if not main, system of transporting ideologies to entire societies permeating class, origin, cultural background or gender.

> Television is a centralized system of storytelling. Its drama, commercials, news, and other programs bring a relatively coherent world of common images and messages into every viewing home. People are now born into the symbolic environment of television and live with its repetitive lessons throughout life. Television cultivates from the outset the very predispositions that affect future cultural selections and uses [...] television has become the primary common source of everyday culture of an otherwise heterogeneous population (Gerbner et al. 1994: 18).

Gerbner does not interpret, nor define, power relations or objectives and hidden ideologies in a sense argued by Barthes. Instead he merely acknowledges a system of dominant ideology at work transported via mainstream media (see Gerbner et al. 1994: 18).

Cultivation theory assumes that strongest effects of media influence can be observed if dominant recurring images and patterns are consumed regularly over an extended period of time (Gerbner 1998: 179). Consequently, a cultivation analysis requires, first and foremost, the identification of "the most recurrent, stable, and overarching patterns" (Gerbner 1998: 181) of specific media. In regard to video games and gender stereotypes, this implies the assessment of regular visualisations of characters in respect to instances of stereotyping.

[2] See for example the theories on myths and connotational value by Roland Barthes, Stuart Hall's conceptions of articulations and dominant messages, or the concepts of simulacra and simulation by Jean Baudrillard.

The main examples used to illustrate cultivation effects are exposure to crime and violence on television and fear of being a victim to violence, perceptions of gendered professional roles and underrepresentations of the elderly (see for example Gerbner 1998: 184-186). Besides these findings, various studies found correlations between television consumption and perceptions of homosexuality (Calzo and Ward 2009) or attitudes towards mental health issues (Diefenbach and West 2007). Cultivation effects can, however, also contribute to positive perceptions of diversity. Calzo and Ward demonstrated that greater media exposure correlated with increased levels of acceptance towards homosexuality, for example (2009).

Naturally, the question arises, if a more and more diversified media environment, comprised of various streaming services, television and pay-per-view channels, seemingly endless content on the internet ranging from youtube videos to social media, may negate a coherent impact of cultivation over one dominant stream of communication as compared to television (see also Romer at al. 2014: 126). Morgan and Shanahan commented on these more complex media environments and emphasised that "cultivation theory is remarkably healthy, and the outlook for the future is promising" (2010: 337) despite these obvious changes. Consequently, research based on cultivation theory recently narrowed down the scope of analysis, not focusing on television as a monolithic entity anymore, but on specific genres such as talk shows (see for example Morgan and Shanahan 2010: 341) or, indeed, video games (see for example Williams 2006, Ivory 2006, Chong et al. 2012 or Kondrat 2015).

Critics, on the other hand, generally point to a relative weakness in predicting effects as opposed to other models. Potter, in his critical analysis of the state of cultivation theory (2014), ascertains that "[c]ultivation theory has continued to exhibit a troubling degree of ambiguity" (1028), arguing that the concept of identifying dominant patterns is important and a crucial argument, but the effects on the audience cannot be predicted with proper precision.

Despite the noted ambiguity in terms of effects on the audience and the highly diversified media landscape, the methodology of analysing and recognising overarching occurrences of stereotypical portrayals derived from cultivation theory, is still highly relevant. As Romer at al. conclude, "the theory points to patterns of media content that can explain a wide array of media effects, which have important implications for the socialization of children and for adults'

constructions of reality" (2014: 131). As the subsequent literature review will reveal, the majority of academic work into the field of video games has been, and continues to be, centred around the identification of recurring portrayals and stereotyped imagery. Thus, while the identification of such patterns may not automatically establish correlations with realisations in the perception of an audience, it still would reveal either hegemonic or diversified environments offered within these digital playgrounds.

2.1.2. Social cognitive theory

A different, and highly popular approach to gauge media effects on its audience is provided by Bandura's social cognitive theory of mass communication (2001). Bandura, like Gerbner's cultivation theory, posits a general influence of media on "human thought, affect, and action" (Bandura 2001b: 265). However, social cognitive theory specifically emphasises a bidirectional model, wherein a "web of self, and society, personal factors in the form of cognitive, affective, and biological events, behavioral patterns, and environmental events" operate in accordance (2001b: 266). At the same time, this complex structure of mutually dependent variables is generally the basis for criticism on studies analysing effects based on this framework (see Carillo 2010: 28 for detailed criticism).

The main concept revolves around the audience as an agentic entity rather than a passive viewer: "people are not just onlooking hosts of internal mechanisms orchestrated by environmental events. They are agents of experiences rather than simply undergoers of experiences" (Bandura 2001a: 4). Consequently, mental processes are regarded as crucial, as they "determine which environmental events will be observed, what meaning will be conferred on them, whether they leave any lasting effects, what emotional impact and motivating power they will have, and how the information they convey will be organized for future use" (Bandura 2001b: 267).

Conceptually these mechanisms are grounded in learning processes. Bandura argues that every mode of thinking in its basic form is grounded in observational learning, either intentionally or unintentionally through observing behaviours of others in the close environment (Bandura 2001b: 270-271), which necessarily also includes the digital environment. In Bandura's words:

> conceptions of social reality are greatly influenced by vicarious experiences—by what they see, hear, and read— without direct experiential correctives. To a large extent, people act on their images of reality. The more

> people's images of reality depend upon the media's symbolic environment (2001b: 271).

This concept of a symbolic environment as source for observational learning translates directly to video games as a highly immersive digital structure. Even more so as the mechanisms of observational learning are based around attentional processes, retention, production, and motivational processes (see Bandura 2001b: 272). Specifically, heightened attention and a positive feedback loop, increasing motivation, are regular accompanying effects of playing video games, as will be detailed below. Especially in regard to motivational processes, Lee and LaRose argue that "the more consumption works as enjoyable/ self-gratifying modus operandi, the less it is reflected upon" (2007: 636). This is critical, as self-reflective processes function as corrective when being confronted with values and world views in media (see Bandura 2001a: 10). Hence the suspension of this corrective may influence the susceptibility for content shown in video games.

Contrary to cultivation theory, social cognitive theory moreover states that sheer amount of exposure is not a defining factor, rather it is the specific content that matters (see Bandura 2001b: 281). Based on various research, Bandura concludes that "[v]erification of personal conceptions against televised versions of social reality can thus foster some collective illusions" (2001b: 282). However, this is not accomplished by media consumption alone, rather by the "dynamic nature of multifaceted causal structures" (Bandura 2001b: 284) whereby media can serve as a prompting device which can set negotiation of meaning in motion (2001b: 286). This, in turn, is related to the agentic behaviour in the selection process of the audience. Bandura explains that popular media may serve as justification for actions, as content may be chosen that solely offers "support for one's values and causes" (2001b: 279). Furthermore, the content consumed may additionally serve as a cleansing device, legitimising behaviour otherwise regarded as socially unacceptable (Bandura 2001b: 280). Naturally, these observations pertain to the analysis of gender portrayals in video games as well. Following these concepts, recurring imagery of women in subordinate roles, or the active choice to treat digital female characters in such a way may very well either reinforce already ingrained believes, or may contribute to their establishment.

Personal choice, additionally, operates as a strengthening factor in social cognitive theory. Bandura notices that "tailored communications are viewed as more relevant and credible" (2001b: 286). Thus, the diversified media landscape,

considered problematic for the predictive qualities of cultivation theory, may add to observed effects of media in social cognitive theory.[3] Clearly, personal choice, especially in regard to choices pertaining to selectable characters, their gender and their role, is a pertinent factor to video games.

Numerous studies have found correlations between media consumption and behavioural aspects by applying social cognitive theory, see for example the comprehensive studies of Wellman et al. (2006) or Jamieson et al. (2006). Also, in relation to video games, social cognitive theory has been established as reliable predictor of media effects. Morawitz (2007), for example, established strong correlations of depictions of sexualised and stereotyped female characters and negative effects on the players "self-esteem, gender stereotyping, body esteem, self-objectification, and self-efficacy" (Morawitz 2007: 11), while Brenick et al. (2007) observed an increased acceptance of stereotypic imagery through exposure to video games (406).

Social cognitive theory emphasises the process of observational learning as the basis for the acquisition or perpetuation of perceptions. This process is profusely influenced by factors such as heightened attention, motivation, and personal choice by increasing susceptibility for these learning effects to occur. As will be detailed below, these factors are generally considered intrinsic qualities of video games.

2.2. Video games as an interactive medium

This section will elaborate on key aspects of video game specific properties, especially in distinction to television and films. This is vital, as the majority of studies on video games, as the literature review in this thesis will reveal, is based around visual impressions of images and does not take into account player experience as an agent in an interactive world that is influenced by actions and choices.

The most prominent feature of video games, as opposed to films, is their interactive element: games do only progress through player input. Beck designates this element as "performative practice" (2014: 6) within a virtual world. This personal involvement of the player is regularly based on overcoming adversity or challenges. Wolf posits that a video game consists of four major factors: "conflict

[3] This notion is especially problematic in regard to search, and suggestions algorithms used by digital content providers. Hence, personal choice may also be just assumed while algorithms dictate actual viewing practices.

(against an opponent or circumstances), rules (...), player ability (...) and some kind of valued outcome" (2001: 14). These four factors reveal another important property of video games: the possibility of losing, depending on player ability, but also on choices made or, sometimes, pure luck[4]. However, despite the chance of losing, video games are also commonly accompanied by feedback systems fostering motivation (McGonigal 2011: 21). Hence, "[a] good game is a unique way of structuring experience and provoking positive emotion. It is an extremely powerful tool for inspiring participation and motivating hard work" (McGonigal 2011: 33). This loop of input, progress and reward, regularly accompanied by an overarching narrative, may, by itself, be considered as a self-gratifying process, a process pertinent to observational learning and the adoption or solidification of stereotypes as posited by social cognitive theory (see above). The following theories add to this understanding of the intrinsic impact and accompanying effects of playing video games, further emphasising the interactive component, and consequently, also the need to assess video games from this point of view as well.

2.2.1. Flow theory

In the introductory sequence of Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi's defining book *Beyond Boredom and Anxiety* (1975), the author muses about the homo economicus, and rather dramatically ascertains that

> [i]n a world supposedly ruled by the pursuit of money, power, prestige, and pleasure, it is surprising to find certain people who sacrifice all those goals for no apparent reason: people who risk their lives climbing rocks, who devote their lives to art, who spend their energies playing chess (1).

Csikszentmihalyi's work revolves around the concept of flow theory, a phenomenon believed to serve as a self-gratifying process found in many activities which do not immediately provide material incentives or are even regarded as socially unproductive (see 1975: 5). While video games certainly do not fall on the side of rock climbing, the game analogy over chess, however, already suggests a relative closeness. Csikszentmihalyi terms this process that leads to a flow experience an "autotelic experience" which completely absorbs the "actor with his activity: [t]he activity presents constant challenges. There is

[4] The infamous "game over" screen of video games is an intrinsic characteristic of video games as a medium. Incidentally, this emphasis of the very possible chance to lose progress and to start all over again can be traced back to arcades where players had to pay money to continue if their character died and the game would have ended. Modern games treat this mechanic in a wide variety of ways depending on genre and also on intended outcome. However, the overwhelming majority of games still apply a losing mechanic, at least to some degree, generally either penalising the score of the player, or requiring the player to replay certain sections.

no time to get bored or to worry what may or may not happen" (1975: 36). A necessary quality of the activity is a certain obtainable goal (1975: 38), as well as a regular feedback loop (1975: 46) and the feeling of control of action (1975: 44). All these characteristics are prominent, if not dominant, in regular video games. Accompanying the flow experience are loss of ego (Csikszentmihalyi 1975: 42) and heightened attention which "allows people to concentrate on their actions and ignore distractions" (1975: 48). Albeit not speaking about video games, but about games in general, Csikszentmihalyi explicitly observes that game design specifically aims at achieving this experience of flow (1975: 49). This notion can be related to regular discussions about video games being addictive and keeping the players drawn in with ever new challenges and achievements to unlock (see for example Griffiths and Nuyens 2017).

Moreover, Lee and LaRose (2007) point out that flow experience in video games may be responsible for a loss of "reflective self-consciousness" (635) which impedes awareness of problematic consumption behaviour. The authors conclude that flow experience may directly "instigate [...] media users to participate in media consumption repeatedly and excessively" (2007: 636) thereby also increasing the levels of attention and motivation of the player (ibid.) which, in turn, relates back to Bandura's concept of observational learning. Hoffmann and Novak confirm these observations in their research, especially emphasising the increased learning effects while in a state of flow, accompanied by a heightened potential for retention and increased participatory behaviour (1996: 64).

Flow experience may not occur in every game played, nor does it establish a necessary correlation between gender portrayals and perceptions of the audience. The theory, however, strongly incentivises to consider active game play as a factor when discussing games. Flow experience, additionally, ties into the next factor discussed below: the immersive quality of video games and the feeling of presence.

2.2.2. Immersion and Presence

Regular assessment criteria in video game reviews are based on the immersive qualities of the game in question. Does the game allow the player to dive into the game world and experience their protagonist and their choices as their very own is a recurrent question posited by the industry (see for example Damnjanovic 2018).

Despite the wide array of video games and genres, Cairns et al. attribute a varying degree of immersion to every game (2014: 339). In their analysis of immersive factors and attributes, Cairns et al. determine that immersion encompasses the level of player engagement and involvement perceived while playing (2014: 340). Even though not exclusive to gaming, immersion is strongly influenced and heightened by the agentic nature of video games (Cairns et al. 2014: 341). Crucially, immersive qualities and the absorption of the player into the game world are directly related to attention and awareness (ibid.). The difference between flow experience and immersion, according to Cairns et al.'s study, is that flow experience can set in at any time if aforementioned factors align, whereas immersion works as a "graded experience" which may increase the likeliness of flow to occur (2014: 344).

Naturally, the achievement of immersion and flow experience is highly sought after by the gaming industry. The occurrence of immersion and flow is also regularly related to evoking positive emotions which again work as a "powerful tool for inspiring participation and motivating hard work" according to game design analyst McGonigal (2011: 28). The unique elements of video games, comprised of a feedback loop, an achievement system, and an intrinsically satisfying gameplay loop further increasing motivation (McGonigal 2011: 23), all intertwine to create immersive and emotional experiences. These experiences are regularly accompanied by a "real-world dissociation" (Cairns et al. 2014: 348).

A different approach to the phenomenon of immersion, from a purely psychological standpoint, is the theory of presence. In its most basic sense, presence indicates a "psychological state in which the virtuality of experience is unnoticed" (Lee 2004: 32). A key element of the status of presence is the connection of three factors: "perception, manipulation, and interaction" (Lee 2004: 33) which distinguish video games from television and film as they are lacking the last two attributes. Lee argues that, despite the non-physical engagement of video games, which are solely based on visual and auditory elements (2004: 39), video games still can create a "compelling sense of reality"[5] (ibid.).

[5] This argument would require a more elaborate discussion on its own however. The definition of physical involvement is more complicated than this excerpt assumes. On a superficial level, the pressing of buttons on a keyboard or a gamepad may not seem to qualify as physical engagement, however combined with heightened stress levels, a state of increased attention and alertness, this discussion may change considerably. This is a longstanding argument in the discussion about e-sports in general, let aside the ever more widespread use of virtual reality sets which include entire body movements.

As to the factors contributing to the feeling of presence, Madigan points to the necessity of several attributes related to the perception of the game world, richness of sensory information, and consistency within the world itself (2010). These factors again consist of various elements such as "completeness of sensory information, [c]ognitively demanding environments, [...] strong and interesting narrative" as well as a lack of "incongruous visual cues" or "consistent behavior from things in the game world" (Madigan 2010). Moreover, the degree of absorption into the game world is also dependent on the personality of the player (Madigan 2010).

Interestingly, Lee, among other scholars, regards the feeling of presence as absence of noticing their virtuality (Lee 2004: 47) and relates it to either a "willing suspension of disbelief" or an "evolutionary tendency to accept incoming stimuli at face value" (ibid.). Whichever the causes, this argument potentially strengthens the impact video games can generate over their audience in a vastly immersive setting. To once again relate back to social cognitive theory and learning processes through media, the study of presence may suggest that video games potentially can strongly reinforce, alter or generate perceptions. Naturally, the experience made in a video game will not directly permeate to behaviour outside of the game as, per Bandura's social cognitive theory, a multitude of other factors are at work in shaping concepts of morality and world views. However, as detailed above, the games played may act as a social prompting device for "previously learned behavior" and slowly dismantle inhibitors which deemed the behaviour originally unacceptable (Bandura 2001b: 282).

2.2.3. Bogost's theory of procedural rhetorics

Finally, Bogost's theory of procedural rhetorics and its implication for video game analysis should further illustrate and explain the nature of video games and their intrinsic systems.

In his comprehensive book, *Persuasive games: the expressive power of videogames* (2007) Bogost attempts to apply the concept of rhetorics in an interactive sense to video games. In essence, according to Bogost, it is the nature of interactive participation, bound by rules of the medium, which shapes representations and effects of video games (2007: VIII). In analogy to the persuasive potential of visual, written, and auditory rhetorics, Bogost attributes games a similar persuasive force, labelling it "procedural rhetorics" (2007: IX).

Bogost does not deny that visual rhetorics are present in games, but this approach simply cannot gauge the entirety of videogames as cultural artefact (2007: 25). Instead, emphasis has to be put on intrinsic values of games and decision making processes, enabling the player, as an agent, to actively shape their experience. Obviously, interactivity alone does not already assume agency, as Bogost elaborates: "[i]nteractivity guarantees neither meaningful expression nor meaningful persuasion, but it sets the stage for both" (2007: 45). However, as soon as decisions are, or have to be, made, and these decisions mattering in the context of achieving goals within the frame of the videogame, procedural rhetorics are at work (2007: 46).

Bogost underlines his theory with various examples detailing effects of designer choice on decision-making processes and persuasive processes observed in various games. In the 2002 game *America's Army: Operations,* a first person shooter developed by the U.S. Army as a recruitment tool, Bogost observes that the scoring system and ranks obtained by playing, directly reflects military values as well as an "accurate characterization for the political contexts in which the army deploys" (2007: 79).

Another interesting example Bogost recites is the nourishment system of the popular third person action shooter and gangster epos *Grand Theft Auto: San Andreas* by Rockstar Games (2004). *The Grand Theft Auto* series has regularly caused media uproar through its displays of violence (a comprehensive overview can be found in the article by Salam and Stack 2018) and sex scenes in later iterations (especially the notorious *hot coffee* scandal, later termed "gaming's greatest sex scandal" by video game journalist Parkin in 2012). Bogost shifts the perspective on the way the player has to feed their protagonist in this instalment of the series. The game mechanics of *GTA: San Andreas* require the player to regularly consume food to continue with tasks and missions. The fictional world of the game is replete with fast food restaurants which offer cheap and high calorie food. However, if the player only consumes unhealthy meals, the protagonist gains weight and will not be able to run as fast or fight properly (see Bogost: 2007: 113). As the game mainly revolves around fighting other gangs and committing various crimes and fleeing from the crime scene, unhealthy, but highly popular and cheap, food choices do increase the difficulty of achieving these goals in the game. Thus, game mechanics in this example transport political and societal ideologies which directly affect the player in their control of the protagonist (Bogost 2007: 114).

Games are indeed ripe with decisions which directly influence the way a player has to approach the game to accomplish or finish the video game in question. A prominent and rather recent example has been the critically acclaimed *Papers, Please* by Lucas Pope (2013). The player assumes the role of a border immigration officer set in a dystopian world reminiscent of the block states in the cold war. The player is regularly faced with morally challenging decisions, having to decide who can leave or enter the country, replete with stories of war, poverty and personal crises. Whitehead in his review summarises the morally challenging mechanics:

> Turn away a valid visitor or let in somebody with dodgy papers, and you're in trouble. The first few slip-ups are allowed to pass without sanction, but after that you're fined five Arstotzkan dollars for every blunder. [...] After each working day, you have to balance your domestic budget, dividing your pittance between heating and food for your family, while also allowing for medicine when they get sick. [...] What do you do when a women pushes you a note saying she's been sold into slavery and the man who controls her is somewhere in your line? What if a husband and wife are separated by red tape - do you take a hit on your own income to allow them to stay together? (2013).

This example may best underline Bogost‘s conceptualisations of game mechanics affecting player decisions and at the same time working with subtle ideological foundations. Bogost concludes that every type of media has effects and influences society in the grander scheme, but every type of medium requires its own perspective to grasp how, and in what way, they operate (2007: 340).

Bogost‘s new approach generally received positive reviews, highlighting the importance to acknowledge game mechanics as an important facet of video games (see for example Webb 2008) which in turn should influence future analytical frameworks (McDaniel 2008: 504).

However, the focus on interactivity and supposed enhancing effects on the audience as opposed to films or books is not without criticism. In her dissertation about death and life in video games, Harrer designates the supposed factors of interactivity as “myth” (2017: 23). From Harrer‘s point of view, the argument about interactive elements and player engagement holds an “intentional fallacy” (2017: 31), cynically remarking: “designers of interactive experiences possess magical persuasive powers” (Harrer: 2017: 23). Regarding Bogost‘s conceptualisations of procedural rhetorics and the persuasive elements of game mechanic, Harrer contests a relation of cause and effect (2017: 25). Harrer partly bases her arguments on an article by Keogh (2014), referencing its remarks about interactivity: “[e]very medium demands an active bodily engagement from the

audience - a book needs a reader willing to turn pages in the right order no less than a video game requires a player to press buttons at the right time" (Keogh 2014: 8). However, Keogh actually criticises a unilateral framework, be it solely build on interactivity, visuals or narrative (Keogh 2014: 8). Consequently, Keogh even advocates for a more comprehensive understanding of video games, acknowledging "the coming together of hardware, flesh, and audiovisuals, without centring on any one of them" (Keogh 2014:4) and emphasises:

> If the academic videogame critic's goal is to understand how a videogame is engaged with by players to produce meanings and pleasures, it makes no sense to claim different elements and features of that videogame as either more or less central to the 'playing' of that videogame when all these elements are intermingled with the player to both mediate and produce meaningful phenomena (Keogh 2014: 9)

Naturally, heightened cause and effect correlations between effects of gameplay mechanics as opposed to purely visual impressions are difficult to measure. Obviously, video games can just as well be regarded as yet another blank media canvas which serves as a playing field of ideologies and social, cultural and political contestations. Yet, the entire debate about multiple layers of video games aside from the visual level, should instead add an incentive to adopt a different perspective aside from established film theory as well. As player interaction is such a striking and differentiating element, it would be ill-advised to disregard it.

3. Gender and stereotypes

Having established a basis on how popular media can create connotations and establish and reinforce value systems, this segment will focus on the specifics of gender theory and stereotyping with regard to popular media depictions. As this thesis is analysing visual representations of gender in a popular medium, Laura Mulvey's enormously influential (Storey 2009: 135) theory about the objectification of women in film serves as one basis for the following analysis. However, as this thesis also assesses the roles of video game protagonists through their available skills and abilities, visual manifestations of gender discrepancies and stereotypes do not suffice. Hence, gender as an active ascription of abilities and traits, as cultural and societal, and highly arbitrary process devoid of biological reasoning, has to be considered as well. Thus, the conceptualisations in the works of Simone de Beauvoir, West and Zimmerman, and, naturally, Judith Butler, will serve as further theoretical basis. Gender schema theory, consequently, elaborates on the processes on how these gender attributions are acquired and processed. Finally, the understanding and categorisation of roles require a solid elaboration on the workings of stereotypes as well as a brief overview of the highly persistent female and male stereotypes in popular culture.

Gender discrepancies are a dominant and recurring problem since decades. Obviously these discrepancies, particularly regarding wages, full time versus part time work, or in regard to professional positions in occupational fields are persistent issues of almost every society. Diekman and Eagly expressively emphasise that despite ever increasing participation on the labour market, the "domestic sphere" is still dominated by women (2006: 27). Naturally, the job market is not the only area of contestation. To put it in perspective, Switzerland, as the last country in Europe, introduced voting rights for women as recently as in 1971 (Maissen 2018). Thus, even in the very heart of Europe, some processes toward equality are comparatively young.

Clearly, also popular media are a room of negotiation of gender dichotomies where values are attributed onto perceived gender norms and stereotypes are created and maintained. There is no general consensus as to the reasons why women are structurally disadvantaged and regularly displayed as inferior to men in popular culture. Storey, in his comprehensive cultural theories guide book (2009) remarks that different theoretical frameworks attempt to gauge the

observed differences from differing stand points, oftentimes relating it to a system of either patriarchal power structures or capitalism, as a system of domination over labour, or a combination of both as source for the status quo (see Storey 2009: 135).

Approaches like the Bechdel Test by Alison Bechdel, simply measuring the representation of women in films (see Smith 2019), oftentimes already reveal a stark underrepresentation of active female roles in films. This lack of women in leading roles can also be traced throughout the history of video games as well, as the literature review will demonstrate below. Mulvey‘s study on visual representations of women in films in 1975 set a basis for academic discussions about gender depictions from a visual standpoint. Mulvey argues that “patriarchal society has structured film form” (1975: 6) which is, as an argument per se, very much in line with the above discussed theories on media effects. Media hereby works as a channel reinforcing a general hegemonic consensus apparent in societies. Mulvey employs the term “scopophilia”, the pleasure in looking, and considers the visual pleasure of cinema as a process of objectifying the female character in films (Mulvey 1975: 8-10). This inherently encompasses the man as an active agent, as the protagonist in films as well as the male audience member both actively looking onto the passive female, even further emphasised by the camera. Thus, cinema is comprised of three distinct gazes, the character, the camera, and the spectator, all regularly viewing “the image of woman as (passive) raw material for the (active) gaze of man” (Mulvey 1975: 17). Mulvey implies an intrinsic need for control and possession as motif behind this objectification of females in film (see 1975: 13).

In terms of video games, these considerations are relevant due to two reasons: first of all, the camera, the audience and the character regularly converge in the player‘s hands. The player can control angle, can zoom in, and focus on varying aspects of characters. Moreover, as the subsequent literature review will display in detail, an overwhelming majority of studies analysing video games are restricted to visual cues only. Thus, the research of passivity and activity, of stereotypes in posture, attire and sexualised display of body proportions is rooted in Mulvey‘s concepts of the male gaze.

In a second article, following the pivotal *Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema,* Mulvey elaborates more on functions of the narrative and roles aside from visual impressions, emphasising that the passivity of female characters and activity of

male characters are being represented through the narrative as well. Specifically about the role of women, Mulvey ascertains that "the erotic function of the woman is represented by the passive, the waiting [...] acting above all as a formal closure to the narrative structure" (1981: 13).

This approach to analyse and grasp roles and values ascribed to the respective gender, hence alluding to gender being a construct devoid of biological prerequisites, is a notion already argued in 1949 by Simone de Beauvoir, stating that "[o]ne is not born, but rather becomes, woman" (2011: 330). Rather, it is the society ascribing values onto women, according to de Beauvoir (ibid.). Consequently, the attributes subsumed under the constructed term *women* are artificial and not grounded in biology. De Beavouir's emphasis on the process of becoming a woman, depending on societal and cultural norms, already points to an active process, a recurring and persistent ascription of attributes and traits that conjure and consolidate womanhood with its seemingly fixed connotations.

West and Zimmerman regard gender, in this sense, as "an achieved status: that [...] is constructed through psychological, cultural and social means" (1987: 125). The title of their article, *Doing Gender* (1987), assumes the active production of gender as a term associated with various value-laden attributes. This is no simple uni-lateral process however, rather "[d]oing gender involves a complex of socially guided perceptual, interactional, and micropolitical activities that cast particular pursuits as expressions of masculine and feminine 'natures'" (1987: 126). Thus, the distinction between sex as a biological determinant and gender as an arbitrary, but socially agreed upon social, determinant becomes apparent. West and Zimmerman emphasise that this division between men and women only appears to be rooted in biology and perceived as normal (1987: 128). According to West and Zimmerman, the process of creating dichotomies based on biological markers is not avoidable as growing up already implies a recruitment into gender identities, labelled as sex-role socialisation (1987: 141 and 145). However, it is possible to change and challenge which values and attributes are implied by the generation of said identities.[6] Popular media are one of the prime sources to purport gender binaries via presenting a blueprint for socially acceptable behaviour for each gender (see West and Zimmerman 1987: 135). Crucially, gender binaries consequently manifest themselves alongside these ingrained blueprints onto an

[6] An obvious reasoning behind the inescapability of gender roles based on an assumed binary structure may be explained through group dynamics, comprehensively studied by Henri Tajfel in 1970.

interactional level. In essence, the male gaze, observed by Mulvey in films, is both, a manifestation of these described processes, as well as another instance where these supposed gender norms are strengthened and reproduced.

Gender as interactional performance, as doing rather than being, is also the basis for Judith Butler‘s approach to gender theory. Butler emphasises the importance to uncover how the “structures of power” construct and restrain women as a category (1990: 2). This notion is reminiscent of Foucault‘s theory about the intrinsic productiveness of power which, as a “regime of truth”, generates knowledge (see Foucault 1980: 131). For Butler, the whole notion of an identity-establishing, supposedly homogeneous umbrella term “woman”, in itself operating as a normative, is highly problematic: "the insistence upon the coherence and unity of the category of women has effectively refused the multiplicity of cultural, social, and political intersections in which the concrete array of ‘women’ are constructed" (Butler 1990: 14). Incidentally, these essentialist notions of women and men respectively, were also at the centre of criticism towards Mulvey‘s considerations of women and the cinema (see for example Stacey 1994: 11-12, who also emphasises the lack of considering the female gaze).

According to Butler, identity, from this perspective, is generated through discursive practices, generating a gender binary based on “repeated stylization of the body, a set of repeated acts within a highly rigid regulatory frame that congeal over time to produce the appearance of substance, of a natural sort of being” (1990: 33). Butler denotes these discourse practices, working as constitutive power, as performative acts: “performativity must be understood not as a singular or deliberate 'act', but, rather, as the reiterative and citational practice by which discourse produces the effects that it names" (1993: 2). Moreover, the process of performativity strongly depends on iterability, “a regularized and constrained repetition of norms” (Butler 1993: 95). Thus, similar to media effects theories in general, reiteration is the basis for ingrained patterns of a perceived gender dichotomy. Borgeson emphasises that “the gestures and performance of gender must be repeated endlessly to maintain the illusion of a natural category of masculinity and/or femininity” (2005: 70). Consequently, uncovering repeated and regular patterns of stereotyping and categorisation alongside supposed gender binaries is quintessential to gender theory as a whole.

Butler, moreover, addresses a process of self-identification through rejection and opposition to the perceived other (see 1993: 112 and 115). This process of not only formulating similarities to categorise oneself into a perceived in-group, but also actively formulating differences in opposition to a perceived out-group, is highly reminiscent of group dynamics research(see Tajfel 1970). Butler observes this process with regard to ethnicity and sexuality as well, concluding that categorisation unfolds "based on exclusionary operations that attribute a false uniformity to them" (Butler 1993: 116). Following these conceptualisations, the generation and constant reiteration of stereotypic portrayals of males, for example, is driven by the intrinsic need to distinct oneself from the opposing female stereotype as well as from a homosexual stereotype. Hence, in essence, heteronormative hegemony reproduces itself constantly in opposition to the perceived homogeneous out-group. Conversely, this process of differentiation may lead to marginalisation and asymmetrical power structures. Butler labels this process as "identification [...] purchased at the expense of another" through "violence of exclusion" (1993: 118). Thus, the process of naturalisation of ascribed traits and abilities onto women and men is a consequence of the normative force of these performative acts (see Butler 1993: 187-188).

In terms of video game analysis, the doing of gender can be traced through the analysis of roles and game play styles ascribed to gendered roles. In other words, if female characters tend to perform stereotypical female tasks, this may uncover additional, and arguably stronger, forces of normative power, besides visual appearances. Indeed, various studies demonstrate how perceived societal standards prescribe behaviour based on gender (see for example the literature overview by Shields and Dicicco 2011 and the non-exhaustive list of stereotypes listed below). This is the intrinsic concept of doing gender, the constant reiteration of seemingly fixed connotations between biological sex and attributed values culminating in stereotypical gender perceptions. These links between sex and gender are, however not static, nor automatic and, hence, changeable (see Butler 2004: 1).[7]

[7] Stuart Hall's articulation theory even further emphasises the variability of supposedly fixed value systems and its dependency on reiteration (see Clarke 2015: 277). Obviously, Stuart Hall's work only touched gender concepts, but his analysis of dominant ideology and seemingly fixed articulations in respect of culture, race and ethnicity reveals strikingly similar processes in a gender context as well.

3.1. Gender Schema theory

From a psychological point of view, the question arises how these assumed gender patterns transfer unto the individual. Bem, in 1981, proposed gender schema theory as a basis for the psychological principles entailed in the process of allocating gender norms. In general, Bem argues that this learning process operates over acquired schemata, cognitive structures of associations which "organize [...] and guide [...] an individual's perception" (1981: 355). Thus, in order to process incoming information, input is subsumed under an acquired schema. This assimilation process of incoming information sorts and distributes associations attributed to a perceived gender binary, thus "sex typing results, in part, from the fact that the self-concept itself gets assimilated into the gender schema" (Bem 1981: 355). This process implies that the "child learns to apply this same schematic selectivity to the self, to choose from among the many possible dimensions of human personality only that subset defined as applicable to his or her own sex" (Bem ibid.). Bem's theory implies a strive for gender-conformity as a natural process of self-identification, whereby the associations made under the term womanhood or manhood are based on "cultural myths [which] become self-fulfilling prophecies" (1981: 356).

Gender schema theory, moreover, regards the cognitive process of evaluating if a certain attribute is gender conform or not as a simple affirmation or negation of input in comparison with acquired gender schemata (Bem 1981: 359). Hence, every action observed is cognitively analysed in respect of sex-congruency. According to Bem, gender schemata are likely the most defining self-ordering concepts, simply because of "the society's ubiquitous insistence on the functional importance of the gender dichotomy, from its insistence that an individual's sex makes a difference in virtually every domain of human experience" (1981: 362).

In conclusion, regular displays of, supposedly, *gender-correct* behaviour form a schema, constructing not only self-identity and personality, but also a gender bias based on perceived dominant and recurring patterns. Bem, in her conclusion, advocates for an environment, where "human behaviors and personality attributes should cease to have gender, and society should stop projecting gender into situations irrelevant to genitalia" (1981: 363). Similarly, Irigaray emphasises the need for cultural change, implying a new discourse devoid of "seductive nor reductive" portrayals of women, thus in essence women neither being recognised

foremost as sexual being nor reduced to stereotypical roles such as wife, mother or caretaker (see 1994: 29).

Gender schema theory has been the basis for numerous studies relating stereotypical depictions in media to the generation of gender-based schemata. Wroblewski and Huston, for example analysed occupational roles presented via television shows and concluded that the regular display of men and women in respectively stereotyped occupations may strongly influence "schemas, attitudes and aspirations of early adolescents" (Wrobleski and Huston 1987: 1296). However, the study highlights also positive effects of displays of role reversals: "one or two counterstereotyped portrayals are unlikely to have much effect, but consistent and repeated portrayals of women as lawyers, police officers, detectives, and the like do have an impact" (Wrobleski and Huston ibid.). Similar effects of stereotypical depiction and effects on self-identity and gender perception have been observed in video games as well. Dill et al.'s study, for example, analysing the effects of "sexist video game content" (2008: 1404), indicate significant correlations between "long-term violent video game exposure and less progressive sexual harassment judgments" (ibid. 1406).

Thus, based on these theoretical considerations supported by various studies, gender stereotypes in popular media do have a considerable impact on their audience, not only purported through visual portrayals but also through the display of behaviour. However, to fully assess and analyse a potentially stereotypical allocation of personality traits derived from the analysis of abilities and skills in this thesis, it is indispensable to establish the basic concepts of stereotypes in general, and to discuss the most common gender-based stereotypical traits and ascriptions in particular.

3.2. Stereotypes

Hilton and von Hippel define stereotypes as "beliefs about the characteristics, attributes, and behaviors of members of certain groups" (Hilton and von Hippel 1996: 240). The formation of stereotypes is a cognitive process "allowing easier and more efficient processing of information", but thereby also disregarding individual differences (Hilton and von Hippel 1996: 241).

The general emergence of stereotypes can be attributed to various different sources. Hilton and von Hippel emphasise self-fulfilling prophecies, and the generalisation from the behaviour of one perceived group member to the entire

perceived group as the dominant sources (see 1996: 244). Maintenance, on the other hand, does not require much regular input, thus a formed stereotype possesses persistent associations and, due to the selective nature of perception, perceivers of stereotypes are very likely to find "stereotype-congruent individuals" (Hilton and van Hippel 1996: 245). Another factor mentioned in the formation and maintenance of stereotypes are intrinsic features of group dynamics[8], specifically the perception of supposed homogenous in-groups versus perceived out-group homogeneity. Hence, once identity is established over perceived, generally positive, markers of a certain group affiliation, out-group members are regularly subsumed under negative traits: "Out-Group members are not only perceived as possessing less desirable traits than in-group members, they are seen as more homogeneous as well" (Hilton and van Hippel 1996: 247).

The selective processing of only parts of information and the perpetuating selection of certain perceived traits as placeholders for perceived groups, are the main concepts with regard to the analysis of stereotypes in popular media. Hilton and von Hippel label this process as priming: the processing of information based on previous information (1996: 248). This entails that exposure to stereotypical content, for example the sexualised portrayal of a submissive woman in television or in video games, strongly affects the perception of the next encounters with women (see Hilton and von Hippel 1996: 249).

The process of re-evaluating and reinterpreting already ingrained stereotypical perceptions requires, as opposed to their maintenance, regular incongruent input. This is due to an intrinsic information processing bias, whereby "perceivers are more likely to remember, believe, rely on, and communicate stereotype-congruent information than stereotype-incongruent information" (Hilton and von Hippel 1996: 252). Thus, most theories assume that changing stereotypes is only achieved over incremental change with every additional processing of stereotype incongruent information (Hilton and von Hippel 1996: 258). This slow and arduous process is highlighted by various studies examining the development and change of stereotypes in long-term studies displaying the relative persistence of once established ascriptions of characteristics (see for example Diekman and Eagly 2000).

With regard to male and female stereotypes, based on the preceding discussion about gender theory and the generation of stereotypes, it is not surprising that

[8] See again in detail Tajfel (1970) about the intricacies of in- and out-group formations.

gender stereotypes are generally formed not on a continuum but principally consist of binary oppositions. As Copenhaver remarks, "gender is often described by traits that are dichotomous - males take on certain characteristics and females take on the opposite" (2002: 83).

The most general stereotypical ascription of traits can already be deduced from Mulvey's considerations of the portrayal of female characters in films: the man as active, onlooking agent, and the woman as passive, sexualised object. Indeed, as also the subsequent literature review will emphasise, the visual sexualisation of women in popular media is a persistent and regular occurrence. Dill and Thill (2007) and Scharrer (2004) relate the sexualisation of women to the concept of hyperfemininity: "the adherence to a stereotypical and exaggerated feminine gender role idealization that emphasizes dependence, passivity, and a view of women as sexual objects" (Scharrer 2004: 397). This entails the portrayal of women with exaggerated sexual features and revealing clothing to further underline sexual features (see Scharrer 2004: 396). Dill and Thill further note that the perceived visual ideal of the female body manifests itself through displays of a thin stature but with pronounced curves (2007: 852). Conversely, the concept of hypermasculinity emphasises the stereotypical traits of dominance and strength, visually purported through muscularity and aggressive posture (Dill and Thill ibid., Schröder 2008: 246 & 249 or Seidl 2009). Furthermore, Zaitchik and Mosher, in their article about hypermasculine stereotypes, emphasise the ideological concept of "machismo - a world view in which a real man is a fearless, callous, violent warrior" (1993: 228).

In terms of stereotypical roles of men and women, Copenhaver regards the concept of males as "breadwinners and providers" and females as domestic caretakers" as the most dominant marker of gender role dichotomies (2002: 83). Hence, the portrayal of women is regularly related to the role of nurturer, enabler or supporter, whereas men are overwhelmingly displayed in occupational positions, independent and dominant (see for example Smith 2010: 781, Copenhaver 2002: 85, or Talbot 2003: 475).

Various studies have added a plethora of further stereotypical gender traits and characteristics alongside binary lines. Jeffords in 1989 observed a "feminization of loss" (145), whereby women and negative female stereotypes were used as symbol for weakness and loss in popular films but also in newspaper articles and daily politics. The stereotypical traits Jeffords observed included "weakness,

indecisiveness, dependence, emotion, nonviolence, negotiation, unpredictability, deception" as negative female attributions (ibid.).

Even as protagonists, the active role may be subjugated by stereotypical displays in relation to the source of power. As Hobson (2019) ascertains, a regular source of power for powerful women in film and television is their sexuality and beauty, especially in fantasy settings. Hobson regards sexuality as a common fuel for female magical powers as well as seduction as a regular tool for solving conflicts (see Hobson 2019: 52 and 56).

Finally, and most comprehensively, Copenhaver established a thorough list of stereotypical gender traits observed in a large sample of contemporary theatre plays to categorise roles of male and female characters. Copenhaver divided the traits into four broad categories: behaviour characteristics, communication patterns, source of power, and physical appearance (2002: 83). Male behavioural characteristics included, among others, competitiveness, self-confidence, ambition, stability, fearlessness, directness, rationality, and logic (Copenhaver 2002: 83-84). Female behavioural traits included adjectives such as emotional, subjective, irrational, sneaky, non-ambitious, in need of security, nurturing, and gentle (ibid.) In terms of sources of power, Copenhaver observed institutional, political, occupational and technological sources of power as stereotypically male and individual resources, such as beauty, youth, sexuality, and reproductive capabilities as stereotypically female sources of power (2002: 85).

This overview of stereotypical traits and characteristics shows the stark dichotomy between stereotypical representations of women and men: from visual markers in terms of muscularity and strength versus sexualisation and weakness; in terms of their roles: occupation and activity versus nurturer and passivity; and also in terms of behavioural characteristics, impressively documented by Copenhaver. These, by no means exhaustive, enumerations of stereotypical character traits will also serve as the basis for the analysis of archetypes and the overall assessment of the skills available to characters in this thesis.

The consecutive literature review will further demonstrate the regular and persistent display of gender stereotyping. However, the review will also highlight the need to devise new methodological tools to analyse behavioural and narrative aspects which, as extensively argued above, can, and do purport stereotypical portrayals as well.

4. Literature Review

As this thesis is introducing a new methodology to analyse video games from a more holistic angle, it is essential to assess previous works in detail. Hence, the following literature review will not only emphasise the results of previous studies dealing with gender depictions in this medium, but also the methodology used. Video games have changed considerably since the first readily available games, not only in terms of technology and the possibilities in game design due to these advancements, but also in respect to audience and narrative tools used in games. Therefore, the literature review will follow a chronological order to demonstrate that even despite drastic changes of the medium, the tools used to analyse games have been established very early and have been rather rigid ever since.

In general, three strands of research topics can be identified since the earliest works in the 1980s: firstly, displays of violence and possible ramifications of video game play on social, psychological, and behavioural patterns of players[9]; secondly, the depiction of gender and race, especially concerning stereotyping, sexualisation and marginalisation; and thirdly, general research into the composition of the audience, identity and the player base as a whole. Naturally, investigations of gender stereotypes and sexualisation and the methodology used to assess these will be the main focus of this literature review.

While the earliest academic forays into the field of video games were almost exclusively dealing with depictions of violence and possible ramifications on their audience (see for example Gibb et al. 1983, Loftus and Loftus 1983, Selnow 1984, Dominick 1984 or Braun and Giroux 1989), studies ascertaining gender stereotypes were relatively scarce.

Provenzo (1991) conducted one of the first studies which more closely analysed gender stereotypes in video games, setting new standards in the academic examination of the medium. Provenzo recognised video games as a cultural artefact in its own right, positing that games have their own representational systems which in themselves can offer "important insight into values and beliefs that permeate American culture and society" (1991: 23). He also highlighted the interactive nature of video games in contrast to television, and criticised earlier works which were solely occupied with questions of violence and addiction and

[9] Selected works pertaining to this broad category have already been discussed in the respective sections of cultivation theory, social cognitive theory, and gender schema theory. Thus, this strand of research has been excluded from the literature review.

not with the content of the games themselves (Provenzo 1991: 65-66). Provenzo conducted a content analysis, albeit through indirect means by analysing the cover art of prominent Nintendo video games, with regard to depictions of gender and violence, concluding that women were overwhelmingly underrepresented and regularly shown in submissive positions (Provenzo 1991: 108; see also Gailey 1993 obtaining similar results). Despite Provenzo's acknowledgement of the complex nature of video games, the approach of utilising visual impressions of an otherwise interactive medium proved to become an almost universal standard in the works to come.

In 1998, Dietz developed a coding scheme to analyse and identify gender stereotypes which set the foundation for an overwhelming majority of studies to come. Dietz based her research on the concept of video games as an agent of socialisation within the wide array of mass media, which "bombard [...] the child with portrayals of men and women" (428). The coding was based on visual cues ascertaining degrees of sexualisation and victimisation on the one hand, and displays of heroicness at the other end of the spectrum. From the 33 games analysed, the most common pattern observed was the complete absence of women followed by the stereotype of damsel in distress (21% of the games) while only 15% of games portrayed women as heroes (Dietz 1998: 434).

In the same year, Cassell and Jenkins published a collection of essays, aptly titled *From Barbie to Mortal Kombat: gender and computer games* (1998), with the goal to examine, validate or disprove assumptions of gaming and gender and to "propose different tactical approaches for bridging the digital gender gap" (3). The wide array of diverse, and to some degree highly controversial, essays unveils how video games and gender were regarded at this point in time. For example, the article by Subrahmanyam and Greenfield attempts to identify specific features in games which might appeal more to girls. In a concluding statement the authors suggest that "girls like nonaggressive play activities that allow them to create fantasies set in familiar settings with familiar characters", and highlight the *Barbie Fashion Designer,* a dress up doll game developed by Mattel Media in 1996 as positive example (1998: 66). Similarly, in the following chapter, Brunner et al. posit that "[b]oys can use games to escape into a fantasy world which allows them to prepare themselves for the requirements of adult masculinity" whereas "[g]irls need games in which they can rehearse and express the ambiguities and contradictions of femininity" (1998: 87). Contrary to these two chapters

emphasising and reinforcing gender binary conceptualisations, later segments recognise differences the in games played by girls and boys, however raising the question as to why the difference in taste occurs in the first place. Kafai relates it to games reflecting traditional toy designs, which "replicate gender differences" (1998: 90) and advocates for games which offer environments where children can express themselves "to unbounded limits of their imagination rather than confined by boundaries of gender stereotypes" (1998: 110). Even more expressively opposed to the concept of gender binaries, de Castell and Bryson constitute a deeply ingrained gender bias in the societal approach and display of technology itself, relating it to a "heteronormative sexual economy" (1998: 241):

> The question we urge is simply: Whose interests will be served in making use of these purportedly "essential" differences as a basis for creating "girl-friendly" computer-mediated environments? Most importantly, are we producing tools for girls, or are we producing girls themselves by, as Althusser (1984) would put it, "interpellating" the desire to become the girl? (1998: 251).

Accordingly, reviews of the book criticised the highly "clichéd dichotomies" and "gendered dualities" displayed in some chapters of the book (Shade 1999:36).

Following Dietz' study, a large variety of academic works applied and refined the methodology used (see for example Glaubke et al. 2001, Scharrer 2004, Ivory 2006, Mou 2007). Beasley and Standley (2002), for example, devised an elaborate coding scheme (comprised of several categories ranging from sleeve length, neckline, cleavage to lower body clothing, see 284-285) to assess the attire of video game characters, arguing that clothing serves as a "prime indicator of sex roles in our society" (2002: 282). The authors applied the coding scheme to every character appearing on screen within the first 20 minutes of gameplay, observing a significant sexualisation of female characters. The study concludes that the "majority of female characters are dressed in such as [sic] way as to bring attention to their bodies, particularly their breasts, which carry strong sexual meaning" (Beasley and Standley 2002: 289). Naturally, their methodology bears the question in how far the first 20 minutes are reflective of the entire game, however.

Up to this point, visual impressions of limited sections of video games were the only perspective of analysis, which was heavily criticised in Grimes' study in 2003. Grimes emphasised the crucial difference between film and games insisting on a more suitable approach to better incorporate the interactive nature of video games:

> Video games demand the continued, highly attentive involvement of the player. The audience becomes a part of the narrative, making decisions and controlling actions, yet subject to the unanticipated forces and events of the game environment that make up the 'reality' of the gaming experience (Grimes 2003: 1).

Consequently, Grimes opted to play games in their entirety and to assess not only the visual portrayal of female characters, but also the roles occupied by them. In contrast to previous studies, her results reveal a surprising dichotomy: while visually, Grimes generally detected stereotypical beauty ideals and sexualisation, the roles of the characters regularly showed opposing notions of strength and dominance. Grimes concluded that her research could be taken as an example that narrative and gameplay can yield different results in comparison to the analysis of visual cues (2003: 13).

Despite Grimes' findings, the visual analysis of segments of video games or of indirect means such as video game advertisements (Scharrer 2004), pictures in video gaming magazines (Ivory 2006, and Miller and Summers 2007, Dill and Thill 2007), or game trailers and game covers (Mou 2007, Burgess et al. 2007) still remained the dominating analytical approach to the medium, overall yielding similar results as well. For example, Scharrer's study of advertisements, based closely on the scales used by Dietz in 1998, again revealed the general underrepresentation of female characters and their sexualisation in the rare occurrence of portrayals of females, relating it to general conceptualisations of hypermasculinity and hyperfemininity (2004). These findings, but also the underrepresentation of Hispanics, Native Americans, children and elderly persons, were further confirmed by a large scale analysis conducted by Williams et al. (2009), comparing the occurrence of characters in 150 popular games with the national census of the U.S. population. Shaw further corroborated these observations in 2012, attesting video games a "general lack of representation of marginalized groups" (39). While these studies clearly reveal gender stereotypes, none of these regularly cited studies assessed video games as a medium or applied any methodology to gauge narrative elements or the roles of the characters.

The utilisation of indirect sources in place of the games proper naturally elicited regular criticism (see Burgess et al. 2007 or Jansz and Martis 2007). Burgess et al., for example, remarked that video game advertisements, or similar sources, may not be representative of the games themselves, while at the same time maintaining that game covers may very well be a suitable source to assess video game content

(2007: 421). However, in how far game covers can be considered more representative as opposed to adverts for the same product could be considered highly controversial at best.[10] Similarly, Jansz and Martis (2007), despite their critique on the use of indirect sources, also resorted to analyse non-interactive sequences: introductory video sequences of games. Their study assessed the attire of characters by applying a similar coding scheme introduced by Beasley and Standley (2002). However, Jansz and Martis also elaborated on different roles of characters, ascertaining that the rise of video game heroines, labelled as the Lara phenomenon named after the popular video game hero, Lara Croft, leads to a dichotomy in the reception of games:

> On the one hand, they generally play disproportionately thin characters with exaggerated female characteristics that may teach them ideals about femininity and beauty that are possibly damaging to their health.
> On the other hand, the Lara phenomenon may be empowering for female gamers. The female characters they are playing may look odd, but they are competent and occupy a powerful position in the virtual world of the video game. (Jansz & Martis 2007: 147)

These dichotomous interactions between the visual stylisation, the roles of characters from a narrative perspective, and game play features in general, were also highlighted by Ferreira and Hock-Koon in their talk at the Vienna Games Conference (2011) about Princess Peach in *Super Princess Peach* (Nintendo 2005, see the example in the introductory section).

Also, Dill and Thill's study of the visual presentation of characters in video game advertisements in gaming magazines (2007) revealed a similar dichotomy in the depiction of female characters, as not only sexualisation and representation were assessed, but also levels of aggression. Their study again revealed a stark overrepresentation of male characters and a regular sexualisation of female characters by applying an adapted coding system of Dietz's study (1998), with 60% of the 479 coded images showing sexualised women (Dill and Thill 2007: 857). In regard to aggression, 83% of the male and 62% of the female characters were portrayed aggressively (Dill and Thill ibid.). These findings are in contrast

[10] Especially considering that video game covers and advertisement pictures can be identical, as for example the game cover for Red Dead Revolver by Rockstar Games (2004) (a digitalised version of the cover can be found here: https://coverproject.sfo2.cdn.digitaloceanspaces.com/playstation_2/ps2_reddeadrevolver_pal_thumb.jpg (last accessed Nov. 21st 2019). The same picture is used in an advertisement for the game itself: (online: https://www.rockstargames.com/reddeadrevolver/images/splash.jpg last accessed Nov. 21st. 2019). Red Dead Revolver was one of the games analysed in Burgess et al.'s study in 2007.

with comparable earlier studies in terms of displays of female aggression, as the authors elaborate:

> While earlier studies (e.g., Dietz 1998) did not find female characters represented as aggressive, the present investigation found the majority (62.2%) of female characters presented as aggressive. Many of these images of aggressive female video game characters glamorize and sexualize aggression. In recent years, more female video game protagonists have emerged, and some have speculated that this indicates new power and liberation in the image of the female video game character (Dill and Thill 2007: 861).

The results of Jansz and Martis (2007) and Dill and Thill (2007) support the observations by Grimes in 2003. A rise in aggression displayed in portrayals of women may be related to a trend to more active female characters despite still being sexualised on a visual level. Thus, despite the overwhelming majority of studies still resorting to an exclusively visual analysis, the enlarged scope and added focus revealed additional layers aside from the persistent and regular underrepresentation and sexualisation of female characters.

Consecutive studies regularly expanded on the original coding schemes, but did not apply new methodologies. As an example, Downs and Smith‘s extensive content analysis (2010) adapted the methodology used by Dietz (1998) and Beasley and Standley (2002) to assess visual sexualisation in greater detail. The variables included sexually revealing clothing, exposure of skin, body proportion, sexual behaviour, appropriateness of attire, breast size and waist size (see Downs and Smith 2010: 725f). In regard to sexually revealing clothing, Downs and Smith explained:

> This referred to any garment that was worn in order to enhance, exaggerate, call attention to, or accentuate the curves or angles of any part of the body (from the neck to above the knee) and which, by design, would arouse interest of physical intimacy from others. The presence of sexually revealing clothing was coded as yes, no, not applicable, or cannot tell (2010: 725).

Downs and Smith concluded that women were “significantly more likely to be shown partially nude, featured with an unrealistic body image” (2010: 721). However, their examination of the games was based only on the first 20 minutes of each respective game, despite emphasising the complex nature and inherent interactivity of the medium (Downs and Smith 2010: 730). Furthermore, Martins et al. in 2011 shifted the focus on body proportions male characters exclusively and compared the results from games to the average population in the United States. Interestingly, despite analysing over 1000 characters, Martins et al. reported that characters did significantly differ from the average person, but not in

terms of muscle to fat content, which did not adhere to stereotypical beauty standards (see 2011: 47).

Remarkably, the overwhelming majority of the aforementioned studies regularly note the complex and varied nature of video games, emphasising the need for further research from different perspectives, while, at the same time, still applying a research methodology enabling to capture only one element of a multi-faceted medium.

As an exception to the seemingly standard procedure, Schröder attempted to adopt a different approach, albeit with a very limited sample size, in his investigation into three popular role playing games, the *Gothic* Series (*Gothic* 2001, *Gothic 2* 2002, and *Gothic 3* 2006) by Piranha Bytes in 2008. Schröder based his methodology on the aforementioned work of Grimes in 2003, emphasising the interactive nature and the roles occupied by the respective characters in the games. Despite a more holistic approach, Schröder‘s findings coincide mostly with previous studies. Women in the three games analysed were generally underrepresented, passive and objectified: “gender roles remain stereotypical in the examined game series and female characters serve a decorative function rather than being vital for quests or story” (Schröder 2008: 253).

A completely new approach was undertaken by Seidl in 2009, making use of the toolset of cultural geography, to identify body positions and posture. According to Seidl, the visual is crucial, as gender, space and body are embedded in the visual, all of these carrying subconscious connotations of gender differentiation (see Seidl 2009: 48-49). Seidl analysed games which, on a surface level, offer the same environment and possibility for action for female and male characters. On closer examination however, even games like *World of Warcraft* (Blizzard Entertainment 2004) where players freely choose the gender of the protagonist, subtle details reveal gender biases (Seidl 2009: 57). Hence, despite female characters occupying any role the players select, their posture and body language still convey a submissive position (Seidl 2009: 60).

Aside from the regular focus on visual elements exclusively, a majority of studies adopted a purely synchronic perspective in their analysis. Considering the advancements of video games as a medium, not only from a technological perspective, but also in terms of narrative, complexity and player interaction, the overall lack of diachronic analyses is striking. Rajkowska‘s study (2014) however, did not only adopt a diachronic perspective using a comparatively large sample

size of 22 games, but also combined the analysis of visuals with discursive elements to assess differences between females in a protagonist, and in a support role. The study revealed that recent games featured relatively more female protagonists as well as support characters compared to games in the 1990s (Rajkowska 2014: 16 and 26). Moreover, the analysis showed that female characters in protagonist roles were presented as generally independent, strong, active and non-stereotyped, while females in supporting roles were perceived regularly in a stereotypical manner in appearance, as well as in the narrative (Rajkowska 2014: 61).

Another large scale diachronic study, albeit purely focusing on visual elements, was conducted by Lynch et al. (2016). Their study analysed the appearances of playable female characters in titles released between 1983 and 2014 and observed that "sexualisation diminished since an observed height in the 1990s" (564). Specifically, games released after 2006 showed a strong decrease in sexualisation of female characters (Lynch et al. 576) while at the same time the amount of female characters in supporting or main roles increased (Lynch et al. 577).

Adding to the rather sparse research methodology, Gao et al. (2017) undertook a mixed methods analysis of the immensely popular competitive online game *League of Legends* by Riot Games (2009). The game features over 140 unique characters categorised in overarching roles, largely dictating the play style of the chosen character. Gao et al. investigated character choice and role preferences by players, as well as the representations of gender by the characters and their respective roles in the game. In terms of representation of gender and character roles, Gao et al.'s study revealed that the support and healer role in the game *League of Legends* is overwhelmingly occupied by female characters, which are also predominantly played by women (2017: 315). Interestingly, the study also showed that the choice of character serves differing purposes: female players tend to select female characters as identity-exploration and re-affirmation, whereas male players choose characters primarily on roles and skills available (Gao et al. 2017: 308-309, also see for example Ratan et al. 2012, and further confirmed in Ratan et al. 2019). Gao et al. assume that the gender bias may also be related to female players opting to play support roles to avoid direct confrontation (2017: 316) and due to support roles being easier to learn which however has been disproven by another study by Ratan et al. (2015) which revealed similar skill accrue between male and female players (455). In conclusion, Gao et al. emphasise

the importance of female characters being able to fill different roles to offer female players an explorative experience while still playing as their own gender (2017: 316). Or, as Ratan et al. succinctly conclude in their most recent study on gender bias in multiplayer games:

> if an avatar with a specific functionality only comes in one gender—male—then women will be less likely to choose that avatar, regardless of functionality. Hence, by offering more female avatar options, game designers could augment their player base as a whole, gaining female players while retaining male players [...] while also promoting gender diversity (2019: 256).

These studies by Gao et al. (2017) and Ratan et al. (2019) point to an important factor in video game research: video game characters are able to convey roles and behaviour through their available play style which, in turn, can strongly influence gender perceptions and even may generate, reinforce or subvert supposed sex-congruency of behaviour as assumed by gender schema theory (see above). However, as demonstrated, the overwhelming majority of video game studies, limited by their methodology, were not able to assess these factors.

One final note on the research into violence and video games: in 2015, Ferguson undertook a meta-analysis including over 100 studies over the last two decades, concluding that "video game influences on increased aggression [...] are minimal" (646). Ferguson cautioned to use more concrete and defining labels and research methods especially pertaining to violence and video games and their diverse nature:

> it is possible that the very concept of violent video game is of limited utility, serving mainly a political and moral purpose rather than a scientific one. It may be valuable for researchers in the field to move beyond such simplistic and moralistic concepts to better understand the full range of video game experiences (2015: 657).

Ferguson's call to avoid simplistic concepts can be applied to the study of gender representations in games as well. Despite more and more studies using different tools and arriving at more complex results, the adherence to Dietz's initial coding scheme, attempting to gauge sexualisation and gender disparity through visual clues, still sees regular use (see for example Near 2013, Nicholl 2017, Behm-Morawitz 2017, or Acker 2018).

Although there is a common consensus among many of the reviewed works that interactivity is a key element of video games, the analysis of the visual is not consistent with this statement. Beasley and Standley specifically note that interactivity of games necessitates a thorough analysis as "the intense engagement

with the media product [...] makes analysing the gender role characteristics of video game characters an important part of understanding what children may be learning during their play time" (2002: 282). Still, Beasley and Standley only analysed the first 20 minutes of game content to eliminate "skill inhibitors" (2002: 284), with numerous other studies justifying their approach with similar arguments (see for example Burgess et al. 2007: 421). Ivory, who analysed video game adverts, admits that "[t]he precise content experienced by a video game player, however, depends on the experience, skill, and time commitment of the player, among other factors" (2006: 104). However, this notion of player experience already implies varying dimensions and categories for research, as Wolf ascertains: video games are "not just a window but a tool that allows one to (metaphorically) reach through the window frame to find things and manipulate and interact with them instead of just viewing them" (2006: 117). He proposes two dimensions to view games:

> the self-contained diegetic world of the game itself and the way the player is (or can be) involved within it. [...] Most existing methods of image analysis deal with two-dimensional images and were not designed to deal with three-dimensional worlds seen through the window of the image, much less interactive ones. (Wolf 2006: 117)

Consequently, Wolf to incorporate a research methodology combining the analysis of the visual world, but also of the experience of the player manipulating, controlling and navigating the world (see Wolf 2006: 117). Wolf's arguments can further be supported by the specific intricacies accompanying the gaming experience as detailed above.

This is also the intrinsic argument of the present study: A multi-faceted medium such as an interactive video game, which not only passively stimulates visual senses, but requires the player to act, interact, make judgements, decisions and steer the way the game unfolds, requires a more holistic approach of analysis. Naturally, as the literature review shows in great detail, the visual representation of female characters has been problematic throughout the history of gaming, hence the portrayal of characters cannot be ignored. But, as works of Grimes (2003), Jansz and Martis (2007), Rajkowska (2014) or Gao et al. (2017) demonstrate, the application of new toolsets may yield different results, yet again reflecting the complex nature of video games.

Ivory's statement about time investment (see above), however, reveals a very practical issue of analysing games: their relative length. As opposed to films and

even TV shows, games vary greatly in length, with completion times regularly moving beyond the 50 hour mark. *Borderlands 3* by Gearbox Software (2019) for example, part of the present thesis, averages 96 hours of play time according to the aggregate website gamelengths.com for a single playthrough. Other games, with no defined ending, such as multiplayer games, completely elude the concept of completion time, a popular example being *World of Warcraft*, where game time is not measured by hours but by days played, ranging from 4-5 days to 10-14 days played for inexperienced players to even reach the highest level according to popular online guides[11].

Hence, as the following segment will detail, this thesis attempts to combine the established methodology of analysing visual character portrayals and gender differences presented through body features and attire with an anticipation of the player experience depending on the character chosen. Based on the foundations of the extensive research into roles of the popular online game *League of Legends* (Riot Games 2009), the thesis will attempt to grasp and categorise each playable protagonist based on their respective abilities and skills to anticipate a specific role and a suggested optimal gameplay style to assess coherences or dichotomies compared to the visual representation of the characters.

[11] See for example the in-depth playing guides provided by the gaming community of Ivy Veins (2019): icyveins.com/wow-classic/leveling-guide

5. Methodology

The thesis at hand attempts to further develop and add to the existing corpus of video game research analysing gender stereotyping. As detailed in the literature review, the overwhelming majority of research made use of film theory toolsets to analyse visual representations in video games. Narrative structures, performances of characters, and the active component of the player and their experience within the game world are in need of further analysis. Hence, this research will approach stereotyping in video games by applying three differing analysis tools to better gauge the complex and interactive nature of the medium.

The overarching questions posited in this thesis are to which degree gender stereotypes are represented in the visual portrayal of selectable protagonists and which, possibly stereotypical, roles these characters occupy within the game world. The roles of the playable characters thereby also may allow assumptions about the player experience based on the character selected and their respective gender. These two indicators, the visual perspective and the role-based categorisation will be compared to reveal dichotomies or similarities between visual representation and behavioural characteristics. This comparison is paramount to assess whether the study of imagery of video game characters would serve as a sufficient predictor of the traits and abilities a character can attain within the game world. Finally, the skill descriptions and their visual representations will be analysed from a narrative perspective as well, in order to determine whether stereotypical ascriptions can be deduced from the sources of power of each character. Therefore, the main research questions and their sub-questions are:

R1) Do the visual representations of the protagonists carry stereotypical connotations?

R2) Which roles can the protagonists assume in the game world based on their abilities?

R2.1) Do the roles occupied carry stereotypically male or female ascriptions?

R2.2) Can a pattern be deduced about typical video game roles pertaining to male and female characters?

R3) From a narrative perspective, do the skill descriptors reveal stereotypical descriptions as to their sources of power?

R4) Are the visual representations of the characters coherent with their role assumed in the game?

5.1. Selection of primary texts

To guarantee a proper comparative analysis contrasting male and female characters visually as well as based on their abilities, video games had to be selected which fulfilled a variety of properties.

First of all, games were required to offer a selection of two or more playable characters with a minimum of one male and one female option. An exception was made for games that would allow to play two or more protagonists interchangeably, but still maintaining the minimum of one male and one female. This setup provides an ideal basis for comparison, as each character selected would be able to complete the game, thus the only differences offered by the game design would be the approach and the solutions offered to overcome obstacles.

Moreover, the video games would need the player to allow the use different skills and abilities based on the character chosen with not every ability available to each respective character. This also excluded role playing games which offered "blank canvas" protagonists, with the player being able to select gender, abilities, traits and roles independently of each other, such as the popular *Dark Souls* series (2011 From Software Entertainment) or games which had predefined protagonists but allowed the player to select gender independently of character class as in *Diablo III* (2012 Blizzard Entertainment) for example. The individual abilities and skills are necessary to categorise each protagonist and allocate the most likely role they would assume. Consequently, most of the games used in this analysis can be classified as role playing games, a classic genre allowing the player to pick a pre-defined character, regularly with a defined back story and set visuals, and abilities and equipment to acquire. Furthermore, only games were chosen that allowed the completion of the story in a single player setting, with multiplayer, if it all available, being entirely optional. Moreover, to add recency and relevance, the games had to be released within the last 10 years, with an exception being made for Diablo 2, which is still played extensively by a large community and actively seeing support and additional content through fan modifications.

Finally, from a technical standpoint, only games were considered which were released on either PC, or the current generation of gaming consoles, Xbox One (Microsoft) or Playstation 4 (Sony Interactive Entertainment). The mobile gaming

market has been excluded on purpose, as the sheer amount of games released on a daily basis is staggering. Moreover, to assure proper quality and impact of the games in respect of audience and general coverage, only games were considered which featured on the review aggregate website metacritic.com with generally favourable, and at least 10 different, reviews. Through the application of these criteria, the following sample was attained (in order of release date):

1. Diablo 2 + Lord of Destruction Expansion (2001)
2. Borderlands (Gearbox Software 2009)
3. Borderlands 2 (Gearbox Software 2012)
4. Assassin‘s Creed: Syndicate (Ubisoft Montreal 2015)
5. Dishonored 2 (Arkane Studios 2016)
6. Octopath Traveler (Square Enix 2018)
7. Borderlands 3 (Gearbox Software 2019)

5.2. Visual Analysis

To obtain a comparable sample, the moment of character selection was selected to conduct the visual analysis of the character models. Only one game, Assassin‘s Creed Syndicate, did not contain a comparable selection screen, hence the moment of first control of each character was selected.

The rationale behind the choice of the character selection screen was based on the theoretical assumption of the moment of the largest impact in the choice of the character based on visuals. Additionally, some of the games use the first person camera angle (which lets the player experience the game through the eyes of the protagonist, see for example the entire Borderlands series or Dishonored 2) making the character model invisible during actual game play, while other games allow the player to alter clothing and appearance through items acquired while playing (Diablo 2 for example) which would change appearance based on player preference and would lead to inconsistencies.

In order to assess the visual element of this study, scales were designed to analyse clothing, body proportions and posture including facial expressions. The scales were generally based on previous academic works, especially the research of Downs and Smith (2010), Dill and Thill (2007), Scharrer (2004) and Beasley and Standley (2002).

Ultimately, eight scales were designed pertaining to four categories. The aim was to grasp the major themes of male and female stereotyping: active or passive

representation of the character, sexualisation and objectification of the character, muscularity, posture and facial expression.

Category	Options	Definitions
1. Gender	male - female - cannot tell	
2. Clothing		
2.1. Level of skin exposed	fully clothed - partially clothed - naked	Fully clothed was defined as upper and lower body covered, showing only arms, or lower legs. Partially clothed was defined as showing legs in their entirety, cleavage or pectoral muscles, or midriff. Naked pertained to only wearing underwear.
2.2. Sexually connotated clothing	yes - no - cannot tell	Sexually connotated clothing pertained to any clothing item, including shoes, highlighting or accentuating curves or "any part of the body (from the neck to above the knee) and which, by design, would arouse interest of physical intimacy from others" (Downs and Smith 2010: 725).
3. Body proportions		
3.1. Level of muscularity	hypermuscular - strong - average - thin - skinny	
3.2. Waist size	small - average - large - cannot tell	In relation to the character model
3.3. Breast size	flat - average - over-average - voluptuous	Only applicable to female characters; Also in relation to character model
4. Posture and facial expression		
4.1. Level of activity in posture	active - passive - cannot tell	
4.2. Sexual allusions in posture and/or facial expression	yes - no - cannot tell	This included any stance, gesture, or facial expressions that would evoke sexual connotations, for example blowing a kiss, highlighting cleavage or the posterior

Table 1: Visual Coding scheme with scales and descriptors

For the coding process, three independent coders were recruited, the scales and definitions sent beforehand and explained once more before the coding. Consequently, each character selection screen was shown using in-game visuals either over a television set or a computer screen, highlighting every character if

selection would change stance, expression or any other feature. Sufficient time was provided for the coding of each character in the game before the next game was displayed. The coding results among the three coders only differed minimally with general agreement on most characters and scales. Thus, based on the very small number of coders and coherent overall results, an analysis of inter-rater reliability was not conducted.

5.3. Analysis of the roles and sources of power

To be able to categorise and analyse stereotypical ascriptions of the roles the protagonists were able to assume within the limitations of the video games, the available abilities and skills were assessed to estimate the player experience for each individual character. In a first step, depending on the abilities offered, each character was categorised in a broad archetype derived from a long standing tradition of fantasy role playing games.

The overarching classification of fantasy characters based on their abilities and roles can be traced back to the development of the popular board game *Dungeons and Dragons* (Gygax and Arneson 1974). The computer gaming magazine giantbomb[12] summarises the classic gaming archetypes of role playing games as consisting of a "tank," a front line warrior dealing damage in close quarter combat and taking the majority of the damage received from enemies; the damage dealing class, generally a hunter, rogue, or wizard archetype not designed to receive damage; and a healer or supporter, keeping everyone alive and supporting the party with combat enhancements or abilities which decrease enemy threat (giantbomb.com). A vast majority of video games are basing their games on this concept of divided roles based on abilities, see for example *World of Warcraft* (2004 Blizzard Entertainment) or *League of Legends* (2009 Riot Games), two of the most popular online multiplayer games.

Consequently, the archetypes were largely based on the latest rulebook for character generation of the Dungeons and Dragons board game[13] as well as the general distribution of roles by the game *League of Legends* by Riot Games (2009). This resulted in the following list entailing five archetypes, accompanied by typical stereotypical ascriptions:

[12] Article to be found online: https://www.giantbomb.com/classes/3015-405/
[13] See online: https://media.wizards.com/2018/dnd/downloads/DnD_BasicRules_2018.pdf

Archetype	Abilities and Traits	Possible male Stereotypes	Possible female Stereotypes
Warrior	close quarters combat; being able to receive damage; possible incentive to receive damage; strength as factor;	aggression; activeness; directness; strength; muscularity; fearlessness;	
Rogue	close quarters combat; generally avoiding damage taken; use of deception, stealth, tricks to enter and leave combat;	aggression; activeness; directness;	deception; stealth; physical weakness
Hunter	ranged combat; avoiding direct enemy encounter; use of pets or summoned creatures to aid;	activeness;	indirectness; passiveness; dependence; physical weakness
Wizard	use of spells and abilities from distance; avoid direct damage and confrontation	activeness;	passiveness; physical weakness
Supporter	availability of healing, supporting or enabling abilities;	protective (in combination with warrior archetype)	passiveness; physical weakness; caretaker; enabler; nurturer;

Table 2: Coding scheme of roles with regular stereotypical ascriptions

Thus, based on this list, abilities were analysed and categorised to deduce the general archetype. Additionally, the play style based on the abilities offered was assessed, highlighting apparent stereotypes conveyed. However, not every possible male or female stereotype had to be present, rather the abilities offered were used as basis for the allocation of stereotypes. Moreover, various characters could assume various roles, thus they were categorised as all archetypes offered by the skills of the character. Eventually, through this procedure, every role of the protagonists could be analysed and compared to the visual representation and their gender. The aim was to assess if, given the same game environment, the games, by design, would allocate stereotypical abilities and therefor roles to their characters, and in how far these would be reflected by the visual representation.

It is important to note at this point that every game can be completed with every character. Moreover, players are not forced to use or select any abilities. However, the games generally incentivise the use of a coherent and consistent set

of abilities (normally introduced through skill trees whereby consecutive skills enhance or are related to previous skills). Thus, playing the games against the intended game design may make the games increasingly difficult or only beatable with a considerably increased time investment. Hence, it can be assumed that the average player would adhere to a coherent ability selection and role.

Finally, all games in this thesis were actively played to attain a feeling of the talents and abilities and to assure that the descriptions of the abilities and skills would be reflected in the game play itself. While this thesis attempts to use skills and abilities as game play predictors, the active game play itself may not be necessary, but was nevertheless undertaken to assure correctness and consistency.

As a final part of the analysis, the source of power was assessed through the skill descriptions and visuals offered within the game. This adds a narrative layer to analyse the use of stereotypes through the abilities and skills obtained by each character. As a basis, the categorisation of Copenhaver (2002, see above) was used to assign the sources of power to either, stereotypically male, occupational or institutional sources, or to, stereotypically female, individual sources. Moreover, the analysis of the source of power can further contribute to the overall assessment of the representation of the characters in their entirety.

6. The Visual versus the Role[14]

6.1. Diablo 2 + Expansion: Lord of Destruction (Blizzard North 2001)[15]

Diablo 2, albeit almost 20 years old, is still regularly played and still receives some maintenance by its original developers. Furthermore, a relatively large group of players continually produce additional content and modifications for the game, adding different and more challenging tasks, new worlds and new enemies. Diablo 2 can be subsumed under the Hack'n'Slash Role Playing Game genre or Action Role Playing Game genre in a broader sense. The nameless protagonist is selected upon the start of the game in an animated selection screen. Narratively, the game tasks the player to overcome the forces of the final antagonists Diablo and Baal who threaten to destroy the world. The setting is strongly reminiscent of classic fantasy literature, but replete with dark and biblical tones regularly alluding to Milton's Paradise Lost. Apart from the narrative itself, a secondary (meta-)goal is implied: to develop their character to beat further difficulty levels after completing the first playthrough, requiring the player to collect items, weapons and to gain levels which enables the player to invest in skills and attributes. This loot-based and level-based concept has since been used in numerous games, giving the game a seemingly endless playtime and depth. Upon every regular level-up the player can choose one talent (including several ranks of each talent to further enhance the ability) from three different trees, generally offering differing themes or groups of abilities. The game can be played either in single player or multiplayer mode with up to seven teammates.

The playable characters encompass a female amazon, a female assassin, a male necromancer, a male barbarian, a male paladin, a female sorceress and a male druid.

[14] As indicated, the analysis and coding was conducted via direct use of the games. However, for easier reference, links to the character selection screen and an ability overview were provided through internet sources if available. A complete list of available character selection screens and ability overviews can be found in the bibliography under the respective games.

[15] The animated character selection screen can be found here:
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=pabATVUBTio
An overview of all abilities and skills per character: https://www.d2calculator.com/lod/.

The Amazon

Visual Analysis:

The Amazon‘s clothing was classified as partially clothed, as well as sexually connotated, accentuating her legs and her high heels. Physically, the Amazon was considered strong and her breast size as voluptuous. The posture was considered active with no sexual allusions through her stance, gesture or facial expression.

Assessment of abilities and role:

The Amazon‘s two main combat skill trees (*Javelin and Spear Skills,* and *Bow and Crossbow* Skills*)* either enhance her direct fighting abilities with spears or javelins, or her use of ranged weaponry. The talents *Jab, Fend* and *Ground Slam* in the first talent tree all reward combat in very close proximity to the enemy. The third tree (*Passive and Magic Skills*) enhances her survivability and adds additional tools to her kit. Her survivability depends on dodging attacks, thus avoiding damage (see the talents *Dodge, Avoid* and *Evade*) or summoning a *Valkyrie* to distract enemies.

The Amazon, depending on the talents chosen, either pertains to the warrior or ranged hunter archetype. Her survivability, even as a warrior archetype, is dependent on avoidance or summoned creatures, which supposes physical fragility. Thus, within the character of the Amazon, a duality of stereotypes can be observed: the possibility for stereotypical male aggression and strength, wielding close combat weapons, as well as the ranged fighting potential using bows and staying away from close quarters combat both emphasising physical fragility.

The skills do not offer any insight in the sources of power the Amazon is drawing from.

Comparison of visuals and characteristics:

The warrior archetype is strongly presumed through the Amazon‘s abilities, however, depending on player choice, the Amazon can also be played as a ranged hunter archetype. Her visual impressions are ambiguous as well. Her physique can be considered as muscular and strong, however her clothing and accentuation are sexually stereotyped, drawing attention to her long and naked legs complete with high heels adding further emphasis to the lower body. The class name, the entire depiction and the nexus of strength and sexuality strongly allude to the Amazon stereotype in popular media as well as in classical literature (see for example Hardwick 1990).

The Assassin

Visual Analysis:

The female Assassin is wearing partially revealing clothing, especially in regard to visible cleavage. Her body proportions were considered as average featuring a small waist size, further accentuating her over-average breast size. Her posture was classified as active and non-sexual.

Assessment of abilities and role:

Similar to the Amazon, the Assassin can make use of various abilities and skills, allowing for a wide range of different gameplay options. The first set of talents under the *Martial Arts Skills* tree allow the assassin to fight with her fists and feet instead of the use of weaponry. Every active skill in this tree requires the Assassin to fight in close proximity to the target. The tree does not offer any protective talents, thus it can be assumed that the playstyle would involve killing targets before dying herself. The second tree, *Shadow Disciplines Skills,* mainly revolves around the use of melee weapons such as claws (*Claw Mastery)* and talents reminiscent of telekinesis, such as *Mind Blast* and *Psychic Hammer*. Moreover, the *Weapon Block* talent enables the Assassin to block attacks in direct confrontation with enemies. The tree additionally involves abilities offering deception and subtlety, such as *Shadow Master* or *Shadow Warrior*. The final tree, *Trap Skills*, offers the Assassin a multitude of abilities to overcome enemies from a distance, ranging from traps (*Lightning Sentry* or *Death Sentry*), throwing grenades (*Fire Blast*) or daggers (*Blade Furry*).

The first two talent trees incentivise aggressive play, requiring the Assassin to move into melee range and either use her fists or her weaponry to overcome enemies, displaying stereotypical male traits such as aggressiveness, activeness, and directness. The second tree offers some tools which can be linked to indirectness and deception, regularly regarded as female stereotypes. The final tree conversely offers a stereotypical female playstyle, staying away from direct combat, using indirect means such as traps. In sum, the Assassin can be categorised as warrior or rogue archetype depending on the skills used.

The first two trees in particular regularly reference martial arts and fighting sports as sources of power, hence an institutional background can be assumed.

Comparison of visuals and characteristics:

Similar to the Amazon, the Assassin character is on the one hand portrayed in a rather sexual way, drawing attention to her upper body through the obvious

display of cleavage especially in combination with her over-average breast size. Her abilities, however, encompass a mixture of stereotypically male and female ascriptions. Her focus on martial arts, the use of bare fists and feet to fight enemies in close range in combination with her sources of power, generally relating to combat sports, heavily emphasise stereotypically male traits such as strength, aggression and directness. Her strong body type does add emphasis to these abilities as well. While some abilities can be related to the traits deception and stealth, generally considered female stereotypes, in sum the Assassin is a powerful, strong character, subverted by her obvious sexualisation in her visual portrayal.

The Necromancer

Visual Analysis:

The male Necromancer is fully clothed, wearing what appears to be heavy armour, especially drawing attention to the massive shoulder protection. His clothing does not carry any sexual connotations. His level of muscularity is considered strong, which is further accentuated by his armour. His posture was coded as active and non-sexual.

Assessment of abilities and role:

The Necromancer‘s abilities are divided upon three different skill trees, *Summoning Spells, Poison and Bone Spells*, and *Curses*. The first tree allows the player to raise golems and skeletons to fight for the protagonist (*Raise Skeleton, Skeletal Mage, Clay Golem* or *Blood Golem* among other skills) or to passively increase the abilities of the summoned minions. The second tree offers a single ability that would enhance the Necromancer‘s ability to use weapons in direct combat (*Poison Dagger)* whereas the other abilities add spells to his arsenal to dispatch of enemies from afar, all based around the use of bones, cadavers and poisons. The final tree, *Curses,* adds utility spells to his arsenal which enhance the entire group if played in a multiplayer setting as well. The Necromancer hereby possess the ability to indirectly heal allied players (*Life Tap* ability) or to lower the damage taken by party members (*Weaken*).

The skill descriptors generally allude to themes of dark magic, wizardry and occults, however not revealing any institutionalised source nor emotions or sexuality as a bolstering force of his abilities.

The first tree adheres to the hunter stereotype, using minions to take the damage and to deal with enemies exclusively. These abilities can be subsumed

under generally female stereotypes, avoiding direct combat, and a passive approach to combat. Even more so, the full focus on minions would assume dependence on others as another strong female stereotype. His second tree, however, allows the player to make use of magical abilities reminiscent of the wizard archetype, albeit with a different theme. Finally, the *Curses* available and the general control offered in the *Poison and Bone* skill tree additionally enables the Necromancer to support and enhance optional party members. The varied options available consequently allow the player to choose between a hunter, wizard or supporter archetype while playing the Necromancer.

Comparison of visuals and characteristics:

The necromancer‘s visual strength conveyed through his body type and armour is not reflected in his abilities. His abilities, depending on abilities taken, fulfil the archetypes of either hunter, wizard or supporter, with the overwhelming theme relating to physical weakness or dependence on minions or party members.

The Barbarian

Visual Analysis:

The Barbarian is presented as naked, only wearing cloth covering his hips. He is considered hypermuscular with an average waist size. His posture is active and non-sexual. His entire visual portrayal represents a stereotypical aggressive warrior, displaying violent gestures and a battle cry as the player selects the character. His face is covered with what appears to be war painting.

Assessment of abilities and role:

The Barbarian‘s first ability tree, *Warcries*, allows the player to use shouts and war cries to weaken enemies (*Battle Cry* and *Battle Cry*) but also to support and strengthen other players in the Barbarian‘s party (*Shout, Battle Orders, Battle Command*). Moreover, the ability *Taunt* forces all enemies to target and attack the Barbarian, a staple of warrior gameplay, drawing attention from weaker characters. The second tree, *Combat Masteries,* generally enhance the Barbarian‘s ability to wield different weapons, including swords, spears, daggers, polearms or maces. The tree also offers the player the skills to enhance the Barbarian‘s ability to withstand damage in direct combat, improving his defence and resistances to magical spells (*Iron Skin, Natural Resistance*).

His final tree, *Combat Skills,* adds a varied and wide arsenal of specific abilities to the Barbarian‘s fighting capability, generally focusing on the use of weaponry

(*Frenzy* and *Double Swing* giving the player the ability to use two weapons at once for example).

Interestingly, the first tree would characterise the Barbarian as a pure supporter, with almost all abilities, apart from the *Taunt* ability, enhancing the party which is also specifically stated in the skill descriptions. However, the sources of power are, especially in this tree, alluding to aggressiveness and fear over the use of battle cries to intimidate enemies and thereby supporting his party. Thus, the abilities rather reflect the male stereotype of protector than the female stereotype of nurturer or caretaker. The two other trees fully suit the warrior archetype, all enforcing and incentivising aggressive and direct game play up front and in direct contact with enemies.

Comparison of visuals and characteristics:

The Barbarian‘s character model, displaying strength, aggression and violence, is in full accordance with his offered play style of an archetypical warrior. His access to support abilities can be, based on his visuals, the skill descriptors and the sources of power, categorised under the male stereotype of protector rather than the female stereotype of nurturer.

The Paladin

Visual Analysis:

The paladin is clothed in full plate armour, featuring a shield and a sword, hence the character is classified as fully clothed and non sexual in respect of his attire. Moreover, he was regarded strong with an average waist size, active and non-sexualised in posture.

Assessment of abilities and role:

The paladin‘s skill set overwhelmingly affects and benefits teammates. From the 10 available abilities in his first ability tree, *Defensive Auras*, 9 directly benefit players in his party, increasing various player statistics (*Vigor, Meditation*), adding defence (*Defiance*), or increasing resistances to elemental attacks (*Resist Cold, Resist Fire, Resist Lightning*). Also his second tree predominantly enhances the abilities of his teammates, boosting their combat abilities (*Blessed Aim, Concentration, Fanaticism*) or indirectly dealing damage to nearby enemies through auras (*Holy Freeze, Thorns).* Thus, the first two skill trees incentivise passive and supportive behaviour by the player, indirectly dealing damage over his auras and enabling party members. Even the final tree, *Combat Abilities,* does

contain skills which further benefit teammates, including a direct healing spell (*Holy Bolt).* Aside from this, the abilities are comprised of skills alluding to wizard-like spells (*Blessed Hammer, Fist of the Heavens)* and a few options to increase melee combat capability either through damaging abilities (*Zeal, Vengeance*) or through boosting his own defence (*Smite, Holy Shield*).

The paladin‘s skillset overwhelmingly classifies the character as supporter with the majority of skills aiding and enabling party members. Even a wide array of his damaging abilities revolve around passivity and indirect damage dealing through his auras. However, some abilities relate to the stereotypically male trait of fearlessness and stability.

The paladin‘s entire skillset revolves around the theme of holiness and divinity as a source of power, relating to the church as institutional source.

Comparison of visuals and characteristics:

The paladin‘s visual strength, activeness and display of weaponry and heavy armour is not reflected in his skillset which overwhelmingly enforces passive, supporting play, even pertaining to his offensive abilities in general.

The Sorceress

Visual Analysis:

The sorceress is clothed in a tight, bright dress, showing cleavage, and legs, thus she was considered partially clothed and visually sexualised. Her body type was regarded as thin with average waist and breast size. The sorceress‘ animation upon selection emphasises her legs and was considered active and sexual.

Assessment of abilities and role:

The three skill trees available to the Sorceress generally offer cold, lightning and fire spells respectively. Almost all skills acquirable enhance the Sorceress‘ ranged fighting capability, giving her various tools to attack enemies from afar and avoid close range combat. Only one ability available in the *Fire Spells* tree would enhance the use of a melee weapon in close combat (*Enchant*) which is also usable on minions or party members.

Additionally, some skills (see for example *Teleport* in the *Lightning Spells* tree) allow the Sorceress to quickly move out of combat and out of harm‘s way. The *Cold Spells* tree features shield spells protecting the Sorceress from damage taken (*Frozen Armor, Shiver Armor, Chilling Armor)*. Moreover, under the *Lightning Spells* tree, *Energy Shield* lets the sorceress absorb damage with her resource, Mana,

instead of health, further underlining her fragile physical stature. The Sorceress cannot learn any supporting or healing spells, and the spell descriptors do not detail the sources of power aside from generically referencing the elements used by each spell.

In sum, the role of the Sorceress fully occupies the mage archetype, straying far away from harm and using the elements to overcome adversaries. Thus, in regard to stereotypes, the Sorceress combines the female traits of physical weakness but also the typically male traits of activeness and independence as her magical abilities allow the player to combat large groups of enemies as long as the player avoids direct contact.

Comparison of visuals and characteristics:

Her visual weakness through the presentation of her physique is consistent with her available skills, making use of ranged spells and not possessing any ability to enter close ranged combat successfully. However, her sexualisation and objectification do subvert her power and strength in terms of magical abilities and her overall activeness and independence.

The Druid

Visual Analysis:

Diablo 2's Druid class is fully clothed in a mixture of heavy furs, broad shoulder pads and light cloth. Neither the clothing nor the active posture are sexually connotated. In terms of body proportions, the character stands out as the tallest of the available classes, with an average waist size and thin in stature.

Assessment of abilities and role:

The Druid features three highly diverse skill trees all revolving around themes of nature and wild animals. The first skill tree, *Elemental Skills*, consists of wizard-like spells with themes of nature, wind and earth magic, for example allowing the player to conjure damaging tornados (*Tornado)* or launch fiery boulders at enemies (*Molten Boulder).*

The second set of abilities, *Shapeshifting Skills*, allows the Druid to either shift to a werewolf (*Werewolf*) or a bear (*Werebear*). The consecutive abilities all enhance and add to the shapeshifting forms, making the Druid in shifted form more durable or allowing the character to deal more damage in close combat.

The final tree, *Summoning Skills*, is divided into three sub-categories. The first set are summonable spirits (*Oak Sage, Heart of Wolverine, Spirit of Barbs)* which

are supporting and healing the entire party. The second set is comprised of summonable animals, including ravens, wolves, and a bear (*Summon Grizzly).* The last three abilities allow the player to summon various vines which deal minor damage but heal and replenish mana.

Considering all abilities, the Druid can be classified either as wizard with focus on the first tree, or as a warrior with his shapeshifting abilities allowing him to enter direct combat. The final tree only adds a few different abilities, apparently only meant to compliment the other available skills. Naturally, the stereotypical ascriptions change depending on the archetype chosen, either, as shapeshifter, incentivising aggressive, direct game play, or a more defensive, passive game play with the conjured spells dealing with the enemies.

In terms of the Druid‘s sources of his abilities, the skills only allude to themes of nature and wild animals, but do not reveal any direct or indirect relation to the terms of acquisition.

Comparison of visuals and characteristics:

The Druid is the most diverse character within the game, combining two rather divergent archetypes, the wizard and the warrior, through his available abilities. The wizard spells, on the one hand, are even more so a passive version of classic spells, as the player summons tornados and boulders which move on their own after the summoning. On the other hand, the ability to shift into a powerful melee character, mauling and clawing through enemies in close combat, naturally relates to aggression and directness. This dichotomy is consistent with his average visual appearance not being defined over muscularity or physical weakness.

Summary:

Diablo 2 offers the player seven characters in total, comprised of three women and four men. The three female characters respectively offer the player the archetypes of the warrior (Amazon and Assassin) with added elements of the archetypical rogue or hunter, and the wizard archetype represented by the Sorceress. All three female characters are sexualised in terms of their attire or posture, highlighting and drawing attention to their cleavage or their legs, which subverts the active, and aggressive nature of the skills offered by the Amazon and the Assassin especially.

The male characters encompass all archetypes to some degree. The Barbarian visually as well as in relation to his abilities fully reflects the stereotypical

aggressive warrior. While the Amazon and the Assassin possess abilities which allows the player to play either from ranged distance or indirectly over the use of stealth or traps, the Warrior only incentivises direct and aggressive game play.

Interestingly, the only support abilities are available in the skills by male characters: the Paladin and the Necromancer, with some minor abilities found within the skill set of the Barbarian and the Druid. Hence, especially the visual representation of the Paladin, clothed in full metal body armour, displaying his weaponry on character selection, is completely inconsistent with his available skills. Similarly, the Necromancer, appearing to be strong, tall and rather aggressive in stance and posture, possesses only abilities which allude to physical weakness, indirectness, and passiveness.

6.2. Borderlands (Gearbox Software 2009)[16]

Borderlands, the first entry of a successful series, shaped a new genre of video games, a hybrid between first person shooter (FPS) where the player experiences the game world through the eyes of the protagonist only being able to see the currently selected gun and an optional cross hair for aiming, and an action role playing game in the vein of the *Diablo* series, allowing the player to level up their character, gather new equipment and invest points in new abilities and skills. The game features four named protagonists: Roland, the Soldier, Mordecai, the Hunter, Brick, and Lilith, the Siren. The protagonists are introduced as vault hunters, reminiscent of fantasy heroes in a quest searching for treasure and fame. The game is set on a fictional, despite its cartoon style graphics, grim and brutal lawless planet. The gameplay loop revolves around solving major story quests and a plethora of optional tasks given by the local populace. The player spends most of their time moving between vast open areas, killing an array of different enemies, ranging from similarly armed bandits and local wildlife, all immediately being hostile to the player upon contact. Borderlands can be played in a multiplayer setting with a maximum of three additional players.

Similar to Diablo 2, the player can chose between talents in three different skill trees passively enhancing combat capabilities. Every character can acquire a signature spell very early in the game, strongly influencing general gameplay.

[16] The animated character selection screen used in-game for the visual analysis can be seen in this youtube video from 3:25-4:10: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=9IeaC3Y8aac
An overview of the available abilities and respective skill trees for each character can be found at: https://borderlands.fandom.com/wiki/Classes

Roland

Visual analysis:

Roland is fully clothed and does not show any indicators of sexualisation. In terms of body proportions, coding assessed him as average in muscularity, with an average waist size. As he is sitting and not appearing to be ready to move, Roland was classified as passive in posture. Moreover, his posture does not carry any sexual connotations.

Assessment of abilities and role:

Roland‘s unique skill deploys an automatically firing turret which also provides a cover for himself and his party. Thus, his initial unique ability is also the only one benefiting optional additional players. His three skill trees reflect a dichotomy between front line fighter, the archetypical warrior, and a supporting, party-enabling healer. The first tree, *Infantry*, increases his general damage output, especially highlighting the use of close-ranged shotguns with his *Scattershot* talent. The abilities *Metal Storm* and *Refire* moreover incentivise constant fighting, rewarding active and direct gameplay as each kill within a certain time window adds bonuses to his abilities. Contrary to the *Infantry* skill tree, the *Support* and *Medic* trees enhance not only Roland‘s and his turret‘s abilities but also these of party members. *Stockpile* and *Supply Drop* in the *Support* skill further aid other players close to Roland‘s turret, offering additional ammunition (a scarce resource at times in Borderlands) and regeneration of health. The *Medic* tree, finally, almost exclusively features abilities and talents bolstering Roland‘s healing and support capabilities. *Cauterize* enables the player to use Roland as a direct healer paradoxically through shooting party members while *Revive* gives Roland the ability to revive party members through the deployment of his turret.

Thus, while one tree obviously focuses on solo play and close quarters combat, the other trees almost exclusively increase Roland‘s ability to heal, enable and support optional party members in a multiplayer setting. Thus, contrary to his class name *Soldier*, Roland can be categorised as supporter with warrior elements, reversing the stereotypical female depiction of nurturer. Consequently, if a group of players would require a character who can bolster and strengthen the group as a whole, Roland would be the only choice offered in Borderlands.

His skill descriptions generally allude to military terminology, assuming institutionalised military training as source of power.

Comparison of visuals and characteristics:

Roland's visuals are neutral, not purporting any specific stereotypes. However, the visible weaponry, as well as his clothing, reminiscent of a battle hardened soldier, evoke connotations of violence and aggression which is further emphasised by his source of power. Yet, his abilities and presumed role strongly relate to female stereotypes of nurturing and caretaking. Hence, the visual representation in the character screen does not predict the role Roland occupies in actual gameplay provided by the game design.

Mordecai

Visual analysis:

Similar to Roland, Mordecai does not display any level of nudity, nor does his clothing accentuate any sexual properties. In terms of body proportions, Mordecai was classified as skinny, with a small waist. His posture is non-sexual and passive. Thus, visually Mordecai does not carry any stereotypically male markers either, even to the contrary, his pronounced slim body figure even subverts the stereotype of a muscular, powerful male protagonist.

Assessment of abilities and role

Mordecai's unique skill allows the player to summon a hawk-like creature to fight for Mordecai and to distract enemies. This very archetypical hunter ability, using animals as companions in combat, is further supported by the first tree, *Sniper,* boosting Mordecai's ability to deal damage from afar (*Loaded, Carrion Call*), including one skill that supports the entire team (*Smirk)*. Slightly misleading, the second tree to choose from, labelled *Rogue*, almost exclusively improves Mordecai's summoned hawk (*Swift Strike, Swipe, Out for Blood*), further underlining the hunter archetype. The final tree, *Gunslinger*, enhances, to some degree, melee (*Lethal Strike*) and small calibre weapon damage (*Gun Crazy, Hair Trigger*), allowing a very limited warrior-like gameplay.

In sum, most skills underline and emphasise the hunter archetype, dealing damage from afar and using the summonable hawk to directly engage and distract enemies. Hence, typical traits such as aggressiveness are hardly present. Rather, typical female stereotypes of avoiding direct confrontations and physical weakness can be deduced from Mordecai's abilities. The use of the summoned creature to help and aid in combat can also be subsumed under the female stereotype dependence.

The skill descriptors do not reveal any specific connotational value in respect of sources of power.

Comparison of visuals and characteristics:

Mordecai is unnaturally thin, but aside from this visual marker, he appears to not feature any stereotypical traits. His role as an indirect fighter, making use of an animal to aid in combat, thus relating to female stereotypes, is, in a sense, reflected by his visual presentation. In contrast to male stereotypes, Mordecai subverts the stereotype of muscularity, which is also represented by his game play abilities alluding to physical weakness.

Brick

Visual analysis:

In regard to clothing, Brick was classified as fully clothed. Brick is extremely muscular, with an almost unnaturally thin waist. His posture is active, standing, and regularly flexing his biceps.

Assessment of abilities and role:

Brick fulfils every aspect of the up and close warrior archetype. His starting ability, *Berserk,* enables Brick to completely forego his weaponry and solely uses his fists to strike down enemies. Furthermore, while this ability is active, Brick gains damage resistances and gains considerable health regeneration allowing the player to stay in the midst of combat. His three skill trees, *Brawler, Tank,* and *Blaster*, all incentivise direct, active and aggressive play generally increasing Brick‘s melee damage output or enhancing and prolonging his *Berserk* ability. The *Tank* skill tree in itself enhances Brick‘s endurance and staying power outside of his *Berserk* ability. Brick‘s final tree, *Blaster,* enhances his use of general weaponry, while also lowering the cool down of his *Berserk* ability with every kill (*Liquidate*), incentivising constant combat and fighting to make the most use of his active ability.

In sum, Brick is the archetypical fighter, the active and aggressive front line warrior. Brick is moreover the only character in the entire game who allows the player to completely drop his weaponry to fight with his fists.

The *Brawler* tree alludes to boxing and combat sports, the *Sting like a bee* talent pointing to Muhammed Ali, while *Blood Sport* possibly references the 1988 martial arts film by Newt Arnold featuring jean-Claude Van Damme, thus his source of power can be subsumed under institutionalised combat sports.

Comparison of visuals and characteristics:

Brick's visual depiction, as well as the archetypical role as a warrior and his abilities which incentivise aggressive, direct play, can all be subsumed under stereotypical male traits: aggressiveness, activeness, directness, strength, independence. Thus, Brick's visual representation is coherent with his abilities and skills provided by the game.

Lilith

Visual analysis:

Due to Lilith's exposure of cleavage, her skin coverage was classified as partial, and the clothing itself as sexualised. In terms of body proportions, Lilith is thin, also displaying a thin waist, and average breast size. Her posture is passive, and non-sexualised.

Assessment of abilities and role:

Lilith's signature skill is *Phasewalk*, enabling her to move invisibly for a short duration. Her first talent tree, *Controller,* revolves around controlling the battle field, slowing and disabling enemies (*Dramatic Entrance, Mind Games, Striking*), reminiscent of wizard abilities. The second tree, *Elemental,* generally increases elemental damage dealt by Lilith (*Phoenix, Spark, Radiance*), additionally featuring a skill, *Intuition,* which enables and boosts party members. Finally, the last tree, *Assassin,* allows the player to play Lilith more in terms of a rogue, moving in and out of combat quicker (*Blackout, Hit & Run)* and dramatically enhancing her melee damage potential during *Phasewalk* (*Silent Resolve, Phase Strike*).

Thus, depending on the player choice, Lilith either fulfils the mage or rogue archetype, either staying at range and controlling the battle field and dealing damage from afar, or using *Phasewalk* to sneak in and out of combat thereby avoiding direct confrontations. Both archetypes allude to physical weakness, a regular female stereotype. Furthermore, her ability to leave and enter combat using stealth mechanics relate to the female stereotype of deception. However, both wizard and rogue archetypes strongly represent male stereotypes of activeness, and aggression in respect to dealing melee damage in close range as rogue archetype.

While the skill descriptors of the Elemental and Assassin tree do not add anything to the interpretation of sources of power, the Controller tree completely adheres to the stereotype of emotions and sexuality as a source. In femme fatal

manner, skill names such as *Diva*, *Hard to Get* (making Lilith survive longer), *Dramatic Entrance* (dazing and confusing enemies), *Girl Power*, and *Mind Games*, all allude to sexuality and emotions, subsuming Lilith under the witch archetype rather than the wizard.

Comparison of visuals and characteristics:

Visually, Lilith's clothing and body proportions show strong sexual connotations. Her role, as a mage and rogue hybrid are per se not strongly stereotyped, with the ability to enter and leave combat, Lilith's fighting ability can also be considered as indirect, alluding to general physical weakness. In sum, her visual objectification is not represented by her active and, depending on the player choice, aggressive game play style.

Summary:

Borderlands has a skewed male to female ratio, only offering one female player option. Interestingly, it is a male character, Roland, who is, considering his playstyle options and abilities, the character with the most pronounced female stereotypes: the caretaker, enabler and healer. Brick, on the other hand, is visually as well as ability-wise the prototypical warrior: the showing of extreme muscularity translates into an aggressive, direct playstyle. Mordecai and Lilith range on the opposite spectrum: both show no abilities to nurture and support, but both benefit most from avoiding direct confrontations, which is also reflected in their visual style. Moreover, and most striking, while the skill descriptors relate to professional fields and sports for Brick and Roland, Lilith's source of power is almost solely based on her sexuality and her womanhood. Thus, the only playable female character is visually sexualised, her game play abilities show connotations of physical weakness and indirectness, while her powerful abilities are regularly subsumed under her sexuality and beauty.

6.3. Borderlands 2 (Gearbox Software 2012)[17]

The sequel to Borderlands continues the story of the first part, enlarging the world and adding a larger cast of characters, among them Gaige, which, as seen in the introduction, sparked controversy due to the developers highlighting a skill which lowers the need for actual accuracy when aiming and labelling the character

[17] An overview of the abilities of each character can be found under: https://bl2skills.com/vanilla.html

a girlfriend-friendly character. Aside from the new set of characters, the general game play is identical with the first iteration. The player chooses a character out of the six available at the start of the game and proceeds, from a first person perspective, to hunt for treasure, items, and guns while overcoming myriads of enemies. Again, the player is given one unique signature spell per character and various enhancing abilities and skills divided into three branching skill trees with different themes. Similar to Borderlands 1, Borderland 2 can also be played either in single player or multiplayer mode.

Axton, the Commando

Visual Analysis:

Axton is portrayed as battle hardened soldier, replete with scars and band-aids covering facial wounds. He is fully clothed and non-sexualised in regard to his attire. His physique is considered strong with an average waist. His posture is active and non-sexual.

Assessment of abilities and role:

Axton can make use of a similar ability as Roland in the first Borderlands game: a turret automatically firing at enemies upon deployment. However, conversely to Roland‘s turret, *Sabre Turret* does not add any support for the players. Axton‘s *Guerilla* tree generally offers enhancements to Axton‘s turret (*Sentry, Laser Sight, Double Up, Scorched Earth*). The skills *Onslaught* and *Able* incentivise aggressive engagement in combat and increase the combat endurance of Axton as long as he is fighting and killing enemies. The abilities under the second tree, *Gunpowder*, mainly enhance Axton‘s own combat abilities (*Impact, Overload, Expertise)* and add more incentives to constantly stay in combat (*Metal Storm*). The final tree, *Survival*, offers the player options to enhance Axton‘s defence, with *Quick Charge* once more only increasing Axton‘s durability as long as he is engaging in constant combat. Finally, the only skill affecting teammates, *Phalanx Shield,* adding a shield to the turret, can also be found in the third tree.

Conversely to Roland in the first game, Axton‘s abilities almost exclusively revolve around combat, emphasising aggressive engagement and constant combat, fully adhering to a stereotypically male archetype of the warrior. The first tree however, mainly focusing on the turret as primary means to deal with combat situations, adds hunter elements and stereotypes revolving around indirectness

and passiveness to Axton‘s available options. However, even the first tree includes skills incentivising aggressive and direct behaviour.

The abilities available generally allude to institutionalised military training as Axton‘s source of power.

Comparison of visuals and characteristics:

Axton‘s visual representation, as the physically strong, battle hardened soldier is consistent with his overall role and abilities offered within the game.

Maya, the Siren

Visual Analysis:

Maya is dressed in a tight, almost corset-like top, revealing cleavage and shoulders. She was classified as partially clothed and sexualised due to the accentuation of her cleavage. Her body proportions were coded as average in terms of muscularity, with an average waist size and over-average breast size. Her posture, holding a gun and standing, was considered active and non-sexual.

Assessment of abilities and role:

Maya‘s signature skill, *Phase Lock,* allows the player to stun a single enemy, preventing the target from acting for a short duration. Maya‘s first set of abilities, subsumed under the skill tree *Motion*, largely benefits aggressive and direct play style, incentivising the player to keep killing enemies to receive combat enhancements (*Kinetic Reflection, Inertia, Sub-Sequence)*, while other abilities generally increase her damage capabilities and bolster her signature skill. Her second tree, *Harmony,* conversely is dominated by supporting abilities, allowing the player to enable, resurrect and heal teammates (*Sweet Release, Elated, Res, Sustenance, Restoration)*. Other abilities in this tree again generally bolster combat abilities (*Wreck, Mind‘s Eye).* The final tree, *Cataclysm*, adds elemental damage to her attacks as well as adding a few tools reminiscent of the wizard archetype with another skill (*Blight Phoenix*) benefiting active game play and constant fighting.

Maya can on the one hand be considered as an archetypical warrior, with a considerable amount of skills requiring and incentivising the player to constantly fight and aggressively seek out the next target. Her second tree, however, fully enables support and healing abilities, making her a hybrid between warrior and supporter. Thus, depending on the abilities chosen Maya, can fulfil stereotypically male traits such as aggression, directness or violence or, the female stereotype of nurturer and caretaker.

While the *Motion* tree does not convey any specific source of power, the *Cataclysm* tree conveys some imagery of elemental powers, relating to wizardry. However, the general support tree, *Harmony,* regularly alludes to sexuality (the broken heart in the talent *Sweet Release* or the kissing lips in the talent *Elated*) and to hospitals (with depictions of IV bags and heart beat monitor). This strongly alludes to the stereotypically sexualised hospital nurse, a very common television and adult film trope.

Comparison of visuals and characteristics:

Maya‘s sexualised visuals are only partially consistent with her game play. The abilities under the *Harmony* skill tree and the allusions of sexuality and the sexy nurse trope are highly stereotypical and consistent with the equally sexualised visual depiction. However, her two other skill trees and abilities reverse her sexualised portrayal.

Salvador, the Gunzerker

Visual Analysis:

Salvador, much like Axton, visually represents a battle-hardened soldier, covered in band-aids, bandages and wearing torn, but full clothing. Neither the attire nor the posture was considered sexually connotated. Physically, Salvador is strong, with a large waist size.

Assessment of abilities and role:

Salvador‘s signature skill, *Gunzerking*, allows the player to wield two guns, even rifles, at once for a short period of time, essentially doubling the damage dealt. Similar to Axton, a large selection of abilities throughout the first two skill trees (*Gunlust* and *Rampage)* support a fast, aggressive pace with the signature skill making Salvador more durable. The final tree, *Brawn,* even allows Salvador to benefit from hits taken (*Incite*, *Sexual Tyrannosaurus*). Additionally, *Fistful of Hurt* gives Salvador the opportunity to enter hand to hand combat. The last talent in the *Brawn* tree, *Come at me, Bro*, allows the player to “taunt” enemies, forcing them to attack Salvador. Salvador‘s entire kit is fully consistent with the warrior archetype. Aggression is incentivised, and the player can even benefit from taking damage, even more underlining the physical strength and power of the character.

The entire theme of the abilities revolves around violence, aggression and hypermasculinity in general, thus the source of power can be subsumed under individual traits, not related to any occupation or institution.

Comparison of visuals and characteristics:

The visual depiction of Salvador, albeit not hypermuscular but overweight and not stereotypically well trained, still fits his tools of aggression, violence, and hypermasculinity.

Zer0, the Assassin

Visual Analysis:

Zer0 is wearing full body armour, including a full face mask, his gender only being deduced from textual descriptions and his body type. Neither his attire nor his posture is sexually connotated. Zer0 was regarded as thin with an average waist size.

Assessment of abilities and role:

Decepti0n, Zer0‘s signature skill adds a stealth mechanic to the game with added bonuses to melee damage upon exiting his invisibility. This mechanic and the focus on his melee combat ability is further reinforced by the *Cunning* and the *Bloodshed* talent tree. While some abilities generally boost melee combat ability (*C0unter Strike, Ir0n Hand, Killing Bl0w*), *Ambush* and *Backstab* add a stereotypical rogue element to Zer0‘s arsenal, as they increase melee damage dealt when attacking from behind, a mechanic regularly used in various games with a rogue archetype. *Death Bl0ss0m* adds an additional ability to deal damage while stealthed, furthering the rogue archetype.

The *Sniping* skill tree adds bonuses to the use of sniper rifles and increasing the zoom level of their scopes (*Optics, Precisi0n, At One with the Gun*). Interestingly, the ability *Kill Confirmed* in combination with *Headsh0t* and *Killer* even incentivises slow and precise game play. Thus, in essence, Zer0 allows the player to either play as a rogue archetype, avoiding damage taken by using stealth and avoidance mechanics while at the same time dealing damage with his sword, or as a hunter archetype, carefully aiming and shooting from distance while using sniper rifles. The use of melee weapons certainly underlines the male stereotype of violence and directness, however the avoidance of damage underlines a certain physical weakness paired with deception as another female stereotype. The use of sniper rifles and the focus on ranged combat available through talents in the *Sniper* tree convert Zer0 into a hunter archetype, emphasising slow paced, almost passive game play, again also alluding to physical weakness.

The skills do not pertain to any specifics as sources of power, merely displaying general themes of weaponry and sword combat.

Comparison of visuals and characteristics:

Zer0's visual portrayal as thin and non-muscular is perfectly reflected through his toolset which assumes general physical weakness, thus incentivising the player to either stay at long range as a hunter archetype or by using stealth and deception to avoid taking damage as a rogue archetype.

Gaige, the Mechromancer[18]

Visual Analysis:

Gaige is displayed sitting on top of her robot, Deathtrap, wearing what appear to be engineering goggles and other gadgets. She is fully clothed and her attire does not evoke sexual connotations. Gaige was considered as thin with average waist and breast size. Her posture is passive and non-sexual.

Assessment of abilities and role:

Gaige's signature spell, *Summon Deathtrap,* allows the player to summon a large robot to aid in combat. The abilities in the three trees, *Best Friends Forever, Little Big Trouble,* and *Ordered Chaos* however largely evade standard categorisation. A main theme pervading all three trees are mechanics related to loading and reloading the weapons used (*Cooking up Trouble, The Better Half, Shock* and *Anarchy*, among others), giving Gaige a unique mechanic in Borderlands games. Some abilities improve the summoned robot (*Sharing is Caring, Make it Sparkle, One Two Boom*, *Annoyed Android*) again spread all over the three trees. On the other hand, Gaige benefits from damage taken, with lower health generally increasing damage capabilities and other positive effects (*With Claws, Blood Soaked Shields*). Finally, various talents are related to wizard-like abilities increasing elemental damage and spell effects such as *Interspersed Outburst,* or *Electrical Burn.* Thus, Gaige possesses a very diverse mixture of abilities and talents, combining hunter, warrior, and wizard archetypes, evading any definite categorisation.

The talents themselves generally allude to technology, robotics and engineering, referring to stereotypically male sources of power derived from education and institutions.

[18] The controversy revolving around Gaige mentioned in the introduction cannot be assessed due to the limitations of the thesis, as it pertains to relative player skill deduced from her abilities.

Comparison of visuals and characteristics:

The visual representation of Gaige on top of her robot, replete with her perceived physical weakness and passive posture are not consistent with her wide array of abilities, with some of the skills strongly emphasising aggression while others pertain to wizardry. Only the subset of skills incentivising play around and with her summoned robot are represented by the visual portrayal.

Krieg, the Psycho

Visual Analysis:

Krieg is partially clothed, wearing no upper body armour nor shirt, revealing his hypermuscular body and small waist size. He was coded as non-sexual, neither in clothing nor in posture. Additionally, Krieg is wearing a gas mask, and is heavily scarred all over his body.

Assessment of abilities and role:

Buzz Axe Rampage is Krieg's signature ability, allowing the player to enter melee combat, increasing his movement speed and enabling Krieg to fully refill his health bar by killing enemies whereby the cool down phase[19] for his unique ability is reduced upon taking damage.

Krieg's character has another unique passive bonus, *Bloodlust*, which is gathered through dealing damage and decays after a few seconds of not engaging in combat. Various abilities mainly in the first tree, equally titled *Bloodlust,* are giving bonuses depending on the number of *Bloodlust* stacks the player has gathered. The second tree, *Mania,* generally supports Krieg's melee fighting capabilities (*Empty the Rage, Silence the Voices*) and adding bonuses which increase the lower Krieg's health drops (*Release the Beast, Embrace the Pain, Salt the Wound).* Finally, the last tree, *Hellborn*, adds fire effects to either weapon or melee combat, while still emphasising close quarters combat (*Pain is Power, Fuel the Fire, Burn Baby Burn*). Moreover, *Delusional Damage* and *Raving Retribution* enable the player to set Krieg himself on fire, losing health (which in turn might trigger positive effects, see above) and dealing damage in close vicinity around the protagonist.

The entire skill set revolves around the use of melee weaponry, and close quarter gun combat. Especially the *Bloodlust* mechanic strongly incentivises the

[19] Cool down phase here refers to a regular gaming term, denoting the time frame between the use of an ability and its next availability.

player to constantly engage in combat. Hence, the warrior archetype is fully represented through Krieg‘s available skills.

The skill trees generally allude to extreme violence, torture, masochism and psychological disorder, hence the source of power might be characterised as subjective and personal in nature, based on the one hand on extreme masculinity in terms of fearlessness, strength, power and dominance, while on the other hand based on extreme emotions.

Comparison of visuals and characteristics:

Krieg‘s abilities and his role as constantly fighting, aggressive up-close combatant are directly reflected in his visual portrayal.

Summary:

Borderlands 2 has a skewed gender distribution, only offering two female characters out of the six available protagonists. Maya can assume the role of warrior or supporter while Gaige basically evades categorisation as a hybrid comprised of warrior, hunter and wizard archetypes. Maya is overtly sexualised through her attire and her sources of power, alluding to the sexy nurse trope, emphasising her sexuality and beauty. Hence, her visual representation is negating her capabilities as warrior, represented by a majority of her abilities.

The male characters represent three warriors, all visually completely consistent with the role assumed in the game. Zer0, as either hunter or rogue, is the only male character offering a different game play approach.

6.4. Assassin‘s Creed Syndicate (Ubisoft Quebec 2015)

Assassin‘s Creed Syndicate is part of a long standing series of games, with the first one, Assassin‘s Creed (Ubisoft), released in 2007. The game series has an overarching story line based on two rival secret societies, the assassin‘s and the templars. The games are generally set in various historic locations, ranging from early medieval middle east, renaissance Venice, or France during the French revolution in *Assassin‘s Creed Unity* (Ubisoft 2014). Assassin‘s Creed Syndicate itself is placed in Victorian era London, allowing the player to traverse and explore major parts of the city‘s historical recreation. The plot again revolves around the templars and the assassins both fighting for dominance and political influence in the capital. The player assumes the role of the assassin twins, Jacob and Evie Frye and is tasked with various missions in order to oust the templars from the city.

Unique to this iteration of Assassin‘s Creed is the use of two main protagonists who are controlled, enhanced and equipped separately. Except certain missions, the choice of the active character is solely based on the player‘s decision. As the game does not have a title selection screen, the visual impression of the moment of first control of each character was used for the visual analysis. The majority of abilities available to Evie and Jacob are identical with only three unique skills available to each character. However, it is completely dependent on player‘s choice which of the shared abilities to acquire on each character, allowing to generate specialised and different characters for different challenges and tasks in the game. Assassin‘s Creed Syndicate can only be played in single player mode.

Jacob

Visual Analysis:

Jacob Frye is fully clothed in multiple layers consisting of what appears to be rather traditional clothing with a few tools and mechanical devices added to his attire. Jacob was categorised as non-sexual in terms of clothing and active and non-sexualised in regard to posture. His body type is thin with an average waist.

Assessment of abilities and role:

The abilities are distributed among three trees, *Combat*, *Stealth* and *Ecosystem*. As aforementioned, the two protagonists share the majority of available skills, however the player can allocate points differently for each character. The combat tree generally enhances the character‘s health (*Health Boost I, II, III)*, durability in direct combat (*Combat Stamina, Unstoppable I, II)* and general damage dealt (*Execute I, II, Slayer I, II)*. This tree also features one of Jacob‘s unique skills, *Mutilate II,* enabling him to deal a considerable amount of increased damage in direct combat. The *Ecosystem* tree is comprised of various abilities pertaining to the recruitment of non-player characters (*Leadership I, II, III*) or the available amount of resources gathered in the world (*Scavenger I, II)*. However, the tree additionally features a few combat abilities, with the two strongest being, again, unique to Jacob‘s character: *Gunslinger II*, considerably increasing the damage dealt with firearms, as well as *Defense III,* the only talent reducing damage taken from every source.

Thus, in essence, the unique abilities of Jacob all enhance his direct combat ability, either increasing damage or enhancing his ability to withstand damage,

clearly designating him as the archetypical front line warrior, active, aggressive, strong and durable.

The abilities themselves allude to the assassin‘s organisation and institutionalised training as the source of power.

Comparison of visuals and characteristics:

Jacob‘s formal attire and thin stature hardly carry any strong connotations of strength, aggression or violence. However, his unique abilities incentivise the player to use Jacob in a more direct and aggressive manner, thus not fully reflecting his visual stylisation.

Evie

Visual Analysis:

Similar to her twin brother, Evie Frye is wearing rather formal clothing, with a large cloak, a leather vest, long trousers and boots. Thus, she is fully clothed, and her attire was not considered as sexual. Her body type is average, with average waist and breast size. Her posture is active and non-sexual.

Assessment of abilities and role:

Evie also has access to many of the same skills as Jacob. However, Evie‘s unique abilities are all located in the *Stealth* skill tree. Abilities in this tree increase the chance to pick locks (*Lockpicking I,II),* reduce noise when moving (*Assassin Steps)*, allowing for a non-violent resolution of encounters (*Intimidation* and *Kidnap*) and increase avoidance of detection (*Stealth I, II,* the final rank considerably decreasing detection chance is unique to Evie). The second unique ability of Evie‘s character, *Chameleon,* renders her almost invisible as long as she is not moving. Finally, only Evie can learn *Knife Master II,* allowing her to deal more damage with throwing knives.

Hence, clearly, Evie excels at moving unseen, and at killing targets from the shadows in silence. Evie thereby completely fulfils the rogue archetype, using deception and indirect means to overcome adversity. The *Chameleon* talent even more emphasises the passive, indirect game play style.

The skill descriptions are identical with Jacob‘s abilities, thus institutional, professional training is the source of power deduced from the skills available.

Comparison of visuals and characteristics:

In contrast to Jacob, Evie‘s clothing and average body composition is more coherent with her emphasis on stealth and deception.

Summary:

Assassin‘s Creed Syndicate is unique in the sense that it offers the player the possibility to alternate between the two protagonists instead of choosing one of the two. The game, however, forces the player to play each character at least to some extent to finish the game with some main story missions only being available to one of the twins. Thus, the player has to develop and allocate skill points to both characters to overcome the challenges at hand. The differences from an ability perspective appear negligible at first, however, game guides[20] generally suggest to specialise Jacob and Evie according to their natural strengths conveyed through their three unique abilities. Thus, the optimal way to use Jacob would be as a front line, archetypical warrior, who can deal more damage and withstand more harm than Evie, whereas Evie excels at avoiding confrontations with two of her three unique abilities, while making use of silent weaponry to dispose of enemies without ever entering direct combat.

The differences considering the available abilities may be minor, but noteworthy nonetheless. Visually, the two characters, naturally based on Jacob and Evie being twins, are almost identical in terms of muscularity, height and shoulder width. Both display similar posture and levels of activity. However, the dividing factor, which is thus clearly not based on physical attributes, is simply in their specialisation, respectively alluding to male stereotypes of violence and aggression in the role of Jacob and deception and indirect combat abilities in the role of Evie.

6.5. Dishonored 2 (Arkane Studios 2016)[21]

Dishonored 2 is an action role playing game set in a fictional universe influenced by Victorian era England and steam punk themes. The player can select between two protagonists, Corvo, body guard, advisor, and teacher of the royal empress Emily, the second selectable character. The plot revolves around a conspiracy attempting to overthrow the royal family. The player is tasked to regain their reputation and to identify and defeat the conspirators. The game is played from a first person perspective through the eyes of the protagonist, and can only be approached in single player mode. The process of adding more abilities and skills, contrary to regular role playing games, is not based around accruing

[20] See for example the guide by gamepressure:
https://guides.gamepressure.com/acsyndicate/guide.asp?ID=32882

[21] The character selection screen is available online: https://www.inverse.com/article/23745-dishonored-2-emily-corvo-character-choice-guide
An overview of the available abilities can be found here: dishonored.gamepedia.com/powers

experience points, but rather based on obtainable items, *runes*, scattered around the world, regularly hidden or well-guarded. The amount of runes is severely limited, thus the player has to carefully select the desired skills.

The game entails a morality system, with the environment and the game world reacting to choices made by the player. Thus, a player opting to confront enemies in direct combat and using lethal weaponry will be faced with an increased number of guards (among other effects) and a different outcome of the story arc. That said, both characters are capable to complete a violent as well as a non-violent play through, depending on the choices of the player.

Dishonored 2 offers two separate systems to obtain skills and abilities: mutually exclusive *powers*, which are, from a narrative point of view, based around supernatural abilities derived from emotions and willpower; and *enhancements*, which predominantly pertain to physical attributes and are based on exercise and training as source of power. The available *enhancements* contain passive boosts to strength, health, speed, adding more defences, allowing the crafting of items, or increase damage dealt. Consequently, the player can fully customise their playable character to almost any archetype based on these *enhancements* alone.

Corvo

Visual Analysis:

Corvo is fully clothed, wearing a dark coat and shirt. His clothing does not display any sexual connotations. Physically, he was regarded as strong with an average waist size. His posture is active and non-sexual.

Assessment of abilities and role:

Corvo has access to five unique base abilities which can be further enhanced. Players choosing Corvo have access to a movement ability, *Blink*, a short ranged teleport, which can be enhanced to deal physical damage if used on an enemy (*Blink Assault*). Furthermore, Corvo can learn the ability *Bend Time*, stopping time and enemy movement, with upgrades increasing the duration or Corvo‘s movement speed while active. *Possession*, another skill offering utility to the player, allows Corvo to possess enemies, either alive or dead, thus remaining undetectable to enemies and allowing him to access restricted areas while taking control of enemies. *Windblast* allows the player to deflect projectiles, and, with upgraded versions, to deal damage from afar or in close vicinity around the character (*Shockwave*, *Greater Windblast*). Finally, Corvo can learn *Devouring*

Swarm, a spell summoning rats which attack enemies and devour their corpses in order to not leave any traces behind.

As emphasised in the introductory sequence, *powers* pertain to supernatural abilities and emotions.

The categorisation of Corvo mostly pervades general archetypes as a multitude of defining traits, which also dictate the play style, are based on the shared *enhancements*.

In comparison to Emily (see below) Corvo possesses less opportunities to avoid battle, and is dependent on *Bend Time* and *Possession* to avoid direct confrontations. His other abilities are generally more confrontational, leaving the player of Corvo regularly open to counter attacks. Hence, given the *Windblast* ability, Corvo is able to parry attacks more efficiently in direct combat. Given the options in the *enhancements* tree, Corvo seems to be more suited for direct confrontations, but not based on his abilities, but rather on his comparative lack of options to avoid combat. The spells offered generally can be categorised under wizardry spells, which would allow a categorisation as warrior and wizard depending on the play style of the player. His abilities confer a certain degree of aggression, but feature elements of deception and physical weakness through the reliance on spells as well.

Comparison of visuals and characteristics:

The character model of Corvo displays a certain amount of muscularity and aggression which is partially reflected through his available skills. The option (or depending on the choice of abilities, the necessity) to play Corvo as an aggressive warrior is partially represented by his muscularity. However, his abilities generally allude to physical weakness, as his only defence mechanism is a magical spell (*Windblast*). Moreover, the availability of wizard abilities contrast his visual impression to a certain degree.

Emily

Visual Analysis:

Emily is wearing almost identical attire to Corvo: a dark coat, dark shirt and black trousers. Thus, she is fully clothed and her attire is non-sexual. She is considered thin, with an average waist, and flat breast size. Her posture, ready to engage in combat, is active and non-sexual.

Assessment of abilities and role:

Emiliy‘s movement ability, *Far Reach,* enables her to traverse short distances almost instantly. *Far Reach* can be upgraded to a telekinesis ability, enabling the player to pull objects and enemies toward her, allowing for direct kills with the enemy still airborne. Additionally, Emily can acquire a second movement ability, *Shadow Walk*, adding a stealth mechanic to her abilities, with upgrades prolonging the stealth effect or its effectiveness, while another upgrade (*Improved Shadow Attack*) allowing the player to assassinate enemies while remaining invisible.

Furthermore, Emily can learn the ability *Doppelgänger*, a summonable shade distracting enemies with upgrades allowing the shade to fight enemies as well. Similar to *Doppelgänger*, players of Emily also have access to *Mesmerise,* rendering targeted enemies unconscious for a short duration. Finally, players can select the skill *Domino*, which links enemy targets, thus every action done to one adversary is automatically transferred to the linked targets as well.

As emphasised in the introductory sequence, *powers* pertain to supernatural abilities and emotions as source of power.

Emiliy‘s abilities, in comparison to Corvo‘s, offer a stealth mechanic and similar controlling abilities in the form of *Mesmerise* and *Doppelgänger*. Similarly to Corvo, her movement abilities can be upgraded into lethal abilities as well. Generally, the emphasis on Emily is slightly emphasising archetypical rogue game play, relatable to physical weakness and deception which is supported by her other deceptive capabilities. However, her lethal abilities allude to violence and aggression as well. Hence, players can opt to rely on stealth, utilising *Shadow Walk, Mesmerise* and *Doppelgänger* (without the lethal upgrade) to avoid combat, or to adopt an aggressive play style, chaining enemies together with *Domino* enabling Emily to deal with large groups in direct combat.

As opposed to Corvo, Emily shows an overall larger arsenal of available options, equally pertaining to aggression or deception, physical weakness or strength. In terms of archetypical categorisation, Emily is best subsumed under the warrior or rogue archetype, depending on player choice.

Comparison of visuals and characteristics:

Emily‘s visual representation and her varied options for game play do not specifically allude to any dominant stereotype. In comparison to Corvo, her weaker body stature may be reflected by the archetypical rogue game play, however not by her aggressive abilities pertaining to the warrior archetype.

Summary:

Dishonored 2 allows for a wide range of customisation of the selected character. Moreover, the game offers a multitude of options on how to approach or avoid combat and solve missions accompanied by different story arcs depending on the choices made within the game. These mechanics are reflected in the characters of Emily and Corvo who both possess a variety of skills and abilities. However, based on the abilities, Emily is more suited for a stealth based game play, her skills offering more options to avoid combat and resolve conflicts in a non-lethal manner. Still, the player can just as easily choose to approach the game aggressively and lethal with Emily as well, thus Emily pertains to the archetypical rogue or warrior category, based on player choice. Corvo, in contrast, has more limited options to avoid confrontations, but instead is given more offensive capabilities revolving around the use of magical spells to fight enemies or avoid damage, hence he can be categorised as warrior or wizard depending, once again, on player choice.

6.6. Octopath Traveler (Square Enix 2018)[22]

The role playing game Octopath Traveler is in some ways quite different to the other games under analysis in this thesis. While players can, in accordance to the requirements in the sample selection, choose a character upon starting the game, they are given the opportunity to recruit other selectable characters into their player-led party at a later point. Contrary to the other games, combat is conducted in a turn-based manner, with the player selecting which skills each character will use before each combat round plays out. Also visually, the game is presented in a rather unique fashion, utilising a stylised 2D graphic.

Otherwise, the general game play pattern is similar: the player is tasked with various missions, entering combat against a multitude of enemies, receiving items and bonuses as well as experience points upon completion which regularly lead to new levels of the characters allowing the investment in skill points. The characters use the resource *spell power* to cast any ability, with magical spells generally demanding more *spell power* than physical combat abilities.

[22] Character selection screens are available at:
https://www.shacknews.com/article/106067/characters-path-actions-and-talents---octopath-traveler
A skill overview can be found online: https://www.shacknews.com/article/106048/job-classes-attribute-bonuses-and-skills-list---octopath-traveler

Octopath Traveler presents the player with a choice of eight different characters, four female and 4 male, all with a unique back story, abilities and story arch within the game. The player has to follow the story of their chosen main character to complete the game, while the stories of the recruitable characters are entirely optional.

The game is set in a fantasy world, Orsterra, replete with magic and mystery but also with serious tones of social injustice, and political tension. Octopath Traveler can only be played in single player mode.

Olberic

Visual Analysis:

Olberic is fully clothed in armour, wearing large shoulder pads, a harness and a massive sword attached to his belt. His clothing as well as his active posture was classified as non sexual. His body proportions were coded as strong with an average waist size.

Assessment of abilities and role:

Olberic, the warrior, as the game itself classifies the character, passively receives considerable bonuses to his health points, as well as to his physical damage capabilities and his defence rating. Players are able to equip Olberic with either swords or polearms. The skills available to Olberic generally revolve around dealing physical damage with his weapon (*Level Slash, Abide, Spearhead, Brand's Thunder*) or increase his defences (*Endure, Stout Wall).* Furthermore, the abilities *Cover* and *Incite* are representing stereotypical *taunt* abilities, making enemies more likely to attack Olberic instead of other characters.

Olberic's entire tool set is based around the warrior archetype. His use of melee weaponry and the emphasis of endurance and physical strength are all pertaining to male stereotypes. Moreover, his ability to shield and protect others with his own physical presence can be subsumed under the male stereotype of protector further emphasising strength and muscularity.

The skills themselves allude to general fighting mechanics with some references to divinity and church practices.

Comparison of visuals and characteristics:

Olberic's character model, fully clothed in armour displaying strength and muscularity, is fully reflected by his role as archetypical warrior.

Cyrus

Visual Analysis:

Cyrus is depicted sitting down reading a book in a library. He is fully clothed in what appear to be wool garments. Neither his clothing nor his passive posture were coded as sexualised. His body proportions were regarded as thin, with his waist size not deducible from the character selection screen.

Assessment of abilities and role:

Cyrus, the Scholar, passively receives bonuses to his spell power, his elemental attacks and his elemental defence. The player can only equip Cyrus with staves. His abilities all generally pertain to the wizard archetype, allowing the player to cast a *Fireball, Icewind, Lightning Bolt* and various other elemental spells. Moreover, Cyrus can acquire the ability to evade combat (*Evasive Maneuvers*) as well as some abilities enhancing the entire party (*Elemental Augmentation, Percipience, Vim and Vigor*).

Thus, Cyrus can be classified as an archetypical mage with a select few support abilities, underlining his physical weakness, incentivising the player to avoid damage taken and fight enemies from afar.

The description of his skills and overall imagery allude to libraries and universities as his source of power.

Comparison of visuals and characteristics:

Cyrus‘s apparent physical weakness is directly reflected in his role as a wizard. Players of Cyrus are highly incentivised to avoid direct confrontations as Cyrus does not possess any means to withstand damage taken.

Tressa

Visual Analysis:

Tressa is shown behind a table apparently selling or buying a trinket. She is fully clothed in a light dress, with a large backpack equipped. She was classified as non-sexual neither in terms of attire nor posture. She is skinny with a small waist size and over-average breast size. Her posture is considered active.

Assessment of abilities and role:

Tressa, the Merchant, passively receives a variety of bonuses, slightly enhancing health, physical as well as elemental attack damage, physical and elemental defence and a bonus to spell power. She can be equipped with either a bow or a polearm.

Tressa‘s available abilities generally revolve around supporting and healing skills. *Rest* and *Donate* heal or enhance herself or teammates, while *Endless Items, Grows on Trees, Hang Tough* and *SP Saver* improve benefits gained from combat situations for the entire party. Moreover, Tressa possesses two magical damage spells, *Tradewinds* and *Bifelgan*‘s *Bounty,* as well as an ability allowing players to evade physical attacks (*Sidestep*).

The majority of abilities offered by Tressa either directly support the party or increase general benefits of fighting in terms of gold earned or consumable items spared. Thus, Tressa is classified as archetypical supporter alluding to female stereotypes of nurturer and caretaker. Her limited combat abilities render her rather passive and dependent in fighting situations.

Tressa‘s skill set generally pertains to themes of trading, and bartering, which can be classified as her occupation as source of power.

Comparison of visuals and characteristics:

The visual depiction of Tressa, thinly clothed, with thin arms and small body stature, is directly reflected by her supporter role with limited options to attack or defend herself.

Ophilia

Visual Analysis:

Despite being fully clothed in white robes, the accentuation of her upper body was classified as sexually connotated clothing. Her body stature was coded as thin with a thin waist and over-average breast size. Her posture was regarded as active and sexualised, once again drawing attention to her upper body.

Assessment of abilities and role:

Ophilia, the Cleric, passively receives a significant bonus to her spell power, with minor enhancements to elemental attacks and elemental defence. Players can equip Ophilia with a staff.

With two exceptions, *Holy Light* and *Luminescence* as damaging spells, the entire skill set of Ophilia supports and heals party members. *Heal Wounds* and *Heal More* directly grant party members a boost to their health, *Sheltering Veil* and *Reflective Veil* increase the defence of the targeted teammate, and *Revive* allows the player to resurrect fallen teammates. Even more underlining her dependence on others to fight, *Evil Ward* grants a bonus to the chance of fleeing from combat.

Similar to Tressa, Ophilia only possesses very limited options to deal with enemies in combat, rather the overwhelming majority of her abilities force the player to support and enhance others instead of engaging in combat with Ophilia herself. The entire set of abilities is based around the female stereotype of nurturer, being dependent on others to deal with enemies, underlining her physical weakness.

Similar to Olberic, the abilities available to Ophilia revolve around the theme of divinity and holiness.

Comparison of visuals and characteristics:

Ophilia‘s visual portrayal as weak and sexualised is consistent with her inability to directly engage in combat, being reliant on party members to deal with enemies, requiring the player to generally assume a passive role when controlling Ophilia.

Primrose

Visual Analysis:

Primrose is portrayed dancing in thin red silk barely covering her body. Consequently, she was considered naked, only covered by underwear, and sexualised based on her attire. She is thin with an average waist and over-average breast size. Her posture is considered active, and sexualised.

Assessment of abilities and role:

Primrose, the dancer, receives mediocre bonuses to elemental attacks, as well as to speed and evasion. She can be equipped with daggers. The abilities available to the player are reminiscent of Ophilia‘s skill set, with the majority offering support to party members. *Lion Dance, Peacock Strut, Mole Dance, Panther Dance, Sealticge‘s Seduction* and *The Show Goes On* all add either defence, enhanced damage or speed to teammates. Only two skills allow Primrose to deal with enemies directly on her own, the wizard-like abilities *Moonlight Waltz* and *Night Ode*. Interestingly, players can also make use of the ability *Bewildering Grace* which causes an entirely random, either beneficial or harmful effect on teammates or enemies.

Primrose‘s almost pure focus on aiding teammates categorises the character clearly as an archetypical supporter, related to stereotypes of nurturer and caretaker, dependent on her teammates to deal with combat situations. The completely random ability *Bewildering Grace* can be subsumed under another, expressively negative, female stereotype, irrationality and unpredictability.

The skills generally are all based around expressions reminiscent of dancing, sexuality and seduction, further emphasising female stereotypes in the regard of sources of power.

Comparison of visuals and characteristics:

Primrose‘s visual depiction is replete with allusions to sexuality and physical weakness. Her archetypical game play as enabler of others and her mostly passive role in combat situations are consistent with the imagery used in her character selection portrait.

Alfyn

Visual Analysis:

The character is portrayed kneeling and apparently comforting a crying child. He is fully clothed in simple linen, wearing a satchel around his shoulder. Neither his active posture nor his attire was classified as sexually connotated. His body proportions are average regarding muscularity and waist size.

Assessment of abilities and role:

Alfyn, the Apothecary, receives a considerable passive bonus to his health, and minor bonuses to his physical and elemental attacks as well as to his defence. Alfyn can only be equipped with axes. Players can choose from a variety of different abilities within the skill set of Alfyn, consisting of a few healing spells (*First Aid, Vivify, Rehabilitate*) with the majority of abilities representing direct physical damage abilities and enhancements to his own defence (*Icicle, Amputation, Empoison, Last Stand, Inspiration*, *Hale and Hearty*). Especially *Hale and Hearty* and *Resist Ailments* considerably bolster Alfyn‘s ability to withstand damage from enemies‘ attacks.

The main focus of abilities available to the player revolves around dealing physical damage to enemies and to enhance the character‘s endurance and defence. These abilities strongly pertain to the warrior archetype, emphasising physical strength, aggression and fearlessness, with special focus on his ‘tanking’ abilities allowing the player to use Alfyn as main target for enemy attacks. Naturally, his healing abilities are related to the supporter archetype, however considering the ratio of the skills and the overall abilities presented, these may rather be subsumed under the male protector stereotype.

The skills generally refer to medicine and apothecary skills, thus alluding to an occupational source of power.

Comparison of visuals and characteristics:

The rather average visual representation is not entirely represented by his aggressive and combat orientated skills. However, the depiction of comforting a child may be related to his role as protector, being able to withstand damage and heal other characters at the same time.

Therion

Visual Analysis:

Therion is thickly clothed in a woollen cloak covering almost his entire body. Thus, he was coded as fully clothed, not showing any sexual connotations. Physically, Therion was considered thin with an average waist size. His posture is active and non-sexual.

Assessment of abilities and role:

Therion, the Thief, passively receives a wide array of bonuses bolstering physical attacks, his speed and his evasion ability. Players are able to use either daggers or swords while playing Therion. The character possesses various abilities enabling him to deal damage from close range (*Wildfire, HP Thief, Steal SP, Aeber's Reckoning*, *Incidental Attack*) with *HP Thief and Steal SP* allowing the character to steal health and spell power from enemies giving the player self-sustaining options. Other available skills either decrease the target's combat proficiency (*Armor Corrosive, Shackle Foe)* or further increase Therion's speed attribute which allows him to act before others.

Therion's overall kit classifies the character as rogue archetype. His game play is centred around aggressively attacking from close range, but his physical weakness requires the player to make use of his innate ability to avoid direct attacks from enemies. Thus, the character of Therion reflects male and female stereotypes equally.

The skills reveal some references to thievery and deception implying an "occupational" background to his powers, further underlining the rogue archetype.

Comparison of visuals and characteristics:

The character's non-descript visual portrayal is suitable and coherent with Therion's archetype. His comparatively thin body proportions underline his physical weakness reflected through his skill set.

H‘aanit

Visual Analysis:

H‘aanit is wearing scarce clothing, mostly consisting of fur gloves and thick boots, with a short fur cape wrung around her neck, thus H‘aanit was considered partially naked. Her upper body is barely dressed at all, revealing large parts of her midriff and back, hence her attire was classified as sexual. Her active posture even more emphasises her sexualised portrayal, drawing attention to her bottom and breasts. Her body proportions were considered as thin, with a small waist and over-average breasts.

Assessment of abilities and role:

H‘aanit, the Hunter, receives an array of bonuses to her physical attacks and her speed and evasion. She is able to use axes and bows. Almost every ability in H‘aanit‘s arsenal specifically bolsters her damage capability while using a bow from ranged distance (*Rain of Arrows, True Strike, Take Aim, Arrowstorm* among others). The remaining abilities generally affect the order of attack of enemies and herself, generally allowing H‘aanit to attack first (*Heighten Senses*), twice during one combat round (*Patience*) or disadvantaging enemies (*Leghold Trap*).

The player is presented with an almost exclusive arsenal of damage dealing abilities with no defensive capabilities. The emphasis on using bows from a ranged position clearly reflects the hunter archetype, related to physical weakness, and dependence on others to shield her from damage. On the other hand, her pure focus on dealing damage alludes to male stereotypes of violence, activeness and aggression.

The entirety of H‘aanit‘s abilities reference hunting terminology, thus her source of power can be classified as occupational.

Comparison of visuals and characteristics:

The visual sexualisation and objectification of H‘aanit in her character portrait through her attire and posture stands in stark contrast to her skills which represent aggressiveness, activeness and violence.

Summary:

Octopath Traveler‘s eight characters cover all five stereotypes used in this thesis. However, the distribution of classes is decidedly unequal in regard to the availability to each gender. Male characters can assume the roles of warriors (Olberic and Alfyn), a wizard (Cyrus) and a rogue (Therion). Only female

characters can assume the role of supporter, represented by three of the four female characters (Tressa, Ophilia, Primrose), with only H'aanit being able to directly participate in combat as a hunter. Furthermore, the visual portrayal of the female characters is replete with sexualisations either in regard of posture or attire, apart from Tressa. Even the damage dealing and active hunter archetype in the form of H'aanit is overtly sexualised in her depiction during character selection. The visual depictions of the characters, on the other hand, are, in general, directly reflected by their available abilities, apart from Alfyn, a stereotypical tank and warrior based on his abilities, and H'aanit. Thus, the game is rather consistent in terms of visual depiction and roles assumed by the selectable protagonists. The sources of power are almost entirely based around the characters' occupation or refer to institutionalised backgrounds, apart from Primrose, whose powers are based on her sexuality and beauty.

6.7. Borderlands 3 (Gearbox Software 2019)[23]

Borderlands 3 continues the story of the previous games, once again enlarging the game world and adding various new elements to the established game design. The game is played from a first person perspective, with the player able to choose from four different and named characters at the start of the game. By killing enemies and finishing missions, the player gains experience points which ultimately culminate in gaining levels which allow the player to invest in various abilities offered by each character. Once again, the plot revolves around the search for treasure and alien artefacts on a fictional planet replete with bandits, monsters and aggressive wildlife. In contrast to the previous games in the series, the player is given the choice of three signature skills per character based on the three skill trees which are mutually exclusive. Similar to the previous games in the series, Borderlands 3 can either be played in single player mode or with up to three additional players.

Amara, the Siren

Visual Analysis:

Amara is clothed in ragged leather and raddled jeans, exposing large parts of her upper body, thus she was regarded as partially clothed and her attire as

[23] The animated character selection can be found here:
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Cgl7me-vEBM
An overview of the respective abilities and talents can be found here: https://bl3skills.com/

sexually connotated. In terms of body proportions, Amara was coded as strong, with average waist and breast size. Her posture is active and non-sexual.

Assessment of abilities and role:

The first available skill tree, aptly named *Brawl*, generally revolves around her fist fighting abilities. The signature skill pertaining to the tree, *Phaseslam,* enables the player to jump into the midst of enemies and dealing damage in close vicinity to the character. Various other abilities strongly suggest playing Amara as close as possible to the enemies (*Personal Space* especially increasing damage dealt the closer Amara is positioned to the enemy) or further enhance her combat abilities with her bare hands (*Find your Center,* for example). Other abilities in this tree incentivise taking damage to bolster her own attacks (*Do Unto Others)* and generally increase her survivability (*Root to Rise, Clarity)*.

The second tree, *Mystical Assault*, supports a wizard-like game play, dealing damage from afar over various abilities. The unique spell, *Phasecast* is a variation of a classic mage ability, comparable to a ranged damaging beam. Talents like *Ascendant, Laid Bare, Remnant* or Deliverance further revolve around the signature skill and incentivise ranged game play.

The final tree, *Fist of the Elements,* presents itself as a hybrid consisting of warrior and wizard abilities. The signature spell of this tree, *Phasegrasp*, enables the player to summon giant fists which root and damage nearby enemies. Other abilities enhance her elemental attacks (*Tempest, Infusion*) or melee damage capabilities (*Illuminated Fist*). *Sustainment,* enabling Amara to heal for a percentage of damage dealt, strongly incentivises the player to adopt an aggressive play style instead of avoiding damage.

Overall, Amara can be played as an aggressive warrior, excelling at close quarters combat through the use of abilities and skills in the first and third tree, with various skills strongly suggesting a direct and fast paced game play in the midst of battle. The second tree allows a play style more related to the archetype of a wizard, with emphasis on control and ranged combat abilities. However, even her wizard skill tree emphasises aggressive game play based on talents requiring her to constantly stay in combat (*Do Harm, Laid Bare*). Thus, even her wizard archetype is tuned towards active, aggressive and direct game play.

In terms of her source of power, the skills generally do not reveal any specific background, mostly referencing elements and combat practices. However, some

control mechanics, allowing Amara to lower opposing combat abilities, are alluding to sexuality and female beauty (*Glamour* and *Allure* for example).

Comparison of visuals and characteristics:

Amara‘s play style overall requires aggression, directness and fearlessness, even in regard to her wizard archetype skill tree, which is visually reflected by her muscularity. However, her sexualised and objectified portrayal subjugates her active and aggressive set of abilities and is not consistent with her role in the game.

Fl4k, the Beastmaster

Fl4k, according to game lore, is a robot, which is reflected through their visual appearance. Despite the inability to allocate gender, the analysis was conducted nonetheless to attain a complete impression of the overall distribution of available roles and the reflection of visual impressions.

Visual Analysis:

Fl4k is fully clothed in thick layers comprised of a jacket, an overcoat, and thick gloves. Fl4k was considered average in terms of muscularity with a large waist size.

Assessment of abilities and role:

All three of the skill trees, *Stalker, Master,* and *Hunter*, allow the player to use a different beast to accompany the player. The *Hunter* tree strongly incentivises ranged game play and staying as far away as possible from the enemy (*Ambush Predator* for example increasing damage dealing capabilities the further away Fl4k is positioned from the target). The active ability in this tree, *Rakk Attack!*, allows the player to summon even more animals to aid in combat. The majority of the other abilities in this tree enhance the combat ability of his summoned creatures.

The *Stalker* tree enables the player to use stealth mechanics (*Fade Away*), allowing for an archetypical rogue game play. *Hidden Machine* increases damage dealt to enemies facing away from Fl4k, while *The Fast and the Furryous* increases damage dealt as long as the player avoids taking damage, further emphasising the rogue archetype.

The final tree, *Master,* once again generally revolves around the use of pets, with various talents increasing the combat prowess of the controlled animal (*Ferocity, Go for the Eyes!, He Bites!* among others). The unique ability, *Gamma Burst*, gives the player the ability to teleport the pet into the midst of enemies, dealing massive damage upon arrival.

Fl4k's abilities overwhelmingly relate to the archetypical hunter, using his summoned animal to distract enemies and take damage instead of the protagonist, alluding to female stereotypes in terms of physical weakness, dependence and, especially conveyed in the *Master* skill tree, passive game play, with the summoned creature being the main source of damage and control. The *Stalker* skill tree conversely allows rogue-like game play, underlining the need to avoid damage, again alluding to physical weakness, and deception through the use of stealth, however on the other hand allowing for directness and violent up-close confrontations.

The skill descriptions generically relate to terminology derived from hunting and stereotypical pet commandos not pertaining to any specific stereotypical background.

Comparison of visuals and characteristics:

Visually, Fl4k appears to be massive and heavy, generally contradicting his nimble play style, with all skill trees emphasising the need to avoid damage and either use stealth or the summoned companions to face enemies up front.

Zane, the Operative

Visual Analysis:

Zane is visually presented as comparatively old, bearded and wearing a monocle-like gadget. He is fully clothed, the attire being non-sexualised with an average body type and average waist size. His stance is active and non-sexual.

Assessment of abilities and role:

Despite the name of the first skill tree, *Under Cover*, the tree is comprised of various talents supporting and enhancing teammates. *Barrier* deploys a protective shield for Zane and all players in the party, with numerous talents increasing the benefits everyone attains from staying close to the barrier (*Charged Relay, Nanites or Some Shite, Redistribution, All-Rounder* and *Deterrence Field* and *Distributed Denial*). The majority of other abilities in this tree bolster Zane's defences (*Hearty Stock, Ready for Action, Stiff Upper Lip*).

The second tree, *Hitman,* offers the player the ability to summon a drone (*SNTNL).* The other abilities in this tree are a mixture of enhancing the deployable drone (*Winter's Drone, Bad Dose*, among others*)* and a variety of *kill skills*, abilities which add benefits for a short duration after killing an enemy which refresh upon the next kill (*Violent Speed, Death Follows Close, Good Misfortune*, *Seein' Red)*. The

tree offers no protection, apart from enhancements to movement speed and benefits to constantly moving (*Violent Speed, Violent Momentum*). Thus, the *Hitman* skill tree requires the player to avoid damage, which is aided by increased speed, as long as Zane constantly engages in combat.

Finally, the *Double Agent* tree allows Zane to deploy a clone (*Digi-Clone*) which distracts enemies and deals damage dependent on the selection of other talents (*Boom. Enhance., Dopplebanger, Double Barrel*). Furthermore, various talents let Zane redirect damage taken to the deployed clone (*Digital Distribution*) or avoid damage as long as the clone is present (*Like a Ghost*).

Players of Zane are presented with a mixture of supporter abilities from the first tree and general hunter abilities with rogue elements from the remaining skill trees. Thus, Zane is either played utilising *Barrier*, aiding and enhancing teammates, reminiscent of the female stereotype of nurturer and caretaker; or as an archetypical hunter, being reliant on his drone or clone to mitigate damage, thereby avoiding damage to himself, displaying the stereotypes of dependence, physical weakness and deception. However, the vast array of *kill skill*s emphasise and incentivise aggressive game play pertaining to male stereotypes of aggression and activeness.

The skill descriptions generally use generic combat terms, with a few references to technology and robotics.

Comparison of visuals and characteristics:

Zane‘s visual representation is best characterised as average. He is fully clothed, not overly strong, thin or overweight, with no sexual allusions. The role of supporter or hunter, strongly relying on either additional players or on the summoned drone or clone to avoid damage and deal with enemies, however relate to allusions of weakness and passivity which are not reflected in his portrayal.

Moze, the Gunner

Visual Analysis:

Moze‘s character model is reminiscent of a soldier, including a metal helmet, heavy armour, goggles, war paint, and various gadgets attached to her protective gear. Hence, Moze is fully clothed, her attire clearly regarded as non-sexualised, with average body proportions, average waist and breast size. Her posture is active and non-sexual.

Assessment of abilities and role:

Moze's abilities are slightly different from the other available characters. In her base form, Moze only has the ability to summon her mechanical walking tank, called *Iron Bear*, which she is able to enter and control for a limited duration. The signature skills pertaining to each skill tree add different weapons to the summonable robot. It has to be noted that, while Moze is steering her robot, *Iron Bear* has vastly increased health points and defences.

Most talents specifically express whether they pertain to Moze or her *Iron Bear*. *Bottomless Mags,* the first skill tree, offering a *Minigun* to Moze's robot, generally revolves around enhancing the *Iron Bear* (*Salamander, Fuel Economy, Chemical Warfare, Let off Steam, General Winter*). Other talents allow Moze to regenerate ammunition (*Forge, Cloud of Lead, Redistribution*) while others incentivise the player to constantly move (*Scrappy, Rushin' Offensive*).

The *Demolition Woman* tree enables a *Grenade Launcher* as weapon attachment for the *Iron Bear* while again offering a multitude of talents enhancing the robot itself (*Shaped Charge, Musical Chairs, Active Tracking, Target Softening*). Furthermore, *Demolition Woman* offers the player a number of talents incentivising the use of grenades while outside her robot (*Why can't I Carry all these Grenades, To the Last, Explosive Punctuation*). Aside from these, the majority of other abilities prolong the duration of the use of *Iron Bear,* and add survivability and general power while steering the robot (*Grizzled, Deadlines, Vampyr, Auto Bear*).

The final tree, *Shield of Retribution*, adding a *Railgun* to the arsenal of *Iron Bear*, is comprised of damage mitigating talents, supporting abilities and enhancements to the melee damage capability of the *Iron Bear*. *Security Bear, Armored Infantry, Tenacious Defense, Behind the Iron Curtain* and *Force Feedback* all enhance the *Iron Bear's* capability to survive. On the other hand, talents like *Selfless Vengeance, Drowning in Brass,* and *Full Can* support and enhance the abilities of teammates. Finally, talents like *Bear Fist, Wild Swing and Close the Distance* enable the player to excel in melee hand to hand combat while steering the *Iron Bear*.

Almost the entire array of talents foster aggression and active and direct gameplay, at least while Moze is using her *Iron Bear*. This is also the interesting dichotomy within the character. Moze only ever unfolds her full potential when she is operating the giant robot, offering unique weaponry, more survivability and numerous talents specifically only enhancing the robot. Thus, the game play in

general can be subsumed under the warrior archetype replete with numerous male stereotypes, however the difference between Moze and the game play with Moze inside her *Iron Bear* is striking. While outside the robot, Moze is more reliant on avoiding damage, with certain talents offering her increased movement speed, or indirect means of damage through grenades which can be launched from cover. This, in turn, emphasises female stereotypes of weakness, indirectness, dependence or even passiveness while the player is waiting for the *Iron Bear* to become available again.

Moreover, the final tree includes various talents enhancing and boosting party members, but at the same time massively bolstering Moze‘s defences, thus while supporting abilities generally are subsumed under the female stereotype of nurturer, Moze‘s protective abilities in this tree allude to the male stereotype of protector.

Overall, the talents regularly reference engineering and robotics as source of her abilities, thus alluding to institutional and occupational sources.

Comparison of visuals and characteristics:

Moze is visually presented as battle hardened soldier, which would allude to a warrior archetype. Her general gameplay is coherent with this representation, however a stark differentiation can be observed, depending on the player controlling Moze or the *Iron Bear*. While outside the robot, players are strongly incentivised to avoid damage taken, or use indirect means of damage, underlining physical weakness and passiveness. Once *Iron Bear* is controllable, the character fully accomplishes the male traits of the warrior archetype: aggression, strength, directness.

Summary:

Borderlands 3 presents the player with a character choice of two females, one male, and a non-binary robot. The warrior role can be assumed by playing either Amara or Moze, thus the stereotypical male role of front line fighter with the most durability and combat prowess in close quarters is only represented by female characters in Borderlands 3. However, both female characters are not consistently represented as their role would suggest. Amara is the only character who can be regarded as sexualised in terms of her clothing. Moreover, her skills are referencing beauty and sexuality as a source for her abilities, additionally subjugating her powerful set of abilities. Moze, on the other hand, can be

considered rather weak and dependent as long as she is not controlling her summonable robot. Zane, the only male character, has access to the archetype of supporter or hunter with strong reliance on his deployable mechanical units to shield the character from damage. Thus, Zane, in his role as nurturer and his abilities strongly emphasising dependence on others as a hunter, is subverting stereotypical female roles and stereotypes. Finally, Fl4k, the robot, can be played as a hunter or rogue, with their abilities regularly emphasising physical weakness despite Fl4k‘s imposing character model in the character selection screen.

7. Beyond the Dichotomies

The thesis aimed at assessing the visual portrayal and the roles of playable characters in video games offering the player a selection of protagonists with at least one female and one male option. The visual analysis was conducted by three independent coders utilising a coding system assessing clothing, body proportions and posture in the character selection screen (if applicable) of each game. The analysis of the roles of each character and stereotypes pertaining to these roles was based on the analysis of the available skills and abilities each character had access to. Furthermore, skill descriptors were analysed to investigate any stereotypical ascriptions of the protagonist's sources of power.

In total, 33 characters were coded within the 7 games available after the application of the sample criteria (see above)[24]. The coding of gender resulted in 14 playable female protagonists, 18 male protagonists, and 1 non-binary character. Hence, despite the selection of games based on the requirement of having at least one playable character of each gender, the sample displays a slight asymmetry, but naturally not to an extent observed in previous studies (see for example Dietz 1998, Dill and Thill 2007, Williams 2009 or Downs & Smith 2010, Acker 2018).

Regarding the clothing of the protagonists, out of the 33 playable characters, 10 characters, 8 female and 2 male characters, were only partially clothed, which was defined by the scales as revealing cleavage, midriff or bare legs above the knees. 2 characters, one female and one male, were only dressed in underwear.

This strong tendency of female characters being portrayed in more revealing attire is further accentuated with regard to sexual connotations of clothing. According to the scale used, sexually connotated clothing pertained to every clothing item, including shoes, which, in the opinion of the coders, highlighted, accentuated or emphasised curves or otherwise "would arouse interest of physical intimacy" (Downs and Smith 2010: 725). First of all, no male characters were regarded as sexually stereotyped in terms of their attire. However, 10 of the 14 playable female characters were wearing sexually connotated clothing, especially apparent in the game Octopath Traveler. Thus, Beasley and Standley's assessment of attire in 2002, concluding that a "majority of female characters are dressed [...]

[24] A complete table with all results of the analysis can be found in the Appendix section of this thesis

to bring attention to their bodies, particularly their breasts" (289) is still valid in the sample of more recent video games.

It has to be noted at this point that attire especially in relation to the point of assessment chosen, the character selection screen, may not be synonymous for the entire game. The majority of the games chosen pertain to the role-playing genre, which in most cases enable the player to change the attire, either solely for cosmetic reasons (as offered by all three Borderlands games and Assassins Creed Syndicate) or due to items found which enhance the character's ability (as in Diablo 2). Thus, the acquisition of more powerful items may very well be reflected through the visual stylisation of clothing obtained (see Lauro 2014). However, the character selection screen still conveys the initial impressions and may still strongly influence the choice of character.

Sexualisation of female characters was also, but to a lesser degree, observed through their posture. 6 female protagonists were categorised as being portrayed in a sexually connotated posture as opposed to no male character being depicted this way. Again, Octopath Traveler was the game displaying the majority of their female characters in sexual poses in the character selection screen (3 out of the 4 available female characters). In terms of activity and passivity, the analysis of posture did not result in any gender dichotomies, in contrast to previous studies (see for example Seidl 2009, or Acker 2018).

The overall sexualisation of a majority of female characters (10 out of 14, or 71%) is consistent with a multitude of previous studies (Dietz 1998, Scharrer 2004, Ivory 2006, Jansz and Martis 2007 or Downs and Smith 2010, Acker 2018). The observation by Lynch et al. from 2016, ascertaining that sexualisation is gradually diminishing in games over the last decades (577) cannot be confirmed in this sample, with the two most recent games (Octopath Traveler, 2018, and Borderlands 3, 2019) still showing considerable sexualisation of their female characters.

The general tendency of highly sexualised but active and playable female characters is in line with regular observations of the "action babe" (Seidl 2009: 57), or the "Lara phenomenon" (Jansz and Martis 2007: 147). Thus, despite all female characters in this study being active (at least to a degree, depending on their role, see below), playable protagonists, they are overtly sexualised and objectified from a purely visual perspective.

These findings are also in stark contrast to Rajkowska's study, analysing the relation of visual sexualisation and role in terms of main protagonist or support character (2014). Rajkowska concluded that main characters are in general rather favourably displayed, not showing overly expressive sexual connotations (see 2014: 61f). These divergent findings between the present study and Rajkowska's analysis may be explained by games in this study containing a selection of female and male protagonists which are rather distinct in their roles but also in their visuals, as opposed to the games in Rajkowska's samples which regularly included only one protagonist. This, furthermore, would allow the assumption that the presence of a male and a female hero in the same setting might prompt game designers to amplify specifically male and female stereotypes based on the theoretical conceptions of assumed in- and out-group homogeneity in respect to gender stereotypes (see Hilton and von Hippel 1996: 247-248). Additionally, by offering various choices of protagonists, the over-stylisation along the lines of typical stereotypes may be a (subconscious) game design decision to convey certain roles and game play styles over the visualisation of characters (see Bembeneck 2015: 55). However, as will be shown below, the roles were generally not consistent with the visual depiction of the characters.

The visual analysis of body proportions assessed muscularity, waist size, and additionally, for female characters, breast size. 3 male characters were considered hypermuscular, displaying extreme muscularity in almost unnatural fashion, and 9 characters (7 male characters and 2 female characters) as showing over-average muscularity (coded as *strong*). Clearly, physical strength as a visual feature of female characters is rather underrepresented (14% of the playable female characters). On the other hand, the positively connotated male stereotype of muscularity (see Giles and Close 2008 for example) was displayed by a total of 10 male characters (55% of the total 18 male characters). Interestingly, only two of these male characters were portrayed with a small waist size. Hence, the stereotypically V-shaped body ideal (see for example Martins et al. 2011: 47) is, in general, not represented by male characters in this sample (with Martins et al. 2011 obtaining similar results).

5 male characters and 7 female characters were coded as thin, additionally only two characters, 1 male and 1 female, showed considerable underweight (coded as *skinny*). Incidentally, also only three characters were coded as having a large waist size, one of them being the robot Fl4K. Hence, from the human characters

available, only 6% were represented as overweight. Clearly, the characters in this sample adhere to regular beauty standards, at the very least by hardly displaying overweight at all (this was also observed by Martins et al. 2011 among others).

The distribution of breast-size further underlines the general sexualisation and stereotypical body image conveyed by the games analysed. Out of 14 female characters, 8 protagonists were coded with over-average or voluptuous breast size, with only 1 character showing below average breast size (Emily, Dishonored 2). Additionally, out of these 8 female characters featuring over-average breast size, 5 were displayed with a small waist and 1 character being coded as skinny (Tressa, Octopath Traveler). Moreover, no female character was coded as having a large waist size, hence an overweight body stature of female characters is not present in this sample.

These results in respect of body proportions further underline and confirm general findings in the literature review. As already noted by Downs and Smith in 2010, women are "significantly more likely to be shown partially nude, featured with an unrealistic body image" (721). The display of body proportions of the female characters, furthermore, fully follow the perceived male ideal of the female body of "curvaceously thin" (Harrison 2003: 256, and Dill and Thill 2007: 852). As Harrison's study shows, "young adults' perceptions of the ideal female figure suggest that a slim body with comparatively large breasts indeed sets the standard." (ibid. 255). The scarce display of strength in the portrayal of female characters in this sample further adds to the adherence of presumed ideal female body standards.

In conclusion, pertaining to the posed research question relating to visual stereotypisation of the available characters, the 7 games showed a strong tendency to visually sexualise female characters. Moreover, body proportions show a regular stereotyped body image for female characters, with a slight stereotypical representation of the muscularity ideal for male characters. Overweight characters are almost entirely absent, only 2 males and a non-binary robot were represented as overweight[25]. Additionally, while the analysis of activity and passivity in posture

[25] Naturally, these depictions of presumed ideal body standards and the underrepresentation of overweight in popular media in general has proven to have, at times severe, implications for the perception of body ideals, self confidence and self-efficacy as touched on in the sections of social cognitive theory (see Morawitz 2007 or Brenick et al. 2007) and gender schema theory (see Wrobleski and Huston 1987). Due to length constraints, this, very crucial notion, cannot be discussed in further detail however.

did not reveal any conclusive results, posture was another means to convey sexuality in the portrayal of female characters.

The analysis of sources of power used the skill descriptors and visual depictions of skill icons to deduce any stereotypical allusions to femininity or masculinity. It has to be noted, that only 25 characters could be categorised based on their skill descriptors, with 2 (Emily and Corvo, Dishonored 2) showing signs pertaining to male and female stereotypes equally. Copenhaver (2002) assessed regular stereotypes of male sources of power as based on occupational or institutional resources, such as education, or field of work, whereas a stereotypical female source of power is subsumed under personal or individual resources, regularly referencing emotions, beauty, or sexuality (Copenhaver 2002: 85; see also Smith 2010, Taitchik and Mosher 1993 or Hobson 2019).

Consequently, 23 characters could be categorised, with 16 (9 male and 7 female) having their power based on either occupational or institutional sources such as technological abilities, robotics, specialised and institutionalised tuition, military training or similar educational backgrounds. 3 male characters based their powers on personal sources, strongly pertaining to conceptualisations of hypermasculinity, strength, fear, or violence, with one also showing strong signs of psychological disorders (Krieg, Borderlands 2). On the other hand, 4 female characters could be categorised as having their power based on personal or individual sources, these, however, all pertaining to sexuality and beauty. Hence, the analysis of the sources of power shows some stereotypisation of male as well as female characters, whereas the female characters were once again objectified and marginalised to their sexuality and beauty in respect their source of their abilities. Contrary to the male characters, whose personal powers were related to general conceptualisations of hypermasculinity, strength, dominance and fear-inducing presence (especially notable in the character of the Barbarian from Diablo 2), the allusion to sexuality can be regarded as to subjugate their otherwise powerful abilities. This has also been noted by Hobson (2019) in the analysis of common depictions of female magic users. Contrary to the general stereotype of the learned and educated male wizard, studying books and deriving his power from institutions, female magic users regularly are reduced to their emotions, sexuality and seductive abilities as source (Hobson 2019: 56-58). This dichotomy of the background of magic users can also be observed in this analysis. Both, Lilith‘s (Borderlands) as well as Amara‘s (Borderlands 3) magical abilities are

based on their sexuality whereas male magic users either displayed no reference or institutional sources (Cyrus, Octopath Traveler)[26].

Maya (Borderlands 2), moreover, displays another common trope subverting her abilities: the common film trope of the sexualised nurse (see Brien and McAllister 2019). Naturally, the reference to emotionality and sexuality implies other negative stereotypes, most commonly unpredictability or instability (see Hobson 2019: 58 or Jeffords 1989: 145).

Finally, the roles of the playable characters were assessed based on the weighting and effects of the available abilities for each character. It has to be noted that the archetypical categorisation into five categories allows for only a broad classification. For example, the hunter archetype represented by Fl4k (Borderlands 3) is more strongly related to female stereotypes as opposed to H'aanit (Octopath Traveler) whose skill set requires the player to be more active and aggressive as opposed to Fl4k's rather defensive, passive and indirect skill set[27].

The most common archetype available to players in the seven games in this sample is the warrior class. 16 out of 33 characters are allowing this particular play style of a fearless, active and direct damage dealing class, regularly offering abilities to withstand damage, or even benefiting from damage taken, further emphasising male stereotypes of physical strength and violence. In respect to the distribution based on gender, 11 male characters have access to the warrior archetype while 6 female characters can be played as this class. Interestingly, the majority of the male warriors are restricted to this play style based on their abilities (8 out of 11), whereas 5 of the 6 female warriors can be played differently as well: Maya (Borderlands) has access to the support archetype, the Assassin from Diablo 2 and Emily (Dishonored 2) can be played as a rogue, and Gaige (Borderlands 2) as well as the Amazon (Diablo 2) have access to wizard and hunter archetypes.

A further investigation into the female warriors in relation to their visual stylisation and their sources of power reveal a regular subjugation of the otherwise predominantly male stereotype of the class: Maya, the Assassin, the Amazon and Amara display visual sexualisations or stereotyping based on their

[26] The magical abilities of Corvo as well as Emily (Dishonored 2) are both based on concepts of institutionalised training as well as, from a supernatural perspective, on emotions and willpower, thus both have been excluded.

[27] The analysis of each character consequently refers to the specific pertaining stereotypes based on the detailed assessment of the available abilities.

source of power. Only Emily, who, however, is playable as rogue as well, and Moze (Borderlands 3) are neither visually nor otherwise sexually stereotyped. However, the abilities of Moze and her general game play can be considered to, at least to a degree, subjugate the warrior archetype as well. As discussed in detail in the character analysis (see above) Moze only fully accomplishes the warrior archetype with the use of one ability which allows the character to enter a tank-like robot. This ability is an innate mechanic of the character, thus the player is forced to acquire it. The activation of the ability not only severely enhances Moze‘s combat and defence capabilities but also visually transforms the character model as she is entering the robot. While this ability is not available (the cool down phase is affected by talents, but it can be assumed that players of Moze spend approximately 40% of the game play steering the robot) her lack of personal defences and the focus on indirect damage sources incentivise the player to play more defensively and passively.

Thus, while the sample allows for a considerable number of female warriors, none of the available characters can be considered as a pure, archetypical warrior from a holistic point of view including visual presentation, narrative elements of sources of power and game mechanics. These findings are similar to Gal‘s analysis of supposedly strong female warriors in fantasy films (2019). The author emphasises the apparent dichotomy in the role of the female warrior: while the display of strong females, resolving conflicts with weapons, hand to hand combat and guns, can be considered an empowerment of female characters in general, they are still regularly “hyper-sexualized” (Gal 2019: 93). The female body, even while the character displays stereotypically male traits in their role, “seems to be written for a male fetishist audience” which is reminiscent of Mulvey‘s assessment of the male gaze (Gal 2019: 93-94). The female warriors in the seven games clearly can be subsumed under this consideration as well.

Aside from the warrior archetype, the remaining four archetypes are rather evenly balanced between male and female characters. 3 female characters and 2 male characters can be played as a rogue, an archetype with mixed stereotypical ascriptions, still generally alluding to aggression and violence, while at the same time emphasising physical weakness and deception as main stereotypical traits subsumed under the class.

The wizard archetype is available to 3 female and 3 male characters respectively. The ascription of stereotypes for the wizard archetypes highly

depends on the nature of the abilities used, but can generally be subsumed under activeness, and directness on the one hand, and physical weakness on the other hand, thereby equally alluding to male and female stereotypes. Incidentally, the wizard abilities of the Druid (Diablo 2) are predominantly passive in their game play manifestation in contrast to the other archetypical wizards in the sample.

The hunter archetype, generally based around activeness and violence to some degree, while at the same time emphasising indirectness, at times passiveness, dependence and physical weakness, is available to 3 female and 4 male characters. The hunter class can be more narrowly divided into two strands: the *lone* hunter, attempting to engage into combat from maximum distance and making use of speed or, at times, deception to avoid enemies. This sub-category is strongly alluding to activeness, directness and aggression to some degree, but at the same time to physical weakness. This play style is offered only by female protagonists (Amazon, Diablo 2; H'aanit, Octopath Traveler). On the other hand, the *companion-based* hunter is depending on either summonable or permanent companions to defend the character, or to even conduct the majority of the fighting. These companions are not under direct player control, thus, an element of passivity can be deduced as well as a definite dependence on others, as regular female stereotypes. This play style is predominantly displayed by male characters (see the detailed analysis of Mordecai, Borderlands; Zane, Borderlands 3; and the Necromancer, Diablo 2) with Gaige (Borderlands 2) being the only female character depending on her summonable companion if the player chooses to play Gaige as a hunter archetype.

The classes of rogue, wizard and hunter are almost equally distributed with respect to gender. Even under closer analysis, the allocation of male and female stereotypes is highly varied, not revealing any dominant patterns. Hence the overarching role of the pure damage dealer is equally accessible to both genders in the games analysed.

Finally, the supporter archetype generally consists of abilities which enable, heal, and support teammates, or decrease enemy combat proficiency as indirect means of support. Naturally, the supporter archetype is almost fully relatable to the female stereotypes of nurturer, caretaker, passivity, dependence and physical weakness in combat situations. In combination with archetypical warrior abilities, however, supporting skills may also allude to the male stereotype of protector, shielding and protecting teammates through physical presence.

8 protagonists, with a surprisingly even distribution of 4 male and 4 female characters, enabled the play style as supporter. Moreover, the majority of pure female supporters are appearing in Octopath Traveler (3 out 4). The visual portrayal of the female supporter characters overall reflects their role by displays alluding to physical weakness. Additionally, 3 out of the 4 female supporters are portrayed in a sexualised and objectified way, even alluding to the *sexy nurse* trope (Maya, Borderlands).

The male supporters, on the other hand, visually do not reflect their supporter archetype. Even to the contrary, especially Roland (Borderlands 1) and the Paladin (Diablo 2) visually convey strength, violence or aggression, which is not reflected by their role. This pattern of visual misrepresentation of a strongly connotated role is comparable to the visualisations of the female warriors. Hence, it can be deduced that the game design of the seven analysed games does not coherently represent neither female warriors nor male supporters.

The roles of the characters do purport not only a visual impression but rather imply 'can do', and 'cannot do' descriptors based on their respective gender. As already noted in the literature review, character selection for female players is generally more based around self-identification, whereas male players tend to choose their character based on the class, not on gender (see for more details Gao et al. 2017; Yee 2008). Thus, clearly, the roles available to female and male characters can either subvert or enforce stereotypes. Early and Diekmann consider the display of roles as instrumental due to their overall impact: the authors regard roles to not only convey role expectations, but to form these at the same time due to "self-regulatory processes that follow from internalized gender roles - that is, people derive social identity from their gender group" (2006: 27). Moreover, displays of stereotypical gender behaviour can effect role expectancy according to Talbot (2003: 470) who refers to stereotypical role portrayals as "ideological prescriptions for behavior" (ibid.). Conversely, regular counter-stereotypical portrayals may add to positively altering traditional perceptions of sex-congruent behaviour (as detailed in previous sections). While the visual portrayal of the video games analysed continue to produce overwhelmingly stereotyped depictions of sexualised and victimised women, the distribution of roles is not as clear. The games purport the overarching stereotype that the archetypical warrior, accompanied by all the stereotypical traits mentioned above, is mainly reserved to men, with female warriors being slightly underrepresented. In terms of active, and

aggressive roles being able to fight and overcome adversity with offensive, and direct means, female and male characters had equal access to the roles, thus offering players identification figures of both genders with similar abilities across the games. Finally, the role of the supporter is again accessible to both genders equally, which overall adds to a diverse distribution of roles and abilities with respect to gender.

However, as noted above, the male supporters as well as the female warriors are not consistent when assessed by all factors of this thesis. The design of the female warrior characters is regularly accompanied by allusions to stereotypical femininity, either through the visualisation, source of power, or intrinsic game mechanics. Similarly, the male supporter regularly seems to be *counter-balanced* with overt displays of strength and aggression, seemingly as to retain at least some connotations of *manliness.* Thus, the question has to be posed in how far these examples serve as a counter-stereotypical display. Especially in regard to attributional processes of stereotyping in general, as Hilton and von Hippel ascertain: "perceivers are more likely to remember, believe, rely on, and communicate stereotype-congruent information than stereotype-incongruent information" (1996: 252).

Finally, the thesis aimed to assess if the visual representation of characters is reflected by their roles and abilities in the game. As extensively discussed in the literature review, an overwhelming amount of academic studies based the assessment of characters solely on visual impressions. The comparison of the visual portrayals of the available characters in the selection screen, and the roles deduced from the abilities and skills available to the same characters reveal a general inconsistency. Out of the 33 characters, 9 were classified as completely inconsistent, and 8 partially inconsistent, either due to the visual impressions only representing one of more possible archetypes, or, conversely, only one of the visual components being represented by the roles. Thus, less than half (16, or 48%) of the characters were properly represented by their visuals in regard to their role assumed. Interestingly, female characters were generally more often misrepresented (9 out of 14, 64%) compared to the male characters (7 out of 18, 39%). As a most common pattern, the visual sexualisation and objectification (see above) of female characters was not represented by their active, aggressive, or otherwise non-stereotyped, abilities. Thus, at least pertaining to the 7 games with their 33 characters, it can be concluded that a visual analysis would not have fully

predicted the behavioural patterns deduced from game play mechanics. Clearly, the way a player may experience their chosen female or male character, either subverting or reinforcing stereotypical behaviour, could not solely be deduced from the visual analysis.

7.1. Moving Forward - A best practice example

In her article about the use of archetypes and the display of stereotypes in popular media, Kidd regards archetypes as a necessary plot device, but emphasises: "it is when these archetypes are married to stereotypes that concerns arise for media management in a multi-cultural society" (2016: 26). Naturally, the use of archetypes as "functional occupations" is an intrinsic feature of video games by design (Jayemanne 2017: 20). Based on Kidd's observation, it is only problematic if these archetypes are accompanied by, and regularly connected to gender (or any other) stereotypes. With regard to the games analysed in this thesis, almost every game alludes to gender stereotypes, either through their use of stereotypical gender portrayals, the sources of power of female characters being based on sexuality or emotions, or in terms of available abilities and roles, especially considering the lack of female warriors without any elements subverting their role. However, contrary to other games, Dishonored 2 (Arkane Studios 2016) can be regarded as best practice example in this sample. Both available characters are visually not sexualised, and have access to a wide variety of possibilities of play style based on their skills. While, clearly, Corvo, the male protagonist, may be more suited to be played as a warrior, which is also visually reflected by his physical presence, Emily can be played just as aggressively and offensively as well. It depends entirely on the player's choice if Emily is played as an aggressive, front line warrior, dealing with enemies in direct combat, or to utilise her abilities in a more indirect way. Jayemanne regards this as the "possibility of other performances" (2017: 20).

Hence, going forward, the demand by de Castell and Bryson from 1998 still holds true: "We argue, then, for a conscientious retooling of [...] games not to consolidate gender" (1998: 254). A female warrior then, without pejorative visualisation or game mechanics, a non-muscular male supporter and enabler, and varied options not pertaining to traditional patterns of supposedly standard male and female roles. As Kidd emphasises, it is the responsibility of "producers and

media educators [...] to create stories which promote inclusion and understanding" (2016: 25).

7.2. Limitations and Outlook

The thesis at hand aimed at introducing a more comprehensive methodology to assess video games as an interactive medium. Due to length and time restrictions, the thesis naturally was confronted with various limitations. Especially the comparatively small sample size and the limited visual coding may pose problems in terms of reliability. Even more so in regard to the assessment of roles based on the categorisation of skills and abilities, which were done only by one person. However, despite these limitations, the thesis certainly was able to add to the already existing corpus of video game studies.

While, obviously, a full and in-depth assessment of a singular video game is not feasible due to average game lengths, variations depending on player choices, variance based on chance, and impeding factors such as player skill, the method presented in this study may offer a *shortcut* to assess behavioural patterns and player experience through the analysis of abilities and game mechanics. Clearly, the analysis of abilities still requires a certain amount of play time to grasp the mechanics and inner workings of the skills at hand, and, most importantly, this approach of analysis only pertains to a specific set of video games. However, this method could also be applied to a wide variety of online multiplayer games with hundreds of playable characters and hundreds of thousands concurrent players (see for example *League of Legends*, Riot Games 2009; *Heroes of the Storm*, Blizzard Entertainment 2015; *Overwatch*, Blizzard Entertainment 2016; *Dota 2*, Valve 2013; as well as an ever increasing number of multiplayer mobile games). Even more so, the analysis of abilities and skills could be repurposed to assess the relative difficulty or relative power level of playable characters.

While visual depictions are still a regular place of stereotypical portrayal and remain highly problematic in their own right, it is my firm belief that the roles assumed by the players may even more strongly influence the perception of gendered roles. As noted above, especially role playing games oftentimes allude to self-identification processes or to the realisations of power fantasies. Thus, playing a character for potentially hundreds of hours is bound to be impactful. As a final note, this study did not assess ethnicity, non-binary displays of characters or non-

heteronormative displays, despite their obvious lack of representation in the examined games.

To conclude, despite the aforementioned limitations of the study, the analysis highlights regular dichotomies of the visual and the behavioural of the analysed characters, and introduces an innovative methodological approach to assess characters more comprehensively within a reasonable scope, both of which contribute to the overall advancement of video game analysis.

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9. Appendix

9.1. Abstract

This thesis analyses seven contemporary video games with regards to male and female stereotypisation. Contrary to the majority of previous studies, the analysis not only assesses visual cues to ascertain common themes of sexualisation, passivity or aggression of the characters within the game, but also suggests an additional methodological approach to measure the roles of each playable character. In order to categorise the thirty-three sample characters, the available skills for each character were analysed to subsume the characters under general archetypical roles related to overarching male or female stereotypes respectively, The roles deduced from this analysis, additionally can be regarded as predictors for the game play experience of players. Moreover, the sources of power deduced from the skill descriptors of each character were analysed in order to assess stereotypical tropes from a narrative perspective as well. Finally, the results of the visual analysis and the occupied role of each character were compared to investigate if a visual analysis could reliably predict the role of each character in the game.

The results of the visual analysis are consistent with the majority of previous works. A large majority of the playable female characters were portrayed as sexualised, either in terms of attire or in regard to their posture, whereas no male character was depicted in a sexualised manner. Also, in terms of sources of power, regular occurrences of marginalisation of female characters were observed, subjugating otherwise powerful characters by reducing the characters to their emotions, their bodily features or their sexuality.

As opposed to the stereotypical visualisation of the characters, the analysis of the abilities available to the characters resulted in a relatively even distribution of roles per gender with the exception of the warrior archetype mainly being occupied by male characters.

The comparison of visual representation and roles occupied revealed apparent dichotomies. It can be concluded that the visual analysis of video game characters does not predict the roles obtained in the games in this sample.

9.2. Abstract (German)

Die vorliegende Diplomarbeit untersucht die Darstellung von weiblichen sowie männlichen Charakteren in Hinblick auf die Verwendung von Gender-Stereotypen in sieben kontemporären Videospielen. Entgegen einer Vielzahl vorhergehender Studien, die Videospiele auf rein visuellen Faktoren beurteilten, verwendet die vorliegende Untersuchung einen neuen methodologischen Zugang um neben der etablierten visuellen Analyse auch die Rollen der spielbaren Charaktere einzuordnen und gegenüberstellen zu können. Hierbei wurden die Fähigkeiten der insgesamt 33 Charaktere im Hinblick auf männliche sowie weibliche Stereotype analysiert und unter archetypische Rollen subsumiert. Die so gewonnen Rollen der Charaktere dienen zudem als Prädiktor der Spielererfahrung als aktiv Handelnder in der Rolle des übernommenen Charakters. Weiters wurde durch die Analyse der Begleittexte der Fähigkeiten, sowie deren Visualisierung, ein narratives Element untersucht: der Ursprung der Fähigkeiten der jeweiligen Charaktere und etwaige Zuordnungen zu Stereotypen die gegebenenfalls deren Rolle und relative Stärke widerspiegeln oder konterkarieren könnten.

Die Ergebnisse der Studie zeigen, in visueller Hinsicht, eine regelmäßige Stereotypisierung weiblicher Charaktere in deren Darstellung als Sexualobjekt, ausgedrückt sowohl durch Kleidung wie auch Körperhaltung. Somit bestätigt die vorliegende Untersuchung den Großteil vorhergehender Arbeiten.

Im Hinblick auf die narrative Legitimierung der Fähigkeiten der Charakter wurde ebenso die Tendenz der Marginalisierung weiblicher Charaktere auf deren Sexualität sowie auf Emotionalität beobachtet.

Die Untersuchung der verfügbaren Rollen der jeweiligen Charaktere zeigt hingegen eine generelle Parität von männlichen sowie weiblichen Charakteren. Mit Ausnahme des stark männlich konnotierten Krieger-Archetyps stehen in den untersuchten Spielen Frauen sowie Männern alle Klassen jedweder Konnotation zur Verfügung.

Im Hinblick auf den Vergleich von visueller Repräsentation und den verfügbaren Rollen der Charaktere wurde eine weitestgehende Dichotomie festgestellt.

Daher reflektiert die visuelle Darstellung der Charaktere generell nicht den Fähigkeiten und Erfahrungen von Spielern als Handelnde der übernommenen Charaktere.

9.3. Coding Table

Coding table of visuals and roles:[28]

Character (gender, Game)	Clothing	Body Proportions	Posture	Archetype	Source of Power	Conformity of Role and Visuals
Amazon (f, D2)	partial; sexual	strong; average; voluptuous	active; non-sexual	Warrior/ Hunter	generic combat terms	partial
Assassin (f, D2)	partial; sexual	average; small; over-average	active; non-sexual	Warrior/ Rogue	combat sports/ institutional	divergent
Necromancer (m, D2)	full; non-sexual	strong; average;	active; non-sexual	Hunter/ Wizard/ Supporter	dark magic/occult magic	divergent
Barbarian (m, D2)	naked; non-sexual	hypermuscular; average	active; non-sexual	Warrior with Supporter elements	aggression, intimidation, physical presence; personal	consistent
Paladin (m, D2)	full; non-sexual	strong; average	active; non-sexual	Supporter	divinity, holy power; institutional	divergent
Sorceress (f, D2)	partial; sexual	thin; average; average	active; sexual	Wizard	elemental mastery	partial
Druid (m, D2)	full; non-sexual	thin; average;	active; non-sexual	Wizard/ Warrior	nature, wild animals theme	consistent
Roland (m, BL)	full; non-sexual	strong; average	passive; non-sexual	Supporter with Warrior elements	military training; occupational,institutional	divergent
Mordecai (m, BL)	full; non-sexual	skinny; small	passive; non-sexual	Hunter	generic combat terminology	consistent
Lilith (f, BL)	partial; sexual	thin; average; over-average	passive; sexual	Wizard	sexuality, beauty, personal	divergent

[28] Abbreviations used: f=female; m=male; D2=Diablo 2; BL=Borderlands; BL2=Borderlands 2; BL3=Borderlands 3; AC= Assassin‘s Creed Syndicate; Dis2=Dishonored 2; OT=Octopath Traveler.

Character (gender, Game)	Clothing	Body Proportions	Posture	Archetype	Source of Power	Conformity of Role and Visuals
Brick (m, BL)	full; non-sexual	hypermuscular; small	active; non-sexual	Warrior	combat sports, fighting, institutional	consistent
Axton (m, BL2)	full; non-sexual	strong; average	active; non-sexual	Warrior with Hunter elements	military training, institutional	consistent
Maya (f, BL2)	partial; sexual	average; average; over-average	active; non-sexual	Warrior/ Supporter	sexuality, hospital, nurse trope; personal/ occupational	partial
Salvador (m, BL2)	full; non-sexual	strong; large	active; non-sexual	Warrior	violence, hyper-masculinity; personal	consistent
Zer0 (m, BL2)	full; non-sexual	thin; average	active; non-sexual	Rogue/ Hunter	general combat terminology	consistent
Gaige (f, Bl2)	full; non-sexual	thin; average; average	passive; non-sexual	Warrior/ Hunter/ Wizard	engineering, robotics, technology; occupational	divergent
Krieg (m, BL2)	partial; non-sexual	hypermuscular; small	active; non-sexual	Warrior	violence, masochism, psychological disorder; personal	consistent
Jacob (m, AC)	full; non-sexual	thin; average	active; non-sexual	Warrior	professional training; institutional	partial
Evie (f, AC)	full; non-sexual	average; average; average	active; non-sexual	Rogue	professional training; institutional	consistent

Character (gender, Game)	Clothing	Body Proportions	Posture	Archetype	Source of Power	Conformity of Role and Visuals
Emily (f, Dis2)	full; non-sexual	thin; average; flat	active; non-sexual	Rogue/Warrior	training, emotions; institutional/ personal	partial
Corvo (m, Dis2)	full; non-sexual	strong; average	active; non-sexual	Warrior with wizard elements	training, emotions; institutional/ personal	partial
Olberic (m, OT)	full; non-sexual	strong; large	active; non-sexual	Warrior	divinity, church, institutional	consistent
Cyrus (m, OT)	full; non-sexual	thin; cannot tell	passive; non-sexual	Wizard	library, university; institutional	consistent
Tressa (f, OT)	full; non-sexual	skinny; small; over-average	active; non-sexual	Supporter	trading, bartering, occupational	consistent
Ophilia (f, OT)	full; sexual	thin; small; over-average	active; sexual	Supporter	divinity, church, institutional	consistent
Primrose (f, OT)	naked; sexual	thin; average; over-average	active; sexual	Supporter	dance, beauty, sexuality	consistent
Alfyn (m, OT)	full; non-sexual	average; average	active; non-sexual	Warrior, with Supporter elements	medicine, institutional, occupational	partial
Therion (m, OT)	full; non-sexual	thin; average	active; non-sexual	Rogue	thievery, deception, occupational/ personal	consistent
H'aanit (f, OT)	partial; sexual	thin; small; over-average	active; sexual	Hunter	hunting, occupational	divergent

Character (gender, Game)	Clothing	Body Proportions	Posture	Archetype	Source of Power	Conformity of Role and Visuals
Amara (f, BL3)	partial; sexual	strong; average; average	active; non-sexual	Warrior with Wizard elements	generic, allusions to sexuality and beauty; personal	partial
FL4K (BL3)	full	average; large	active	Hunter/ Rogue	generic, referencing hunting and pet commandos	divergent
Zane (m, BL3)	full; non-sexual	average; average	active; non-sexual	Supporter /Hunter	generic, references to technology and robotics; occupational	divergent
Moze (f, BL3)	full; non-sexual	average; average; average	active; non-sexual	Warrior/ Supporter elements	engineering, robotics, technology; occupational	consistent