

When everyone is special

Gender representation in League of Legends

Bachelor's Thesis

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Tiivistelmä – Abstract <p>Median vaikutusta sukupuolirooleihin ja niiden tulkintaan on jo pitkään tutkittu eritoten televisiosarjojen osalta. Televisiosarjojen tavoin pelit tavoittavat usein suuria yleisöjä ja täten vaikuttavat jo tarjontansa puolesta käyttäjiensä odotuksiin sukupuoliroolien suhteen. Tästä huolimatta pelejä ja pelien välittämiä sukupuolirooleja on tutkittu verrattain vähän. Tämä työ tarkasteleekin, miten naishahmoja edustetaan suosituissa League of Legends-pelissä ja millaisia sukupuolirooleja peli luo.</p> <p>Työn analyysi on jaettu kahteen osaan: ensiksi tarkastellaan pelissä esiintyvien hahmojen määrällistä suhdetta toisiinsa, eli kuinka moni pelin hahmoista on mies- tai naispuolinen, missä rooleissa hahmot esiintyvät ja miten hahmot jakautuvat pelin antamiin rooleihin sukupuolen mukaan. Määrällisten ominaisuuksien tarkastelun jälkeen analyysi pureutuu pintaa syvemmälle ja tarkastelee yksittäisten hahmojen taustoja, ilmiasua ja diskurssia.</p> <p>Analyysistä käy ilmi, että naishahmot ovat verrattain hyvin edustettuja League of Legends:ssä. Naishahmoja löytyy pelin jokaisesta roolistä, minkä lisäksi naishahmojen vaihtelevat taustat antavat ymmärtää naisten olevan tasaväkisiä osallistujia pelin lukuisilla osa-alueilla. Vaikka peli asettaakin naishahmoja johtaviin asemiin ja tekee naisista toimivia osallistujia, suuri osa naishahmoista esitetään yliseksualisoituina, mikä heikentää hahmojen uskottavuutta itsenäisinä ja voimakkaina naisina.</p>	
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1. Introduction

Language always carries meaning: one's choice of words can make the difference between a freedom fighter or a terrorist. Representation of gender is no exception and it is often very prominently affected by one's use of language. A simple choice of wording can turn elegant to depraved, adorable to insufferable and generally affect how people are perceived. Pietikäinen and Mäntynen (2009:53) have similar views, stating that discourse has the power of describing, limiting and challenging our perceptions of reality. Generally speaking, it is easy to link certain types of description and stereotypes together. For example, one could expect a 'manly hunter' to be a character who is only given a few words and whose actions are strict and simply motivated. Such expectation would, naturally, lead one to use simple and effective discourse for that particular character. Thus it can be argued that language builds identities and these identities in turn affect the language associated with them. However, this kind of discourse would limit our view on the hunter, and other discourses might give a different, and perhaps equally true, impression of him.

While representation of gender is rather interesting subject, it is relatively well and widely studied. Although there are some areas that have not yet been thoroughly researched, one can find several studies with relative ease. Today's media is saturated with gender representations and many academics have conducted very thorough studies (e.g. Mills 1995) in the more commonly acknowledged media such as newspapers, literature and television shows. However, there are relatively few studies about games and gaming in general and subsequently even fewer about the representation of gender in games. While gaming is mostly thought of as a male-dominated arena, many people of varying ages, occupations and both genders consider themselves frequent gamers. Indeed, games are as accessible and as widely played as some TV shows are watched. Therefore it is surprising that so few studies exist about a medium that affects so many people.

In this study, I will analyze the representation of women in a popular, free to play strategy game called League of Legends, designed by Riot Games. The game is interesting for various reasons. Firstly, according to an article by Neutral Creeps (2011), League of Legends has peaked at as many as 500 000 concurrent players, having over 15 million registrations and 1,4 million players that play the game daily. Given these numbers, the game is no doubt the most popular (or at least the most frequently played) in its genre. Since the game features many characters that players encounter and use frequently, it stands to reason that the game's discourse and the way it represents genders has an influence over a rather large number of people around the world. Secondly, the audience for games is still seen as male dominated and Williams et al. (2009) report in their extensive study that women constitute 38% of the audience for games. This being the case, it is easy to see how games are still viewed as male domain. However, there is keen interest in the gaming community and between the game developers to make games that are approachable to both genders - in no way are games meant to be accessible only to men. While the majority of the audience and arguably the gender of the developers might influence how games are produced and to whom they are marketed, a study on a game as popular as League of Legends might provide valuable insight on how gender is represented in games in general. In addition, this insight could contribute towards making people more aware about the gender roles in games and thus make it easier for people to evaluate and change them.

In short, the aim of my research is to study the representation of women in League of Legends. Using the existing 92 champions (as of 10.02.2011), I try to compare their roles in the game, the discourse given to them, their narrative backgrounds and their status to establish an understanding about how female characters are represented in the game. While I also aim to make gaming as a medium more approachable and easier to understand, it is a secondary goal. Likewise, while I hope that this study can help people to better perceive and understand gender in games, it is not my intention to advocate change to any direction.

2. Terms and Concepts

The concepts defined here are all central to my study. Discourse analysis lends me many of the central terms and concepts (such as identity, representation and positioning) I use in my analysis and provides me with a framework that helps me organize and describe the knowledge I have about discourse. Feminist stylistics, likewise, provides me with a method and a perspective through which I look at the champions, and is as such one of the cornerstones of my theory. The nature of my study also dictates that I have to include game concepts such as "champion" and "tank" in order for the reader to fully understand my research. However, to conserve space, the terminology associated with League of Legends is explained in Appendix I. Moreover, since games as a medium are multimodal by definition, some background from multimodal discourse analysis is not only vital to my understanding of games, but also crucial for explaining and describing the complex relations between the narratives given to the champions and how the narratives relate to the characters' visual representations.

2.1 Discourse Analysis

Pietikäinen and Mäntynen (2009:7) define discourse analysis as qualitative research that spans across sciences. According to them, each science has its own nuances, but discourse analysis is always characterized by its interest in the relationship between language and social activity. Moreover, Pietikäinen and Mäntynen list a number of general concepts such as discourse, genre, representation and identity that occur frequently in discourse analysis, including in this paper. In addition, discourse analysis is characterized by the assumption that linguistic functions are situational and tied to the context in which the language is used instead of just focusing on the systematic nature of language. For a discourse analyst, language is social activity. As seen by Pietikäinen and Mäntynen (2009), the norms and rules affecting social activity also affect discourse, and both are likewise subject to change. Moreover, they further emphasize that language use and social activity occur at the same time, affecting each other. Though language and social practices are constantly changing, it is possible to look at the motives behind them at a given time.

The view presented by Pietikäinen and Mäntynen is also relevant for gender representation, as they describe how language can be used to affect one's view of the world, a person or even just a single event. According to them, discourse gives the power to alter one's position, to challenge, define and limit what is being described about the world, people or certain events (Pietikäinen and Mäntynen 2009:53). In other words, a simple choice of words can change how people are perceived, which is also true for gender as well. Different discourses entail different assumptions, language and social practices based on gender and I want to look at what gender roles and expectations exist in the discourse of League of Legends. Moreover, there is a belief expressed by early discourse analysts suggesting that sentences produced by males and females are fundamentally different. Though Mills (1995) and many discourse analysts challenge the definition, Mills admits that there are styles of writing that can be categorized as feminine or masculine based on certain cues. While she questions whether biological gender has anything to do with one's style of writing, Mills gives examples of stereotypical male and female sentences, a male sentence being direct and even aggressive while a female sentence is more complex and less confrontational. I aim to use this idea, as introduced by Mills as a cultural construct rather than objective truth, to analyze dialogue given to champions in League of Legends and to see how their gender identities are constructed by their discourse.

Since games are often multimodal by definition, and League of Legends is no exception, I also draw upon the methods of multimodal discourse analysis in order to describe and analyze the champions more comprehensively. According to O'Halloran (2004) multimodal discourse analysis is, in essence, discourse analysis that considers multiple semiotic resources, such as images. He claims that a large portion of linguistic research has ignored or downplayed the role of other resources that construct meaning in the context together with text. In this study, I will use multimodal discourse analysis to contrast and compare visual representations of the champions to the textual discourse revolving around them. Though my descriptions are understandably brief due to lack of space and focus in visual appearance, I hope that by taking visual and even aural resources into account I can form a more comprehensive picture of the champions I am trying to describe and analyze

2.2 Feminist Stylistics

According to Mills (1995), Feminist Stylistics aims to "make explicit some of the untenable assumptions of conventional stylistics". In addition to taking gender in consideration in analysis, feminist stylistics tries to "lead stylistics away from analysis of the language of the text -- to an analysis of socioeconomic factors which have allowed the language to appear, or which have determined its appearance--". That is to say, Mills intends to move stylistics from observing grammar and language elements to analyzing the socioeconomic factors that have shaped language and discourse as we know it. In addition, Mills suggests that gender is foregrounded in texts at certain moments that can be predicted. Although these moments appear sensible, realizing the foregrounding allows one to read the text in a different manner, allowing one to explore gender issues. While Mills further elaborates that this method is applicable to scenes that explicitly deal with gender issues (e.g. love scenes in books and differential use of terms for men and women), she also claims that this method can be used to look at elements that are not tied to gender as obviously (or seemingly at all), such as metaphor, narrative and focalization.

Mills also argues that stylistics should shift from "--the analysis of literary text to an analysis of literature in the context of other forms of writing", such as advertising. Arguably, discourse in games would also be part of "literature in the context of other forms of writing". It should also be noted that feminist stylistics, naturally, draws upon ideas of feminism to explore language: themes of discrimination and the difference in how people are treated based on, especially, gender are relevant for feminist analysis. While most see Feminism from the perspective of oppressed women, Mills (1995) also notes that the current social structures do not benefit all men either and that men are also being oppressed. Therefore, a feminist take on discourse and language use will help me to make my analysis more detailed and avoid overgeneralizations such as 'all women are the same' or 'all men are the same'. In other words, this framework helps me to distinguish between two seemingly similar "female DPS carries" and encourages me to see the individual differences that make characters and people unique.

3. Gender Representation in Gaming

Although this study is loosely linked to general studies about gender and identity, discourse analysis and feminist studies, the existing research concerning games is relatively rare and relevant topics can be hard to find. Therefore, I was rather fortunate to find a study by Ivory (2006). In his study, Ivory (2006) researches how female characters are represented in games as described by video game reviews. His hypotheses were that male characters are referred to more often and are active and playable in comparison to female characters, who are cast in a more passive role. He also makes a note of expecting female characters to be sexualized more often than their male counterparts.

At the end of his study, Ivory (2006: 103-112) concludes that female characters are underrepresented and, indeed, sexualized more often than male characters. The particular method of his study, however, allows him to also note that many reviewers do not appear to support the sexualized roles female characters are given in games. On the contrary, Ivory questions the for more female characters in games if that is the only role cast to them. In other words, he asks why we should have more female characters if we can only give them oversexualized roles. By doing so, he does not say that there should be less roles for female characters, but argues for a more diverse set of (gender) roles for female characters. Moreover, he considers whether there could be a corresponding degree of disapproval among the players, which would suggest that game designers need to think more about how they portray women in games. One general problem among game developers is how to make female players interested in their games. Studies like Ivory's might actually be useful for game developers, should they wish to attract female players without hindering their efforts through male-orientated representation of characters. Another research on representation and positioning in games by Williams et al. (2009) shares this view, stating that the percentage of female characters in major roles is even smaller than the actual percentage of female players. In addition, Williams et al. argue that if the game developers wanted to please the existing market even more, they should have even more white male characters in prominent positions. They note, however, that to reach wider audiences, minorities in games such as women and ethnical groups should become more represented.

Though Ivory's study is more focused on reviewers than mine, we share similar expectations. Although I would criticize the study for the fact that reviewers themselves might not portray the game's setting correctly (or using equal, unbiased standards), it is obvious that his study is not necessarily as concerned with how things are in the games as how they are presented by reviewers. Regardless, his conclusions help me to form my own expectations and reflect my study against his. While I expect that female champions will be more overtly sexualized than their male counterparts in League of Legends, as in the reviews Ivory has looked at, I would characterize every champion in League of Legends active due to their position as playable champions (the game does not feature passive, inactive support characters). Therefore, it is not sensible to gauge whether the champions are active or passive, but rather what roles they are cast in based on their gender. Subsequently, it is reasonable to study the ratio of male champions to female champions within a role.

4. Research aims and question

Drawing on multimodal discourse analysis and feminist stylistics, it is my aim to answer my main question: how does League of Legends represent its female champions? Although this research is situated in the well studied field of gender representation, I aim to combine my insight as a gamer with existing theory to provide an in-depth look at how female characters are represented in the game.

There are two sub questions that I aim to explore in order to answer my main question thoroughly: Firstly, in what roles are female characters positioned in comparison to male characters. Secondly, what kind of language do female and male characters use in the dialogue given to them and how does it construct their identities. By asking these questions, I hope to find out what kind of gender identity the game builds based on the roles it casts the characters in and what kind of language the game gives to the characters depending on their gender and their role. While my questions are focused on female champions, I will also draw on male champions as a point of comparison to make my analysis more complete.

In addition to looking at in-game discourse and the background narratives given to the champions, I will also look at their visual representations and link them to how their identities are constructed in discourse. While discourse alone will no doubt reveal a great wealth of knowledge, it is my firm belief that this kind of analysis is incomplete without addressing the champions' visual representation. Games have a rather peculiar way of representing characters of both genders as ideal people, as in any other media, but it is more often than not that female characters are somewhat sexualized. This being the case, visual representations of female characters often end up depicting them as sexual creatures, sometimes even defining them by their sexuality. I hope to thoroughly analyze how League of Legends uses visual representations and, subsequently, how it affects the champions' identities.

5. Data and Methods

I have gathered the vast majority of the data from the League of Legends homepage (2012), and therefore a good portion of the data utilized in this paper can be found there. However, some of my insights are also arrived at through playing League of Legends and while one can certainly quote players' experiences with the game, it is often best to gain this kind of knowledge (e.g. Are supports useful? What kind of attitude do players have towards playing certain roles? How does a DPS actually work in the game?) by actually playing the game. I based my study on narrative descriptions of the game's characters, which (and their pictures I used for analyzing their visual representations) can be found from League of Legends homepage. I have also used audio data to analyze the discourse given to the champions. Though there is no record of jokes, one-liners and occasional remarks from the champions at League of Legends homepage, this data can be obtained by playing the game. Moreover, since each character has a default skin (in-game appearance and picture) and alternative skins, I will use the default skins since they are the most commonly used and thus, arguably, are usually associated with the characters by the players. Therefore, I have associated each character I have analyzed with the default appearance and picture which are available in the League of Legends homepage.

Using the game and the League of Legends homepage as a source for narratives, descriptions, dialogue and visual representations, I can look at the discourse of League of Legends. Since the discourse is multimodal in nature, I will use the methods of multimodal discourse analysis for researching the discourse and drawing connections between different modes of representation. Since each champion has their own role, I will first look at a general spread of the champions to see how many champions are labeled as DPS, mages, tanks and supports (which are the role definitions used by the League of Legends homepage). Moreover, I look at the percentage of these roles filled by female champions and compare it to the percentage of male champions in similar roles. By doing this I hope to establish a general understanding of how women are represented in the game and in what kinds of roles they are most often cast.

Once I have provided a quantitative look at the champions, I explore the matter further by choosing a few typical examples to illustrate whether the champions fit certain stereotypes, such as a mature protector (Leona), strong and independent woman (Caitlyn, Miss Fortune), a meek and professional support (Sona, Taric) and a woman with political power (Karma, Katarina) or exceptional knowledge (Soraka). My choice was made after reviewing each champion in question and choosing the ones that represent their type the best, as well as choosing champions like Tristana, who deviate from the norm in a way that defines them as characters and often end up representing women and men in different ways. While a different section might yield slightly different results, the scope of my study required me to limit my selection. Moreover, I have included Taric and Alistar as male champions that either fit a stereotype (Taric) or go against it (Alistar). Both champions are there to provide a contrast to how female champions are represented and although I also mention other male champions briefly, Taric and Alistar are the only ones I have analyzed to some depth in order to avoid straying from my research question.

Indeed, analyzing all the champions at once would likely provide the best - or at least the most comprehensive picture - but a more limited take allows me to focus on individual detail. Although the champions I chose for the analysis consist mostly of females, I have also included a mention of male champions in a few instances in order to provide a contrast. In each case, I will use the champion's background and picture (provided at LoL homepage) as a reference. Moreover, I hope to provide insight into how the characters fit in their role and whether female and male champions have similar personalities depending on their role in the game. In addition to looking at the champions' roles, I hope to give a glance at the fictive narratives given to the champions using the methods of discourse analysis in hopes of establishing an understanding of their positioning in the game's setting (e.g. What roles they are given? Are they respected or knowledgeable or just characterized by their sexuality?).

As of 10th of February 2011, League of Legends has 92 unique champions and Riot Games are already planning at least two new champions, one of whom is about to be released in a few days. Although I would like to include every character in my analysis, such is beyond the scope of my work and would make updating the paper quite tedious. Therefore I shall not consider any champions released after 10th of February 2011.

Although this means that the game has already changed, the problem I face is no different from other discourse analysts: like language, games and how they are perceived change with time and it is perhaps impossible to provide analysis that is exact and true for years to come. Therefore, my analysis is like looking at a still picture of the game as it was in 10th of February 2011 and while I have taken possible changes into consideration, my analysis is not concerned with them. Instead, I hope to describe the game as it was as accurately as possible.

6. Analysis

I will approach my analysis in two stages. First, I will take a quantitative look at the characters, providing four figures with relevant statistics (see below) before discussing them in depth. Having done that, I will move to qualitative analysis, looking at a few preselected champions in depth. Figure 1 represents the overall spread of champions based on their gender, while figure 2 demonstrates how large portion of male champions is given a certain role. Figure 3 works similarly, but is based on female champions instead. Both figures 2 and 3 allow one to see which roles are the most prevalent for male and female champions. Finally, figure 4 contrasts the number of female champions with male champions within each role, allowing direct comparison between genders: it is, for example, possible to see that the majority of tanks are male and that support characters are actually spread the most evenly. Indeed, it is evident from figure 3 that 17,24% of female champions are filling a support role, while figure 4 reveals that 50% of all support characters are female.

Figure 1: Champions

Male: 68,48%

Female: 31,52%

Figure 2: Male champions

DPS: 47,62%

Mage: 31,75%

Tank: 12,7%

Support: 7,94%

Have melee auto attack (or fight in close quarters): 65,08%

Figure 3: Female champions**DPS:** 31,03%**Mage:** 44,83%**Tank:** 6,9%**Support:** 17,24%**Have melee auto attack (or fight in close quarters):** 31,03%**Figure 4: Roles**

	Male %	Female %
DPS:	76,92%	23,08%
Mage:	60,60%	39,40%
Tank:	80,00%	20,00%
Support:	50,00%	50,00%

6.1 Statistics unveiled (quantitative analysis)

Looking at figure 1, it would seem that there are about twice as many male champions as there are female champions. Although males are certainly a majority here, the vast number of female champions alone (29 of 92) indicates that women are nevertheless not a rare exception in the League, but rather a natural part of it. Moreover, a champion's gender does not make them any better or worse in their role: Graves and Miss Fortune are both ranged DPS champions whose gameplay is centered around farming gold and getting better equipment that allows them to carry the game for their team in late game. While the two characters have different backgrounds, personalities and talents, these champions' gender has no evident bearing to their usefulness.

Indeed, the setting of League of Legends (see Appendix I) defines champions as unique and talented individuals who come from a variety of backgrounds, nationalities and races. In fact, one could even state that women are well represented in League of Legends exactly because there are female champions: the reasonable number of female champions demonstrates that women have what it takes to become a champion of their cause and faction. According to Williams et al. (2009), female characters typically make up only 15% of the cast, while the actual number of female players is 38%. They further argue that the number of female characters should be closer to the number of female players in order to avoid underrepresentation. As figure 1 demonstrates, 31,52% of champions is noticeably closer to the actual percentage of female players than the typical 15%, which is why League of Legends seems to have a reasonably sized cast of female champions. However, to quote the Incredibles: "When Everyones's super, no one will be." Put simply, this means that when everyone has special capabilities, the difference between people must be made by other means. Just acknowledging that there are female champions is not enough to establish that women are positioned favorably, equally or unfavorably in comparison to men. Certainly, the base is good: both men and women have the ability to become champions - but what kind of champions they will be?

A glance at the roles in figure 2 shows that a good number of male champions are DPS carries or bruisers with a tendency to fight at melee range. Archetypically, they are the barbarians and knights charging at the front lines while others stay back and support them at range. However, there are many mages and ranged DPS among male champions as well, indicating that males fill a variety of roles and are more than just meat shields charging in the fray. In turn, female champions lean slightly towards the role of a mage and tend to fight at a range instead of engaging their enemies in direct, physical melee. Although exceptions exist, many iconic ranged DPS characters are indeed women. Interestingly, while male champions filled my expectations by being predominant as tanks, both female and male champions fill support roles in equal numbers. This is an encouraging sign of role stability. However one wants to look at it, support characters are roughly the equivalent of nurses. Having both male and female nurses in equal number, therefore, means that neither women or men are specifically meant to stay back and support their team instead of competing for glory in battle. While supports have an important role in the gameplay, it is not strictly a male or a female role. Both genders have what it takes to give their team the support it needs.

One must note, however, that the differences between roles are relative given the lesser number of female champions (figure 1). That being said, women as tanks are a rather new addition by Riot Games, as before Leona and Sejuani there were no female tanks at all. Basically, being up in the close quarters and protecting your team while taking damage yourself was for men only. Even though both genders are now represented in all roles, it is noteworthy that female champions are spread in their roles differently (figure 4): while there are 5 male and 5 female support champions, female support champions take a larger percentage of female champions overall (figure 3). While these differences do not necessarily state that women are inferior at close quarters and that they should stay at range or support, one gets the impression that a generic female champion would stay at range and carry the game through ranged DPS, magic or by offering support to one's team. Therefore, while the game does give a variety of roles to female champions, the generic representation of a female champion still leans towards a perceived image of support and standing behind males, while male champions are more often associated with the front lines and protecting their companions more directly than female champions. Notable exceptions like Leona and Sejuani, however, still show that female champions are not limited to their most commonly associated roles, which is promising for the future development of the game.

6.2 In depth look at champions (qualitative analysis)

Having looked at the general statistics, it is important to look at the champions in depth. Here, I will discuss some champions individually and compare and contrast some champions with each other to provide insight to how they fill their roles and how they represent women.

6.2.1 Miss Fortune and Caitlyn - typical ranged DPS

In his study, Ivory (2006) concludes that female video game characters appear underrepresented as active characters and are often depicted in sexualized roles. While the data I presented above seems to indicate that League of Legends has indeed a reasonably good roster of both male and female champions, judging by the champions' discourse and visual representations it is also evident that many of the game's female champions are portrayed in a sexualized fashion, just as Ivory suggests.

Both Miss Fortune and Caitlyn offer good examples of a female champion, whose discourse and personalities revolve around sexuality. Firstly, both of the champions are relatively scantily clad and dressed in suggestive (i.e. revealing) outfits. The outfits of these champions both feature a relatively exposed cleavage and a lot of bare skin. While Miss Fortune has trousers, her outfit still exposes a large part of her lower abdomen. At the same time, Caitlyn's short skirt wouldn't even allow her to sit down comfortably, and she has straps attached to her thighs that serve no actual purpose (other than to accentuate her appearance and draw attention). Secondly, even though they both are described as individual and self reliant women (a bounty hunter and a sheriff), they both are given discourse, especially jokes, that is at least partially suggestive, such as Caitlyn's "Sorry boys, I keep the fuzzy cuffs at home" and Miss Fortune's "Sure you can handle me, summoner?".

It appears that a good portion of the sexualized female characters have brash and bold personalities (which does not sexualize them in itself - rather it is something they have in common), and while they are seen as powerful and independent individuals, it is likely that the sexualized view the players get of them will undermine their credibility as independent women. In comparison, most male DPS carries are also seen as powerful and independent, but they are not quite as sexualized in the same fashion: their outfits are not as openly sexual, and although they are certainly ideal and able-bodied males, few outfits feature bare skin. On the other hand, a grasp on their own sexuality and boldness in using it could be seen as something that makes these female champions all the more independent. However, the implied audience of these jokes is most likely male dominated. To quote Mills (1995) "Interestingly enough when doubles entendres are used in seaside postcards they are often concerned to depict sexual relations as being the only relationship between men and women --" Though Mills is obviously speaking about different context, it is possible to apply this line of thinking to jokes made by the above champions: Miss Fortune's remark ("Sure you can handle me, summoner?") could mean a challenge posed by gameplay or something more untoward - the joke is meant to be seen from the perspective of a male consumer who intends to handle the champion. Indeed, Mills further argues that double entendres can often turn women into objects for male consumption and knowing that the game's audience consists mostly of males, it appears that her argument is sensible in this context as well. Therefore, though both Miss Fortune and Caitlyn are characterized by their boldness, their oversexualized representation also makes them objects for male consumption.

6.2.2 Tristana - a different ranged DPS

Though many female champions, especially those filling DPS roles, are sexualized, it is positive to notice that not all female champions are built on sex appeal. While it would be easy to assume that this shift of focus would also mean that a champion portrayed in a less sexualized fashion would also be more passive or more traditional, Tristana shakes this claim easily by her unique brand of personality. Tristana is a yordle (a race unique to the game's setting, not quite unlike hobbits or gnomes of some settings: they are short and somewhat childlike in appearance) who has an outgoing and even impatient personality. While it is possible to say that the character's childlike appearance makes it impossible (or at least highly unconventional) to portray any traces of sexuality, Tristana's narrative marks her as a grown, accomplished and responsible adult of her species.

Even so, her direct approach and remarks like "I wanna shoot something!" give her an air of childlike enthusiasm, which undermines her credibility. In addition, her joke "Is that a rocket in your pocket?", which is delivered in a childlike and innocent tone, also sets up a double entendre, where her implied innocence is in contrast with the joke she makes. However, the character is still portrayed as a skilled commando and clad in a non-provocative way, which makes her far less sexualized than some of her peers.

6.2.3 Leona - A female tank

The examples above would lead one to think that a female champion can only be either overly sexualized and bold, childlike and impatient or perhaps decent and meek. Leona, however, manages to reach yet another stereotype by being a mature protector who is neither oversexualized nor meek. Her narrative depicts her as a chosen warrior of her people, holding a higher moral code than her warrior brethren - instead of killing, she's more concerned with protecting. In line with this outlook, she is equipped in heavy armor, which would be more expected of a knightly type male character. Of course, her armor is not a plain and simple barrier of protection, but this is likely because the game's developers have wished to give each champion an unique appearance rather than striving for

realism. Despite the aesthetic quality of Leona's outfit, she is still decently clad for battle and not as provocative as a good portion of the female champions.

Though Leona is a serious and respectable champion, she makes a joke like "don't stare directly at me for too long", which is a play on her sun-theme but also on her assumed radiant beauty. In other words, she's telling one to avoid staring at the sun lest they become blinded by it and also implying that her beauty would have the same effect. As far as jokes go, the double meaning has less to do with sex, though it is certainly linked with themes of desire and appearance. Her more usual comments are decisive and contain direct utterances such as "I will protect you" and "They'll have to get through me". When Mills (1995) speaks of gendered sentence, she challenges the notion that direct and decisive remarks like these would be only limited to males. League of Legends seems to agree and Leona is indeed given a personality that would fit a generic male knight champion.

However, her approach and occasional reminders of her femininity, e.g. "I think I broke a nail, good thing it wasn't mine.", complete her as a believable character who is a protector on her own terms, instead of simply following the discourse that would be appropriate to a generic male knight. In other words, her identity as a female is as important as her identity as a tank and a protector - her femininity is not excluded just because she fills a role that has been traditionally left for a male champion.

6.2.4 Katarina, Karma and Soraka - political position and knowledge

So far, I have only mentioned champions that have power and status through their personality and independence. In other words, their status depends on themselves and the value one gives to their personality. Though Caitlyn holds the position of a sheriff in the game, and while the occupation is not one that might be expected of a female character, it is still a relatively low position on the ladder of political power or skill. However, female champions like Katarina, Karma and Soraka have either political status or knowledge that rivals that of the game's many male champions, displaying that status and skill in the game are for those who have the ability to grasp it regardless of their gender.

Karma is the figurehead and esteemed leader figure of Ionian resistance (a nation under strife in the game's lore), who is not only seen as a skilled champion, but a beloved leader. Katarina, on the other hand, belongs to Noxian high command (another nation, ruled by the strength and cunning of its military leaders) and though in the game's narrative her father held her post before, she has risen to it by her own skill and cunning rather than being coddled by a protective father figure. Soraka, on the other hand, has little political power, but her background depicts her as an accomplished magician that has gone further than any other mage in the game's setting (be they men or women). While Katarina and Karma are still esteemed, Soraka lost a good portion of her favor with the stars (whose magic she had researched) due to cursing a cruel scientist, Warwick, and turning him into a werewolf. Soraka's apparent fall from grace was based on emotion: anger towards the cruel scientist. Although emotions can stereotypically be thought of as a feminine quality, her narrative does present this as feminine weakness, but rather makes her a human being through her misstep. In other words, her narrative does not include elements that would imply that her decision was made in absence of logic or the ability to think straight like a male - instead, it was a human act befitting both genders. At the surface, these three female champions are fundamentally different: Karma is an esteemed leader due to her personality and actions, Katarina is feared and respected due to her martial prowess and cunning and Soraka is, basically, a very skilled researcher. However, while the game's setting features a number of princes and esteemed male inventors, it also has a good portion of female champions in similar or even higher positions of power, be it political, based on knowledge or personality.

6.2.5 Sona and Taric - Professional supports

Support champions are usually given less brash and dominant personalities, given their tendency to stay in the background, supporting their team as the game progresses. Both Sona and Taric are good examples in this regard, because their discourse is built on their mastery of an art they use to support others. Sona's discourse is mostly built around music and while her outfits are stylish and occasionally suggestive, she is not represented like the typical DPS carries mentioned above. Instead, she uses musical terms like "allegro" and speaks more about music than herself. As a point of comparison, most male support characters do not deviate from their female counterparts greatly.

For example, Taric is depicted as a gem knight, proficient in healing through the power of gems. His most known line might be "Gems? Gems are truly outrageous. They are truly, truly, truly outrageous." Like Sona, Taric speaks more about gems than himself and usually maintains a calm and even tone of voice.

It seems that this, more professional, approach makes the characters appear more respectable, but their calm personalities make them seem inevitably more passive and less in control. Moreover, while Sona might easily fill the stereotype of a quiet and nice girl, Taric's calm approach is in such a contrast compared to the other male champions that the community has been able to make more than a few jokes about him, most of which concern his sexual orientation. While the game gives no indication to any direction whatsoever, it seems that the players' expectations and the character's representation are creating a different interpretation of Taric.

6.2.6 Alistar - Supporting made manly

Of course, not all champions of the same role are similar. Some variation is to be expected and Alistar, a male minotaur champion, is in a stark contrast with support champions like Taric and Sona. While Alistar also has a healing ability like Sona and Taric, his gameplay revolves more around disturbing the enemy team with his ability to stomp and stun enemies and knock them around by headbutting them. In addition, he has lines such as "Nothing can hold me back!" and "Mess with the bull and you get the horns!" Alistar's brand of gameplay and discourse gives a more aggressive feel to the character, which is more in line with stereotypical representation of a male champion. Therefore it is not surprising that there is no female support character that fills a similar stereotype, which emphasizes the fact that there are still some limits to what kind of roles champions are given based on their gender. To the date, no female support champion has a similar or equivalent style of gameplay as Alistar - and while female support champions are not less effective within their role because of this, they accomplish the goals of their role differently. However, some female champions like Leona can also fill a role as a support, and her protect and control style of gameplay is actually very similar to that of Alistar. Even though Riot Games did not intend or label Leona as a support, the player base has found a way to utilize Leona's talents to the fullest.

Though Alistar's central theme seems to be unbound rage, the narrative description of this champion also represents him as a former slave, who has taken the rights of the oppressed as his cause after gaining freedom and status as a League champion. While this gives his character certain depth, his aggressive and powerful stance seems to make him more liked and believable as a male champion. Interestingly enough, Alistar has a joke that could be seen as sexualized. "You can't milk those", he says when prompted to joke, which is obviously a joke on him being a minotaur and being linked to cows by association. Whether the joke is sexist is hard to determine: on one hand, he is saying that he cannot be milked like a cow and that cows are milked, yet on the other hand he applies the joke on himself, voluntarily being the butt of the joke by realizing the association between a minotaur and a cow. Therefore, it can be said that even male champions get some variety in their representation.

7. Conclusion

Looking over the analysis, it is evident that male champions are slightly more represented in physical, close-up melee roles. However, both male and female champions fill a variety of roles and often succeed as characters even if they are not well represented within a given role. Likewise, while female champions' discourse revolves around sexuality more often than male champions', it is likely a tendency inherent in the culture League of Legends was produced and received in. In fact, it is admirable that the game is bold about representing women in different positions of power, skill and knowledge. Indeed, having female champions is hardly special at all: the consensus in games for a good while has been that female characters can be present in them and they can have an active role. However, the quality of women's participation is always a concern and it has been interesting to look at how League of Legends has managed to represent its champions. It was especially interesting to notice that both men and women filled the ranks of support champions in equal numbers. This would be in a stark contrast to the results gained by Williams et al. (2009), who found that the number of female characters in significant roles is smaller than the actual percentage of female players. In fact, the overall percentage of female champions in League of Legends is much closer to the percentage of female players that Williams et al. (2009) suggested, which is a good sign considering that Riot Games has been releasing many female champions. Perhaps the percentage of female champions will be even larger in the future.

Overall, I would be keen to say that female champions are well represented in the game, both in the sense of their number and positions and the quality of representation. Even the most sexualized champions have other dimensions to their characters and none of them are defined by their sexuality alone. Perhaps it is, indeed, even inevitable to include some sexuality in any champion's representation, lest they would be less human. Though League of Legends manages its task well, the larger question still remains unanswered. Obviously, studying gender representation in games and gaming on a wider scale would be a natural, larger step from this study, but unfortunately I did not have the space nor resources to pursue such research. Indeed, I had to limit my selection of champions to look at in general, and had to take a surface approach to the champions I chose. It would, after all, be possible to conclude a whole study about the narratives given to the champions, their visual representations or even full studies based on one champion if one wished to do so.

Despite the limited space, I believe that I have been able to display the variety of roles given to women in League of Legends and analyze them thoroughly enough to create a footing for future study in gender representation in games.

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Appendix I: Game terminology

Champion

A champion is a character utilized by the summoner (player) in the game. Champions fill several roles and are the main focus of my research. I aim to explore what kind of dialogue and background the characters are given, how they are drawn and how their presentation constructs their identity. Champions are used to fill several in game goals, such as killing enemy minions and champions, destroying enemy towers and inhibitors and finally bringing down the enemy nexus. In the game setting, champions are unique heroes and paragons, excelling mostly in warfare but often in other aspects as well. Their exceptional abilities make them desirable puppets for summoners, but also national heroes and champions of their factions' cause.

Lanes, turrets, inhibitors and nexus

A map contains a certain number of lanes that depends on the game mode, 5vs5 being the most commonly played and containing 3 lanes. Minions, not controlled by players, travel these lanes from one's base towards the enemy base. Turrets guard lanes, each acting as a waypoint and preventing access to further towards the enemy lane before they have been destroyed. The goal of the game is to destroy turrets at a lane until players reach enemy inhibitor, which they can then destroy. Destroying the inhibitor causes super minions to spawn, making pushing the lane towards the enemy nexus easier. Moreover, once an inhibitor is down, the enemy nexus becomes vulnerable. The team that first destroys the other team's nexus wins the game.

Minion

A faceless and voiceless support unit that spawns at a base and moves through a set path towards the enemy nexus, destroying enemy minions and turrets along its way. Minions move in packs and killing them awards gold to enemy champions (gold is a resource used to purchase better equipment, leading to advantage).

Minions cannot usually destroy enemy turrets alone, requiring a champion's presence to eliminate enemy minions. Left unchecked by the enemy team, however, minions can pile up and devastate enemy defences.

Summoner

Player's alter ego. Summoner is a game mechanic employed by Riot Games that affects the game in a couple of ways. Firstly, a summoner always brings a champion he or she owns to the game, controlling it in the game. Secondly, a summoner may affect the course of the game with two abilities they select before the match, having a couple of options to choose from. These abilities include teleportation of champion, healing, replenishing mana (a resource used for abilities) and so on. Because the game is not on the role of the summoner, they are not directly relevant to my research.

Role (Champion's)

Each champion can fill several roles, but Riot Games has given them tags to represent the roles they are officially qualified and supposed to fill. The role is defined by the character's abilities and the items that are build to a character. For example, a tough character with defensive abilities is usually a tank, but a reasonably durable character that has more offensive abilities can still be made a tank by correct itemization. However, there is usually little point to make a character to perform a role that it is not meant to perform. The roles will be explained in depth below. I will first give a brief description of what Riot Games says of the roles at their homepage, expanding it afterwards with the knowledge I have gained by playing the game for a year.

DPS/Carry

DPS champions, according to League of Legends homepage (2011), are best at dealing constant physical damage. An even team usually has one ranged carry and one melee carry that builds defensive items to perform a task that players refer to as a "bruiser". A ranged carry fights from a distance, being very weak and easily taken down without help of a friendly tank. A melee carry, however, charges into the thick of the battle with a tank and usually has to choose their items accordingly to survive some damage from the enemy team. Though some carries can inflict magical damage as well, their main damage source is physical.

If a team does not have a carry, winning will be very difficult. Carries need to kill minions early game and get gold so that they can shine at late game, carrying the team. Carries often reap rewards for their tedious early game in late game, getting most of the glory before the battle is over.

Jungler

Though League of Legends homepage (2011) states that Jungler is not an official tag, it is still a role that some champions primarily fill - a fact that is acknowledged by Riot Games. A jungler spends most of their game in the jungle between the lanes where the minions travel, instead killing neutral creeps for gold and experience. In a way, jungler is also a template applied to any other role, though junglers often have abilities that help them to endure punishment of neutral creeps and even heal themselves during their jungling route. However, a jungler is usually a tank or a bruiser-type DPS champion. The main advantage of jungling is getting an experience advantage. In addition, enemies rarely know where the jungler is at a given moment, and as such they can assist their team by performing surprise attacks.

Mage

League of Legends homepage (2011) describes mages as burst casters that excel at doing large amounts of damage instantly. An even team requires at least one mage to perform well, because they inflict magic damage that is not countered by armor. Although tanks can buy magic resistance to survive magical attacks better, even distribution of damage types ensures that the enemy team will not be too tough to take down. Compared to carries, mages have strong early game and need little items to be effective. However, as the game progresses, mages remain powerful, though their damage is limited by cooldowns between their abilities. Mages are usually just as appreciated as carries are and a skilled player can even win the game for their team without having to rely on a carry to do all the damage.

Tank

According to League of Legends homepage (2011), tanks specialize in two traits: absorbing damage and distracting enemies with crowd control effects (such as stun). Tanks are the durable characters with defensive abilities and items that rush in to the enemy team to get their attention so that the rest of the team can concentrate on bringing the enemy team down in team fights and smaller skirmishes.

While a team does not necessarily require a tank to win the game, tanks are very useful for their team, because they can survive turret hits and help the team to fight in places they otherwise would not be able to. Some champions require a tank to initiate a fight before they can function effectively, lest the enemy team is able to eliminate them too easily. A good tank is always appreciated, but they rarely get the glory that is reserved for a carry or a mage for performing a pentakill (annihilation of the whole enemy team in a quick succession).

Support

League of Legends homepage (2011) defines support champions as characters that are focused on helping their teammates. Support characters generally have abilities that can help friendly champions to replenish health or mana (used for abilities). Some support characters also give shields, boost abilities or attack damage of friendly champions and can even revive dying champions. Moreover, support characters are also expected to sacrifice personal glory for the team's sake, buying items such as wards (used to grant vision at map so that players can see approaching enemies) instead of completing strong item builds that allow them to get kills. Indeed, a support character is expected to do with little to no gold while champions filling other roles get the kills and gold. While a support champion is not required to win a game, a correctly played support can turn the tide of the entire game, leading one's team to easy victory if the enemy does not have a support champion or anyone else willing to fill the role. Therefore, though a support is rarely the hero of the team, the role is very important and active, requiring skill and insight from the player.