THE EXPANSION OF GENDER ROLES IN *THE LEGEND OF ZELDA SERIES*

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ABSTRACT

This study asked how the existing roles in video games may or may not change over time. The study used *The Legend of Zelda* series for a content analysis of the actions performed by all characters that appear in a segment of the game and all actions were recorded as data. The study used Judith Butler's concept of gender being a performative act as a critical lens. Results showed that the possibilities for performing different character roles for male, female, and ungendered characters expanded across the study. The majority of females were found to be the Healer, Non-Profit Gifter and the Helper. While male characters were mostly the Hero, Explorer, Scenery and For-Profit Seller and appearing in greater numbers than the other genders. Ungendered characters were sparse and performed only a few actions. While there was expansion in role possibilities, there is still a lot of expansion to be done.

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INTRODUCTION

Video games have become a prevalent area of study in academia. One area in particular of gaming that has been analyzed by scholars is a feminist perspective applied to different aspects of the gaming culture. For example, studies have shown that female characters are vastly outnumbered by male characters in games (Behm-Morawitz & Mastro 809; Dietz 433; Downs & Smith 729). Also, female characters have been found to be far more sexualized and objectified when compared to male characters (Downs & Smith 729; Miller & Summers 739-740 Phillips, et. al. 15; Dill & Thill 858).

Further, researchers have defined and categorized the very narrow range of submissive and secondary roles that female characters fulfill in video games and how these roles have become stereotypes over decades of the gaming industry (Miller & Summers 740; Dietz 438). These roles include being the "victim" in the game's plot or the "prize" the hero receives at the end of the game or assuming the role of a helper figure for the protagonist or other major character, who is usually male (Miller & Summers 740; Dietz 435-436).

However, what seems to be lacking is whether female characters have had their role opportunities expand from the stereotypical and submissive roles they play from the early days of the gaming culture into stronger, more self-reliant characters in present day games. It is essential to know if the range of female gender roles has expanded in order to understand if the gaming culture has changed to offer examples of strong female characters in attempts to break out of well-established stereotypical roles and redefine what female characters are capable of accomplishing. If we look at each action each game character executes as a performance of gender, and what gender roles they fulfill through these performances over time, we can look for patterns and changes in the performances that make up the construct of gender. By extension, the

if there is a noticeable change in gender performances within video games, these changes will affect the way the culture the games are a part of understand gender roles and can introduce the culture to new ways of thinking about gender roles and expectations and can encourage new ways to practice gender within society. Through this study and using Judith Butler's theory that gender is constructed through performances and The Legend of Zelda video game series as this study's focus, I will show that through the performances of gender showcased in the Zelda series that an expansion of gender role possibilities is present and increases over the series' installments.

Review of Literature

Butler

Judith Butler argues in "Performative Acts and Gender Construction: An Essay in Phenomenology and Feminist Theory" that gender is an identity created by a collection of repeated similar actions (519). This identity is culturally constructed not just through an individual's actions, but society as a whole. Butler emphasizes the performativity part of gender construction and uses the comparison of gender construction to acting. Individuals are the actors and society is the social audience. The audience is accustomed to and accepts the usual performances of gender or established gender roles as the norm. In order to change the usual gender roles, gender can be transformed by individuals performing acts of gender that stray from the established roles and create new acts that will become part of the collective of actions that make up gender, albeit this change is a difficult, but possible, one. Butler makes it clear that the physical body does not help create gender, additionally it does not limit the ability and opportunities of constructing gender. The creation of gender then is a process, the collection of actions continuously grows and alters based on the performances acted by a given gender in a

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given culture. A culture creates meanings from the actions, these actions carry weight and create beliefs of what is included in gender (520).

Butler stresses the agency the individual "actors" have when performing their gender. She notes that the agency can be limited by historical conventions, but also notes that the performances can continue to change and once those performances have come into existence, new possibilities with further change are possible. At the same time however, each individual has their own unique experiences and performances (521). Butler notes the importance of both individual and cultural performances, and that even though individual acts are important, they become part of the cultural definitions (523).

According to Butler there is always a previous act, always a previous definition of gender. These preexisting cultural norms are the starting period for current performances. She explains, "Gender is an act which has been rehearsed, much as a script survives the particular actors who make use of it, but which requires individual actors in order to be actualized and reproduced as reality once again" (526). In order to change the definitions of gender, new "actors," or people (or in the purpose of this study, game characters) will take the script and perform it in their own unique way, possible changing from the previously established norms created by the acts before theirs. Repetition is an important part of making a definition of gender. The more a performance is done by individuals (actors) and is observed by the culture (audience) the stronger that performance becomes until it eventually becomes a social expectation for gender because it has become common to the point it is a norm (526). Butler closes stating "There is, in my view, nothing about femaleness that is waiting to be expressed; there is, on the other hand, a good deal about the diverse experiences of women that is being expressed and still needs to be expressed" (531). Butler is encouraging the expansion of diversity of gender

performances and making a wider range of performances part of the cultural norm through repeating a wider variety of acts. It is this suggestion by Butler that drives this study.

Hypersexualization of Female Characters

A majority of the time, when feminist theory is applied to video games, the focus is on the appearance and the hypersexualization of the female characters (Downs & Smith; Behm-Morawitz & Mastro; Dill & Thill; Miller & Summers; Perron & Wolf; Ratan, et al). Female characters are often found to be used as objects of affection or the "prize" for the hero of the story. For example, the immensely popular and globally recognized Mario, star of the multiple Mario game series, saving Princess Peach is usually the primary objective in Mario's quest. In addition, females are also much more likely to be depicted as having unrealistic body sizes and wearing less clothing. In a study done by Edward Downs of UMN and Stacy Smith of USC titled "Keeping Abreast of Hypersexuality: A Video Game Character Content Analysis," Downs and Smith look at popular video game characters through a content analysis. They state their goal as "to chronicle depictions of male and female characters' sexuality in popular video game consoles" (721). Downs and Smith looked at physical attractiveness, clothing, nudity, and body proportion, among others (725-726). Their findings included that 41% of female characters wore overtly revealing clothing and 25% had unrealistic body proportions; this compares to 11% and 2% of male characters respectively. While Miller and Summers, mention the female gender roles they observed in their study, this is only one paragraph of their findings and they do not go into detail as to in which games did they see certain gender roles (740).

Stereotypes and Physical Appearance

Karen E. Dill and Kathryn P. Thill's article "Video Game Characters and the Socialization of Gender Roles: Young People's Perceptions Mirror Sexist Media Depictions"

look at what the stereotypical male and female video game characters are. This study looks at gaming magazines and how the characters are depicted in these magazines, they also cited that three of the top 10 best-selling magazines for teens are gaming magazines (852). Like Marawitz and Mastro, Dill and Thill apply the social cognitive theory in their study. Dill and Thill's research looked specifically at stereotyping gender portrayals in gaming magazines, also of note, these magazines, with the exception of The Official Xbox Magazine, were not for any specific gaming company, console, or game. Categories used when collecting data included sexualized and stereotypical sex role portrayals, as well as aggression, power and dominance (856-857). The study found that male characters were three times more likely to appear in magazines. When it came to the number of characters who were sexualized, 59.9% of females inventoried were "curvaceously thin" and only 1% of male characters were coded as sexualized. Also, 38.7% of women were "scantily clad" and only 8.1% of the males were. Male and female characters were almost even with number of depictions with weapons, but 82.6% of males and 62.2% of females were categorized as aggressive (857). In terms of stereotypes, 62.6% of females were categorized as "visions of beauty" and 33.1% of males were categorized as "hyper-masculine" (857). Using Butler's theory, these stereotypical roles have become our culture's typical and normal definitions of gender through the repeated acts that reinforced the stereotypes. To break these stereotypes then, different repeated performances of gender that reimagine and redefine the cultural definition of gender and gender expectations.

Dill and Thill conducted a second study that surveyed undergraduate college students, asking how they would describe the typical male and female video game character. The most stated attribute listed for the typical male character was "muscular" and for the typical female it was "big boobs." Other common traits for females included "helpless, victim, subservient, polite,

pretty, and bitchy." For male characters "warrior, superhero, rage, asshole, and cool" were commonly cited. Dill and Thill also note that these common characteristics were only listed under the one gender; there was no overlap with these traits (860). Dill and Thill only coded for two genders in this study. This article helps illustrate, in detail, what the perceived stereotypical characteristics are for both male and female characters. Dill and Thill's study help set the scaffolding for this study by establishing that female character indeed fall into widely perceived and easily recognizable stereotypes. It also clearly demonstrates the typical environment of video gaming culture and expectations that women are supposed to be obedient, subservient, and helpless.

Monica K. Miller researched the gender depiction themes as found on gaming magazines. The magazines looked at were the official magazines of their respective gaming consoles (736). The article focused on answering the research questions, "What messages do video games present through character appearance, roles, and clothing? And what, if any, indications do these messages have on gamer behavior and attitude?" Miller studied magazine articles at least three pages in length over the course of six months. Miller found that there were significant differences between genders in the roles they play as well as their appearance. Female characters were found to be more submissive in their roles as well as wearing less clothing. Male characters were found to more often be the hero and carry weapons (737). Even though this study is based on gaming magazines, they faithfully keep the same depictions as the characters appear in the games. Miller's article depicts the narrow opportunities present for female video game characters. Once again, females are falling into stereotypical, submissive roles which are, as this article helps show, commonplace in video games. Miller's study shows that the repeated

performances of the female gender in games are limited in scope, with plenty areas for expansion and reimaging of gender definitions.

Along with magazines, gaming websites have been analyzed for gender content. Tom Robinson and Mark Callister, both professors at Brigham Young University, along with two graduate students, Brad Clark and James Phillips, looked at gaming websites to see what types of messages the gaming companies were sending through their websites, based on the character images they use. The study assessed attractiveness, sexuality, violent content, presence of using and portrayal of abusive substances that included tobacco and alcohol as shown on the website. After coding the results, they found that males were three times more likely to be shown on the website than female characters. Additionally, females were much more likely to be dressed in tight or revealing clothing and even though most did not have explicit sexual content on the website, it was certainly implied (11-12). The study included dozens of different games' official websites, no genre or type of game was specifically looked at. This study looks at a different gaming format, gaming websites, but the focus is still on how gaming characters are portrayed. This study pays attention to physical appearance of characters on websites. But their appearance can imply gender roles. This study, among others described, argues there is a clear connection between video game characters' appearance and the roles that they fulfill in games.

Video games are the most frequently analyzed component of gaming culture. Most of the time the studies are content analysis of video game characters. Studies have looked at how characters are depicted, adding on to these findings; researchers have looked at how this affects body image and self-efficacy in females. Also they have looked at how female characters have affected how people treat women and what their idea of "normal" gender roles are. Carrie Heeter in The Video Game Theory Reader 2 states,

Gender studies of the representation of females in games, both as non-player characters and

player avatars [characters that the gamer controls] include content analysis of hypersexualized

physical representation, gender stereotypical roles, and implicit values, overt themes, and game

narratives involving violence and sex including violence against women. (353)

The stereotypical gender roles that Heeter refers to include various submissive roles on the part

of female characters. For example, popular roles for female characters to have in video games

include the damsel in distress or the object or reward at the end of the long and dangerous quest

of the hero, the object of the hero or another character's affection or a love interest, and the

passive helper who aids the hero with information or items, either directly or indirectly, such as

Princess Peach in the Mario series. Additionally, many female characters are equipped with

weapons or magic spells that are less aggressive than what the hero typically carries. Female

characters that possess the ability to use magic usually used as the "healer" or nurse figure. Their

cache of abilities includes spells that heal, enhance abilities, cure ailments that effect abilities,

and provide general support to their fellow comrades; this is showcased well in the Final Fantasy

series. Healers are typically incapable of direct combat and therefore usually don't inflict damage

and are dependent on the physical attackers in the group. In all of these roles, the female

characters' roles are passive or merely supportive and they rely on a stronger hero figure to be

saved or to actually accomplish the goal.

The literature to this point has located and defined gender stereotypes and typical gender

behavior in video games. The unanswered question then is, have gender roles in video games

remained static or developed diversely over time? If the gender roles have changed, which

type(s) of action-based gender roles are utilized more compared to others? Have they tried

expanding beyond the well-established stereotypes and challenging the confines of current cultural definitions of gender?

The Legend of Zelda Series

What's missing from this discussion is whether or not these gender roles have changed over time. Gender roles in society have evolved to a point where women have the opportunity to become heroes, show that they are strong, and can be independent, but this isn't far enough. Women are still considered subservient in many aspects of society and as a society where media is so deeply attached to our identity; media should be showing us how we can be more diverse in the cultural performances of gender. Therefore, it is important to know if genres of media, like video games, are following suit. Equal gender role possibilities in video games would be encouraging for all gamers; female gamers would see relatable, strong characters and strong female characters could potentially replace the long established stereotypical gender roles, giving male gamers a different view of what female characters, and by association, females in society are capable of. The best way to assess this is to look at one series that has been around for years, released plenty of sequels, and is immensely popular among gamers. The purpose Therefore, I will look at *The Legend of Zelda* series and critically assess what the gender roles are in their various sequels and compare the games to see if there has been some sort of change in gender roles.

The Legend of Zelda takes place in a fictional fantasy world called Hyrule. Life and order on Hyrule was created by three goddesses who after creating life left behind mystical artifact called the Triforce, which could grant the wishes of the person who used it. The Triforce cannot distinguish between good and evil, so as a precautionary measure, the Triforce was put in an alternate world called the Sacred Realm. The Triforce consists of three components, Wisdom,

Power, and Courage and only a person who has a balance of all three of these can access the Triforce's true potential. Each piece of the Triforce holds the essence of a goddess, each embodying the virtue of the piece's namesake. These goddesses then, are clearly shown to have great power and are central to the plot of the games of the series. Each piece is also specifically associated with one of the main characters. The hero of *The Legend of Zelda* series is Link, a young and brave boy (in later installments he is an adult). Each installment in the series actually has a different hero, but he is always known as Link and continues to have the same appearance, so in gaming culture, many consider Link to be the same character throughout the series. Zelda is the ruler of Hyrule and she usually is held against her will by the antagonist of the series Ganon. Zelda is usually passive, but she has been able to participate in combat. She is rehearsed in magic and a light bow. Zelda also has alter egos in some of the games that are playable by the gamer, Sheik and Tetra. Ganon, as mentioned earlier, is the primary enemy in the series. He is usually the final boss that Link has to beat in the game. He usually kidnaps Zelda and is after the power of the assembled Triforce in order to rule Hyrule. Zelda is able to use the Triforce of Wisdom, with Link and Ganon using the Triforce of Courage and Power respectively. Using the Triforce of Wisdom strengthens Zelda's magical abilities, so Zelda is certainly not completely submissive in the game series, despite the fact that she is usually kidnapped or plays the victim in most installments of the series. Which role Zelda embodies more is a small part of the purpose of this study.

The outline of the story in each of the games in the series is very similar, making this an ideal series to study. There is a structure of some sort in place for the series, so any changes or evolutions in the characters will be easy to note. As a fan of the series for years, I am familiar with the basic series of events that commence in each installment of the series. The basic

sequence of events includes Princess Zelda being kidnapped by Ganon, series protagonist Link is introduced as the playable character and shortly after this initial introduction, Link is called to action to save Zelda, utilizing the power of the Triforce. Finally, the game reaches its climax when Link battles with Ganon, ultimately winning the fight and saving Zelda. Any deviation from this canonical sequence of events will be easily detectable and could possibly indicate a change in gender roles. Over the course of the series, I want to see how gender roles have or have not changed.

METHODS

The Legend of Zelda series was chosen intentionally for this study. The series has a long and prosperous history with a distinction of being one of the most recognized and iconic game series ever. To find any patterns that indicate a widening of the gender role possibilities in this series would certainly have consequences for other game series and video games overall, because if The Legend of Zelda series can show change and prosper for decades, then it is certain that game companies are taking note and following suit. Further, depictions of gender in the media have an impact on culture, as media is often an interpretation of what is expected and valued in the surrounding culture and therefore what people within the culture's society aspire to emulate (Warren & Karner 170).

Four installments of The Legend of Zelda series were selected for this study, the original title, The Legend of Zelda, and three of its sequels, Ocarina of Time, Twilight Princess, and Skyward Sword. The games selected were on a console game platform rather than handheld to make it easier to view the game content. The series does not release games on a regular basis, so the time in between the titles selected for this study varies. This was not a significant issue, as most characters and the basics of the plot remain similar.

I chose to view videos of complete walkthroughs of the games on Youtube recorded observations. This approach was chosen so that more emphasis and attention could be devoted to recording the actions performed by characters. I watched the first 60 minutes of each game and recorded all unique actions performed by all characters that appear in that first hour. This decision was made to make the data between games comparable due to the first game, The Legend of Zelda's drastically shorter length versus the other games' lengths. The beginning of the game was chosen because all games in the sample were front-heavy in terms of introducing

characters. As the games progressed, fewer new characters emerged; the use of the first portion of the games ensures a plentiful sample of both a range of characters as well as actions. Even if the entire game was observed and recorded, details would still be missed. That said, the opening hour of each game provides the most diverse characters with a nice range of actions and frequency of said actions.

There were some instances in which a character performed the same action more than once. The number of times actions were performed were recorded to an extent; number ranges for higher frequency actions were added categories. The reason for number ranges instead of exact counts is that some actions were performed at such high frequencies (+20) that counting them all individually would be difficult and time consuming. Also, a lot of the high frequency actions were repeated in quick succession of each other, for example, in all four games Link swings his sword to attack enemies with rapid hits one after another. However, showing that some actions occurred multiple times added dimensions to the analysis of the study. In addition to all actions performed by the characters, each character's name and gender were recorded. Since Butler claims that gender is created through performative acts, observing and analyzing the actions performed by video game characters creates physical action meanings for gender (521). Butler also asserts that the acts must be a repeated, collection of actions in order to make a construction of gender (522). Therefore, the more frequently and the greater number in which these acts are performed, the more concrete the gender construction is. Further, if these repeated actions deviate from an earlier construction, it expands the possibilities of acceptable actions for the gender(s) in question.

The games appear to represent 3 genders: male, female, and ungendered. These options are the standard representations of our culture, but with not enough emphasis given and lack of

representation of non-gendered over the course of the games featured in this study. This was necessary as some characters' gender were not visually obvious and no dialogue made it clear what their gender was.

Upon completing the recording of character actions, each action was coded into a second data table first by gender then by the type of role the action best fit according to the role definitions. The definitions for character roles emerged from all observations across the four games (see Table 1).

Table 1
The character roles used for coding the study

Hero	Actions brave or courageous; done to aid or rescue other character(s).
Villain	Actions are evil or hostile actions that are done to harm or imprison others or actions that are performed for selfish reasons to acquire power, items, or property.
Non-Profit Gifters	Gives the playable character (in all games this is Link) items for nothing in return.
For-Profit Gifters	Gives the playable character items, but only for something in return. This can be a particular item or for a specified number of Rupees (the in game fictional currency).
Healer	Performs actions that partially or fully heal Link's health, magic, stamina, and/or other stats.
Task Giver	Actions that ask or demand some kind of task, mission, or errand for the playable character to complete in exchange for money, items, or further progression in the game.
Helper	Actions provide aid to the playable character in their quest. This can take various forms, for example, they can teach abilities, explain how to use items, guide with directions, give information, or aid in combat.
Victim	Requires assistance or rescue, their range of abilities is restricted somehow and they perform submissive actions against their will.
Explorer	Actions that explore areas of the world around the character. A good portion of these actions include finding and acquiring items and information for the adventure ahead.
Scenery	Actions are limited to being physically present in the location the player is walking through. They act as part of the background for aesthetic. Sometimes these characters can be spoken to by the player, but do not provide tasks or important information.

Before starting the data collection, there were a few role categories that were definitely

going to be present in the games. Dietz was also a starting point for the list of performance roles.

Dietz compiled the following "portrayals" of female characters in games in her study: damsel in distress, visions of beauty, obstacles to the goal of the game, spectator, victim, and supporter of the to the male character. Dietz's study solely focused on female characters so no male "portrayals" were created (434-436). My creation of gender roles was also formulated after I collected my data and during analysis and some of the gender role names came from Dietz's list like the Victim role. And Dietz's spectator role is very similar to the Scenery role of this study.

Once the data had been collected and the analysis began, it was clear that there were some roles that had to be added and changed in order to be able to categorize all actions observed in the games effectively. Initially there was the role of "Gifter" which referred to characters who would give the protagonist, or (albeit rarely) the protagonist giving another character, an item. The *Zelda* series has a clear economic system as well as its own currency, Rupees. Despite the fact that the characters running shops were giving Link items, they were doing it for a distinctly different purpose than other characters. So the Gifter performance role was divided into the Non-Profit Gifter, which is when a character gives Link an item with no expectation for anything in return, and the For-Profit Seller category for characters who have the ability to give Link items, but they require either money or some other kind of payment first. Additionally, "gifting" does not just refer to tangible items like weapons, ammo, and healing items, but also to knowledge and information. Quite frequently Link is given information that aids his quest. For example, in *Ocarina of Time*, the Deku Tree tells Link about how the Triforce came to exist and why it is so important for Link to retrieve the pieces of this ancient power before Ganondorf can do so. The player, through Link's interaction with characters, learns a lot of the game's mechanics and moves through interactions with characters. Navi in *Ocarina of Time* does this for Link as well as Beth, Malo, and Talo in *Twilight Princess.*

Another role that was not developed prior to data analysis was the Explorer performance role. A good chunk of the player's playing time of the game is dedicated to Link exploring the world, gathering and finding items, learning knowledge from other characters, and completing tasks and quests. None of these actions fit well into any of the other categories and the number of times actions of this kind occurred was very frequent. In its simplest form, the Explorer role can be defined as a character finding or acquiring something, whether it is a physical object or some kind of knowledge, through exploration of the game world.

Finally, the Scenery performance role became necessary due to characters that either Link could not interact with or characters that Link is not required to interact with to further the game. A lot of games include non-playable characters (NPCs) with optional dialogue. Meaning that the playable character, in this case Link, can interact with them to experience conversation with the character, but it is not required for the game's completion. These conversations help enrich the gaming experience and the player's immersion into the game's story. NPCs, when interacted with, can fill a variety of character roles like Non-Profit Gifter, For Profit Seller, Task Giver, Healer, and so on. However, when Link chooses not to speak to a character, their role changes. Despite Link not interacting with an NPC, they are still present in the game. Their existence does not hinge on Link speaking with them, but their purpose in the game changes. There are also some characters in *Ocarina of Time* that Link is incapable of speaking to, the option to even try is not given to the player. Characters that do not interact with Link but appear in the game fall into the Scenery role. From an appearance perspective, adding more characters to an area like the city of Hyrule makes the game more immersive. We see numerous citizens of Hyrule in the town square, showing us how populated the city is and Link is in the middle of a bustling city. In *Twilight Princess*, when Link is in the Shadow Realm, there are numerous castle

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guards that are frozen, captured in the Realm and unable to move or get out. These guards help emphasize the urgency of the situation Link finds himself in. People are suffering and displaced from their world and that provides motivation for Link to complete his quest.

After recording and coding the data, I analyzed the data across all four games for patterns. Specifically, the range of different actions and role types that were performed by each gender present, male, female, and non-gender. I analyzed each game that was part of the sample and further analysis was done to see what changes were present among the games.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The gender roles performed in the games in the study and the number of times each role was performed is shown in (name of table). I first note the gender role breakdown by gender, what roles each gender (male, female, and ungendered) performed in each game and how those roles changed across the games in terms of variety of roles and number of times a role was performed. Second, I look at the gender roles by game. This included what roles were present and the gender breakdown of said roles. I also compare the results of each game to the previous game in the study to see what type of changes occurred between installments. Finally, I note the overall patterns seen in the study. This discusses the gender-exclusive gender roles, Scenery and Explorer as well as the discussion of the expanding variety of roles performed by all genders.

Ungendered Characters

When recording the data, for some characters defining their gender was too difficult to base on appearance and dialogue alone. For a gamer regularly invested in the *Zelda* series, they would be much more likely to know the gender of these ambiguous characters than could one who is not well versed on the *Zelda* universe. In some instances, the gender of some characters is not defined in any way in the game (for others, it is a while after the first encounter that gender is stated). In these situations, popular *Zelda* fan sites have assigned genders. However, none of these sites have any official affiliation with Nintendo or the creators of *Zelda* so the gendering is based on assumptions. This shows a strong desire by the fanbase to conform to the gender binary emphasized by the surrounding culture. For the first game in the series, *The Legend of Zelda*, there are very few characters and gender is defined for all of them so no ungendered characters were present in that game. In *Ocarina of Time,* this changed dramatically as *Ocarina* featured the most number of actions by an ungendered character with 18 distinct actions. The latter two

games in the study had fewer ungendered characters appearing, but they were still present with 1 performed action in *Twilight Princess* and 5 performed actions in *Skyward Sword*. Since one of the parameters of defining characters as ungendered in this study was due to a lack of clues via physical appearance, it is possible that the decline in ungendered appearances is due to the character designs being more detailed and designed for easier gender identification.

Additionally, in the games, the protagonist encounters countless enemies that randomly spawn in the game world near Link's position. Many of these enemies are not visibly gendered by their appearance. Their purpose is to give Link the opportunity to defeat them for items and practice the games' combat system and also to provide a more inclusive gameplay experience as it adds to the atmosphere that Link's quest is perilous and filled with obstacles. These randomly spawning enemies were not included in the data table as they appeared very often and it was difficult to count each occurrence. Based on their purpose in the game, overall they would fall into the Villain and Scenery roles.

For ungendered characters that were part of the data recording, the majority of performed behaviors by ungendered characters were Scenery actions, appearing in the background as Link roams a specific area of the game. For example, in *Ocarina of Time,* when Link enters the town of Hyrule, there are a number of characters that appear to make the town seem populated (*Ocarina of Time*). Sometimes these characters are available for conversation with Link if he approaches them, but it is up to the agency of the player for this event to happen. The higher number of ungendered characters in the Scenery role can be accounted for in a couple of ways. One is that these ungendered characters that appear in the background are only visible for a second or two and their gender is very hard to distinguish by this short window of viewing time as well as the ambiguous character design within the game. It could also appear that ungendered

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characters in Scenery roles are there because this character role has little significance compared to the other roles present in the game. The Scenery characters bare no weight on the plot of the game and interfere little to none with the protagonist. The gender make-up of the list of ungendered characters shows that male characters were the heavy favorite for this particular character role. Male characters are still the emphasis in terms of quantity of character appearances with female and ungendered characters appearing as secondary.

The other roles performed by ungendered characters were the Non-Profit Gifter (5), the For-Profit Seller (2), and the Task Giver (4). None of the ungendered characters had a large, significant role in the plot of the game and none of them repeated any of the actions they performed. These were all roles that assisted the main character in some way and they were all short in the time it took them to perform the actions so they are featured very little in the actual game time.

The appearance of ungendered characters in the series is important to note, because it reduces the emphasis on the need to gender every character and create the rigid binary that society is accustomed to. Players can see the ungendered characters performing roles and see that the need for gendering all things is not so necessary. However, this is not enforced very well as the ungendered performances are few and minute in significance. As Butler points out, "Gender reality is performative which means, quite simply, that it is real only to the extent that it is performed" (527). The ungendered as a reality needs to be performed more to become a societal norm and to be accepted as a possibility for self-identity. If we accept the idea that "the reality of gender is constituted by the performance itself, then there is no recourse to an essential and unrealized 'sex' or 'gender' which gender performances ostensibly express," then the ungendered performance makes the option of identifying as ungendered a real possibility (527).

Though the performances, the option of ungendered exists but only in a limited capacity as the performances are sparse and lack substance. While there was an initial increase in instances that the ungendered characters appeared and performed roles, this sudden burst of expansion tapered off quickly in the latter 2 installments in the study. After appearing not at all in Game 1, ungendered characters performing roles spikes to 18 appearances in Game 2, and then decreases to one performance in Game 3 and then five in Game 4. In a decreased capacity the ungendered characters remained present but there is plenty of room for more ungendered characters in *The Legend of Zelda* series not only in quantity of roles performed but also the weight of the roles they perform.

Game 1: The Legend of Zelda

With the first game in the *Zelda* series, *The Legend of Zelda* (1986), female characters were almost completely absent from the game. Four roles, performed by two separate female characters occurred (see Table 2). A female fairy heals Link three times, while the Old Woman sells Link items. While male characters outperform female actions 10:1, they are also limited to only a few roles that are actually performed. Only four unique male characters appear in the game, so the same characters performed actions at a higher frequency. Out of the ten identified character roles, female characters only performed two of them (For-Profit Seller and Healer) and the male characters performed five (Hero, Explorer, Helper, For-Profit Seller, and Non-Profit Gifter). While Butler states that there is no real beginning to the formation of gender construction but instead an always changing construct, with the *Zelda* series, we can consider this first game as a starting point to measure changes in gender representation in this study. Butler explains that when an actor repeats an action, they are creating an identity that's an illusion, but with the repetition, it is eventually considered a belief by the audience (520). Looking at Game 1, we see

the female character repeating the action of healing the hero, so the initial identity of female

characters in games are sparse, perform few actions, and most likely heal the hero of the game.

Table 2
All actions in Game 1 coded into the character role categories

Hero	L1*
Villain	NONE
Non-Profit Gifter	OM1 x 18; SM1 x 13
For-Profit Seller	OM1 x 2, SMe1 x 5, OL1 x 1
Healer	F1 x 3
Task Giver	NONE
Helper	OM1
Victim	NONE
Explorer	L1*
Scenery	NONE
Total:	41* + 4 + 0 = 45*
* = Too many occurrences to count individually	
Red = Male; Blue = Female; Green = Ungendered	

The roles performed by the female characters in this game are certainly not trivial, the

Old Woman gives Link items that he can't find elsewhere that make it possible for him to

progress further in the game. The fairy that heals Link can completely restore his health

regardless of how low it may be when he approaches her. Other than this method of healing, the

only other ways Link can heal is buying an item to restore health and pick up health from

defeated enemies. Her role is not absolutely necessary, but it makes Link's adventure far easier.

Since the fairy is not pivotal to the game's completion, some gamers wouldn't even encounter

her in the game. Female characters appear sparingly in Game 1, which gives off the implication

that they're less important in the game. This fact, paired with the fairy's non-essential role

further compounds this implication.

For male characters, the protagonist Link cements some pillars of the male gender construct by repeating Heroic and Explorer actions at a high frequency. Secondly, we see male characters as Non-Profit Gifters who give Link aid in the form information or items for no charge. In a smaller capacity, but at a higher frequency than female characters, males also performed the For-Profit Seller role. Link clearly establishes that being the hero and explorer of the game world something a male character does. Other male characters in the game made the Non-Profit Gifter role part of the male construct. While they also sold items and information to Link, more male characters just give Link what he requires without requesting anything in return. The male characters in these roles just further stress how predominantly male in character appearances Game 1 is. Female characters are used sparingly, as if there is a limit to how often they can appear and in what capacity.

Game 2: Ocarina of Time

Game 2, *Ocarina of Time* (1998) added a greater diversity of roles performed for all three gender possibilities (see Table 3). From performing only two possible roles in the first game, females in *Ocarina of Time* performed five different character roles. Female characters performed more actions in the study than male or ungendered characters, a dramatic change from the previous game. Five different female characters performed actions that fell into the Hero category. After a complete absence of villainous roles in the first game's sample, we see both male and female characters performing this role in this game. Females did not continue either role they performed in the previous game, instead female characters were Non-Profit Gifters and Task Givers. Finally, Navi, Link's fairy companion performs the Helper role at a high frequency, regularly providing him aid in combat and traversing the areas of the game world. After comparing Game 1 and 2, the most significant patterns in change pertains to female characters.

They appear more often and have more significant roles in the game that actually impact the plot and protagonist's gameplay.

Table 3

All actions in Game 2 coded into the character role categories

Hero	L2*, N2, Di2, Na2, F2, I2 x2
Villain	G2, CG2, MK2, QG2
Non-Profit Gifter	N2 x3, S2, M2, Z2 x2, I2 x2, DT2 x2, D2, O2
For-Profit Seller	SK2, T2, D2
Healer	NONE
Task Giver	N2, M2, Z2, DT2 x4
Helper	N2*
Victim	L2
Explorer	L2*
Scenery	HG1-2, HG2-2, HG3-2, HG4-2, HG5-2, HG6-2, HG7-2, HG8-2, KV1-2, KV2-2, KV3-2, KG1-2, KG2-2, KG3-2, KG4-2, KG5-2, KG6-2, F1-2, F2-2, F3-2, F4-2, F5-2, F6-2, F7-2, SF2, HP^
Total	19* + 26* + 18 = 63*
* = Too many occurrences to count individually	
^ = multiple background characters of both genders, it is too hard to count the exact number	
Red = Male; Blue = Female; Green = Ungendered	

Link reinforces the Hero and Explorer roles as part of the male gender meaning by once again performing both of these roles repeatedly. Male villains (3) appeared more often than female (1) villains. Further, the female villain is a spider, with the title of "Queen" who does not speak at all in the game. The only indication that she is female character is her name and other characters referring to her. The fact that a female Villain is present is a step in expanding gender role possibilities, but a very small step with plenty of room for growth. Also starting with this game, the cast of characters becomes diverse in terms of species present in the game. There are human characters as well as animal characters present. For the most part, the animal characters are still depicted with physical cues that point to gender such as emphasized body shape like

masculine abs or facial features like make-up. In the game, the different animals are looked at more as different races than species as most are capable of the same basic functions of talking and moving around at the same level of ability. In the case of the villainous Queen Gamora, she is depicted as a spider, an animal that has a stigma of being scary and that adds to her status as a Villain. With no context of the game series, making the first female villain an animal can seem minimizing that a human female isn't needed for roles, but with how animals are used as races in the series, this is not a concern.

The Victim role also first appears in this game and it is Link that performs this role. Given previous studies (see Dietz) it is interesting that a male character is the one to perform this role, as Dietz found the "Damsel in Distress" role to be the most common role for female characters when they actually appeared in games (434). The Scenery character role makes its first appearance in *Ocarina of Time* and it is performed by all three gender options. While this is a passive role with an aesthetic, background instead of an active role, male characters performed it the most often, reinforcing the fact that male characters appear in games in higher numbers. The inclusion of the Scenery role displays a wider range of roles on a passive to active actions spectrum.

Ungendered characters make their first appearance in *Ocarina of Time*. With nineteen actions performed by male characters and eighteen actions performed by ungendered characters, ungendered characters performed basically at the same frequency as male characters. Ungendered characters perform four different character roles; the most common was the Scenery role. These characters also performed the Task Giver, For-Profit Seller, and Non-Profit Gifter roles. Much more than the Scenery role, these character roles carry some power with them. A Task Giver can offer a reward to sway the hero to pursue the task given, showing some

persuasive hold over the protagonist. With the other two roles, just like in the first game, Link must rely on these character to provide the opportunity to receive the information or items that he needs to further his quest.

Game 3: Twilight Princess

In the third game in the study, *Twilight Princess* (2006), female characters remain stagnate in the number of character roles that are performed (see Table 4). In addition, the number of actions performed by female characters also decreased noticeably from 26 to 16. Female characters once again perform the Hero, Task Giver, For-Profit Seller, and Non-Profit Gifters roles. Like with Navi in *Ocarina of Time,* Midna performs the Helper role extensively in the game and in relatively in the same capacity as Navi. The one role females had not performed prior to this game that they picked up in *Twilight Princess* was the Victim role. Two female characters found themselves in the Victim role, while three male characters performed the same role.

Table 4

All actions in Game 3 coded into the character role categories

Hero	L3*, CG3**, Mo3, Mi3, PZ3
Villain	Z3 x3
Non-Profit Gifter	H3, J3, C3, T3, Ma3, Co3, U3, S3, B3 x2, Mi3 x 2, PZ3
For-Profit Seller	R3, S3, Tr3
Healer	NONE
Task Giver	R3, F3, M3, U3
Helper	I3, Mi3*
Victim	L3 x4, C3, T3, I3, PZ3
Explorer	L3*
Scenery	SV1-3, SV2-3, SV3-3, SV4-3
Total	26* + 16* + 1 = 43*
* = Too many occurrences to count individually	
^ = multiple background characters of both genders, it is too hard to count the exact number	
Red = Male; Blue = Female; Green = Ungendered	

Male characters performed eight roles in *Twilight Princess* versus the six performed in

Ocarina of Time. Males in Game 3 were the only gender category that performed the Villain and

Scenery roles. Additionally, they were the only gender category that performed more actions

than they did in the previous game. This game was the first time male characters performed the

Task Giver role. The Explorer roles are still just performed by males, Link specifically.

There was a significant drop in ungendered performances from 18 in *Ocarina of Time* to

one in *Twilight Princess*. The sole role performed by an ungendered character was a For-Profit

Seller. In the eight years between Games 2 and 3, the graphic capabilities of games matured a

great deal. Many of the characters in Game 2 had ambiguous physical appearances, which helped

aid the number of ungendered character roles, due to the fact that if characters couldn't be

determined to be male or female, they were categorized as ungendered. With the improved

technology, Game 3 was able to provide more emphasis on character appearance details, and consciously gendered more characters into a two-gendered system.

Twilight Princess seems to revert backwards in terms of female and ungendered characters and their roles performed in the game. Female and ungendered characters appear less and perform less actions overall which point to female and ungendered characters not being as important as they once were in comparison to male characters in Game 3 as well as overall in the game series. This stagnation is a major obstacle for trying to expand the possible performances that fall into the gender construct. The repetition of certain roles is completely halted for the roles that are attempting to become part of the gender definition and the roles that have cemented their places in the gender construct once again take precedent. Additionally, with the sharp decrease in ungendered characters, the grip of the gender binary on our culture has tightened. There is less concern and interest in expanding the gender boundaries.

Game 4: Skyward Sword

After a decrease in number of actions performed in the previous game, female characters rebounded, but did not exceed their numbers of Game 2, in the final game in the study, *Skyward Sword* (2011). Female characters expanded the number of roles performed from six to seven (see Table 5). None of these actions were in a character role that hadn't been performed by a female before, but an expansion nevertheless is important to broadening the gender construct. Females performed the Hero character role more times in *Skyward Sword* than any of the other games. As it was in *Twilight Princess,* both male and female characters performed the Victim role. After a two game absence, the Healer role was performed by a female character in Game 4; all acts of healing in this study were performed by female characters. Female characters perform the Helper role the most once again, making it a solid marker in the female gender construct.

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Table 5
All actions in Game 4 coded into the character role categories.

Hero	L4*, Z4 x8, Fi4
Villain	Gr4 x4, S4 x2, C4 x2, Z4 x2
Non-Profit Gifter	F4 x3, Ho4 x2, G4 x2, Gu4, E4, Z4 x2, H4, Fi4 x2, SS4
For-Profit Seller	NONE
Healer	Z4
Task Giver	F4, Ho4 x2, G4, Fi4
Helper	L4, Z4, Fi4 x2
Victim	L4 x5, Z4
Explorer	L4*
Scenery	S4, C4, SC1-4, SC2-4, SC3-4, SC4-4
Total	31* + 22 + 5 = 58*
* = Too many occurrences to count individually	
^ = multiple background characters of both genders, it is too hard to count the exact number	
Red = Male; Blue = Female; Green = Ungendered	

Male character actions increased from the previous game as well but the number of character roles performed were the same as the two previous games. Link is still the only character to perform the Explorer role, making it one of only two character roles that are performed by only one gender option. More male characters performed the Villain role in *Skyward Sword* than previous games, although males were already performing the majority of the villainous actions. As with the Villain character role, more males performed the Non-Profit Gifter than in previous games and also performing the majority of those actions. Male characters perform the Victim role more than the single Victim act performed by a female character. So while males did not attempt any new character roles, they are expanding the frequency in which they perform the character roles they are already acting.

From one action to five in the last game, ungendered characters also make a rebound in *Skyward Sword*, albeit a small one. They only perform two character roles, one of them being a

new role for the ungendered category, Scenery and Non-Profit Gifter. The game series embraces the physically ambiguous characters more in Game 4 which is an encouraging sign towards breaking the importance of the gender binary on our culture.

While it was not the game with the most actions performed by female characters, *Skyward Sword* was the game in which female characters performed the most character roles across the four game span. This widening of role possibilities shows that there is indeed an expansion of possibilities for female characters. However, it should be noted that female characters are the default for certain roles. As the only gender that performs the Healer role as well as performing the vast majority of the Helper role actions, these character roles are firmly within the expectations of the gender construct. Male characters are in a similar situation. Male characters are never in the Healer role and rarely are Helpers. Male characters did not increase the number of character roles performed in the latter two games of the study, their expansion of possible character roles has come to a standstill. While these particular roles are given less emphasis in the games, they still would signal a growth in possible character roles and create a more complete gender construct.

Repeated Actions

Something that occurred across all four games were actions that were repeated at such a frequency that it was difficult to count exactly how many times it was performed. In the coding tables, this is denoted with an asterisk. For the majority of these instances, the highly repeated actions were performed by the main (male) protagonist Link. These actions also fell into two character roles. In the Hero character role, Link swings his sword to attack enemies very often and it takes multiple strikes to defeat most enemies. The other role that these high frequency actions fall into is the Explorer role. Link opens chests, breaks or moves environmental objects

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to solve puzzles to advance in the game or to obtain items that are helpful to his quest. These actions then are the ones that the player performs the most often in the game. A good portion of Link's adventure is devoted to attacking enemies and interacting with in game objects. Repetition of this magnitude clearly demonstrates that these actions are firmly cemented in the male gender construct for the game series. It is expected that Link will perform these duties during the game and at a high rate.

Full Series Analysis

Other than for aesthetic and player immersion, at the core of their purpose, Scenery characters are passive characters, unable to actively contribute to the game to the point that they are nothing more than objects. In *The Legend of Zelda*, the first game in the study there are no Scenery characters; this is not surprising given the that the typical game in the 1980s didn't include excess characters. *Ocarina of Time* however included plenty of Scenery characters, with six female and 11 male characters with another nine that could not be gendered. All four Scenery characters in *Twilight Princess* were male and in *Skyward Sword,* 2 were male and 4 could not be gendered. From this study, it does not appear that the Scenery performance role is predominantly gendered in any particular gender.

The number of different character roles performed by male and female gender options expanded with each new installment of the series. In the original *Legend of Zelda,* female characters performed two roles and male characters performed five and ungendered characters were not present at all. In *Ocarina of Time*, both male and female characters performed six of the unique character roles while ungendered characters performed four. With *Twilight Princess*, female characters once again performed six different character roles, male characters performed eight, and ungendered characters performed one role. With the final installment in the study,

Skyward Sword, male characters remained at eight roles and female characters performed seven and ungendered characters performed two. Just looking at these overall findings across the four games in the study demonstrate that both male and female characters are being represented more fully in the games, but ungendered characters appear much more erratic and in much smaller capacities.

The diversity jumps drastically in between *The Legend of Zelda* and *Ocarina of Time* as all six character roles performed by female characters in *Ocarina of Time* are different than the ones performed in *The Legend of Zelda*. In *Ocarina of Time* female characters perform both the villain role and the hero role for the first time, this is notable as these roles are predominantly male characters. This is also where the series steers away from the expected female role of the Healer. The role of the Non-Profit Gifter was one of the most used character roles, performed by both male and female characters. In fact, the Non-Profit Gifter was performed far more than the For-Profit Seller as only a few characters, a fair balance between male and female, profited during Link's quest. Link is able to acquire items and knowledge, for the most part, without having to spend the money he gains from exploring, which in turn strengthens Link's power.

In *Ocarina of Time, Twilight Princess,* and *Skyward Sword*, the Hero role is performed by both male and female characters. While Link performs the vast majority of the male instances of the Hero role, there is a nice variation of different female characters that fulfill the Hero role. However, zero ungendered characters perform the Hero role in any of the games in the study. In *Ocarina of Time*, Navi is the main female character that performs the Hero role as she accompanies Link and is the one who initially provides Link with his call to action. Several other female characters in the game also perform heroic roles including the Goddesses that are described in the Deku Tree's explanation of the Triforce as well as Impa who acts as Zelda's

bodyguard. Midna in *Twilight Princess* acts as Navi did previously, accompanying Link on his journey and aids him in both battle and traversing the world. In *Skyward Sword* the first hour features much more Zelda than any of the other games. Zelda performs the heroic role a fair number of times, which defines her as a strong and capable female character. This, however, is diminished by her kidnapping, reducing her to a victim.

In addition to Zelda, Fi also performs the Hero role in *Skyward Sword* as she is Link's companion for his adventure. Link's companions, Navi, Midna, and Fi are all female and all play a pivotal role in aiding Link during his journey. This expansion of the Hero role to include and feature female characters is substantial and important to demonstrate that the spectrum of possible roles for female characters is as wide as the male spectrum. However, while these female characters do perform heroic deeds, their accomplishments are always kept in check as to not overshadow Link's. The use of female characters in the performance of the Hero role could still be expanded by featuring a female protagonist.

It is important to note that the diversity in performance roles seen by female characters by the end of the games in this study is quite expanded from where it started. All roles performed are important and crucial to realizing as broad a gender construction in gaming as possible. Butler notes that there is "nothing about femaleness that is waiting to be expressed; there is, on the other hand, a good deal about the diverse experiences of women that is being expressed and still needs to be expressed." (530-531). We have seen an expansion and a wide range of gender roles from both male and female characters in this study and the diversity is something that should be encouraged and the envelope for future gender roles should be pushed.

Like the Hero role expanding to female characters in the latter three games, the prominent male character Link performs the Victim role in each of those games as well. In Game

2, *Ocarina of Time,* Link is caught by Hyrule castle guards and is escorted off of castle grounds. Game 3, *Twilight Princess,* features the most extensive portrayal (in this study) of the Victim role by Link when he is knocked unconscious by and enemy, taken to the Shadow Realm and chained in a cell that requires Midna's help to escape. The depiction of Link in a vulnerable position aids in showing that male characters can be put in helpless situations just like female characters are. The fact that the protagonist is shown in these situations further emphasizes that strong characters do not need to appear invincible and in control every moment of the game and that it's normal for male characters to require help in some instances. As this appears more frequently later in the series, these markedly different male roles being performed confront the male roles established in the previous games where men did not require assistance and did not find themselves in vulnerable positions.

While most of the character roles showcased in this study featured more than one gender, two roles remained isolated in gender. The Explorer role is entirely male. Across all four games, Link is the only character that performs actions that fit the Explorer role. Exploring the world and uncovering items and knowledge is solely a male endeavor. Link acquires money, weapons, other useful items, and information in order to complete his quest. Acquiring these things is seen as a mark of power and authority and as Link gathers more money, stronger weapons, and more information, Link's power grows as well, through these actions. No female character performs the Explorer role so there is no example of a female character gaining power using these means. The reality then in the game series is that the Explorer role is strictly a male role. This reinforces Butler's discussion of gender reality which she describes as "performative," and elaborates further, "it is only to the extent that it is performed." Butler goes on to say that certain acts help define the core of a gender identity and that these acts can confirm or challenge gender

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expectations (527-528). At the core of Link's identity, he is an Explorer, it is one of the most repeated actions that he performs in each game. The immense repetition of this role conforms to the male gender role that Link's performances have created. This is a major missed opportunity for both female and ungendered characters.

The other role performed by only one gender is the Healer role. Only female characters performed this role, and a few different female characters shared performing it. Like with the Explorer role, both ungendered and male character miss out on performing this role. Because these two character roles are only performed by one gender, both of these roles are becoming normalized to the respective gender. This is a prime example of how gendered characters can repeatedly perform certain acts to establish the norms of the genders' performances. Together, these two exclusively one-gendered roles create a gender binary that dictate that only males can be Explorers and only females can be Healers, which is an unnecessary and rigid boundary.

CONCLUSION

The goal of this study was to observe changes in gendered character roles across a sample of *The Legend of Zelda* series and applying Butler's theory on gender as a string of continuous performances that, with enough repetition, can change over time. The first hurdle accomplished in the game series was the inclusion of more female characters and the introduction of ungendered characters to the gaming franchise. With Game 1, female characters barely appeared and with the appearances they did have, their performances were limited and nonessential to completing the game. Male characters appeared almost exclusively and performed a large majority of the roles.

Later on, the focus shifted to characters performing roles more often as well as performing a wider variety of character roles. Female and ungendered characters appeared way more often in Game 2, so much so that more performances were done by female characters than male and ungendered characters performed almost the same number of actions as male characters. Ungendered characters tapered off after Game 2, while female characters continued to diversify the character roles they performed over the four game study. Female characters started off with performing two of the possible ten character roles and by the end of the study, female characters performed every character role at least once, save for one. With enough performances of these different roles, the parameters of gender and accepted performances of gender can change and expand.

This study encourages more scholarship be done on the expansion of gender roles in video games. This was a very small sample size of 1 hours of gameplay from four games from a series with nineteen installments. One could expand this study by making the sample from the games longer, adding more games. Otherwise adding different games under the Nintendo label to

look at how a specific gaming company depicts gender roles or studying more than one company to compare how different gaming companies depict gender. Another possible study could be looking more into the ungendered character and the roles they perform. For the most part as noted in the discussion section, ungendered characters were characters who were labeled as such by default when there were not physical or in game cues to gender. It would be interesting to look at other games to see if any characters have been ungendered or if any games use a different gender system besides a binary on purpose. Finally, another possibility is studying the character roles that were performed in this study by only one gender to see if other games include non-female Healers or non-male Explorers.

At the end of her essay, Butler encourages an expansion on the roles that the female gender performs in society. Through this study of *The Legend of Zelda* series, we have seen an expansion of the possible gender performances for not only the female gender but also for the male gender as well. As the series progressed, both genders performed a continually increasing number of gender roles and many of those were repeated multiple times in the portion of the game observed. This repetition is important in altering the cultural definitions of gender outside of the game series as it becomes more common from the multiple individual acts to become a societal norm and further encourages individuals that this particular performance is an accepted definition of gender, and that they can perform gender in the same or similar manner and they too will be accepted culturally. The repetition of the high frequency actions denoted by the asterisks on the data tables are good examples of how important repetition is to making an action part of the gender construct and this should be used as a model. *The Legend of Zelda* series expands its definitions of gender to a wider range of possible performances and by extension encourages more possible, acceptable performances of gender in our culture as a whole.

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