Doing gender in the gaming industry

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Abstract

The field of ICT has traditionally been seen a masculine area and research has shown that is problematic for women to both enter and stay in the field. Looking at industrial growth, the field of gaming has become the prominent one, and has surpassed all other entries in media and culture. Gaming, also perceived as a masculine area, does however have a gender distribution of players that almost is equal. Still, the workforce is dominated by males, and the games are designed by males, for males.

Medial tools (such as gaming) are representing societal models, which is the source of information that is most influential in shaping how people perceive and creates values about gender in the society. As mostly males are designing these societal models in the games, and that almost everyone is playing them, there are reasons to believe that the view of gender in society may be moulded from the male perspective in the gender structure. This study adds additional knowledge and understanding of how gender is done, by applying the concept of Doing Gender at the gaming industry. Which leads to the research question, "how is the gaming industry doing gender".

The question is answered by applying a theoretical framework to highlight patterns and answers in empirical data gathered in semi-structured interviews with actors in the gaming industry. The results show that there is a broad understanding and gender consciousness from the eyes of the interviewees. However, this study also show that a broader gender consciousness is essential to make the gaming industry a more appealing place for the female gender, as well as keeping their interest for gaming when growing up. In addition, we advise that the component of Setting as is added when creating and designing video game characters out of a gender conscious perspective.

Keywords; Doing gender, gender inclusion, gender stereotypes, gaming industry

Abstrakt

Forskningsområdet ICT har setts som ett maskulint område och forskning har visat att det är problematiskt för kvinnor att komma in i branschen samt att stanna kvar. Inom den industriella utvecklingen så har spelbranschen kommit att bli en utav de största inom media och kultur. Spel ses också som ett maskulint område, även om antalet män och kvinnor bland spelare nästan är jämställt. Dock så är det fortfarande mansdominerat på arbetsplatserna inom industrin och spelen designas av män, för män.

Mediala verktyg (t.ex. spel) representerar samhällsmodeller, vilka är viktiga informationskällor som influerar människor när de skapar sina idéer och värderingar kring genus i samhället. Eftersom det är mest män som designar de samhällsmodeller som vi hittar i spelen, samt att de flesta människorna spelar spelen så finns det anledning att tro att samhällssynen på genus kan komma att formas utifrån ett manligt perspektiv. Den här studien skapar kunskap och förståelse kring hur genus blir gjort, genom att applicera "Doing Gender" teorierna på spelindustrin. Det här leder fram till forskningsfrågan " how is the gaming industry doing gender".

Frågan besvaras genom att använda det teoretiska ramverket till att hitta mönster och svar i den empiriska data, som är insamlad genom semistrukturerade intervjuer med aktörer inom spelindustrin. Resultatet visar att det finns ett bredare genusmedvetande hos respondenterna. Dock så visar studien även att ett bredare genusmedvetande är viktigt för att spelindustrin skall kunna bli en attraktiv industri för kvinnor att arbeta i, men även för att behålla tjejernas spelintresse under deras uppväxt. Vi rekommenderar att komponenten "Setting" används när man skapar och designar spelkaraktärer utifrån ett genusmedvetet perspektiv.

Nyckelord: Doing gender, genus inkludering, genus stereotyper, spelindustrin

Acknowledgements

1. Introduction

The gaming industry has since the release of Pong in the 70's grown to become a leading genre within the popular culture, surpassing the movie- and book industry. Last year the gaming industry had a turnover of 99.6 billion USD (Newzoo, 2016). In addition, studies made within the fields of social cognitive psychology explains how medial tools, such as video games, highly influence the way society molds its perception about gender (Bussey & Bandura, 1999). Societal models contain the most influential information concerning how humans create their values and beliefs about gender roles and they will always affect humans during their lifetime (Bussey & Bandura, 1999).

The main area within gaming-research has aimed at pointing out the negative consequences of gaming, such as less physical activity (Griffiths, 1997), addiction, aggressive behaviour (Bryce & Rutter, 2003) and violence (Carnagey, Anderson & Bushman, 2007; Smith, Lachlan & Tamborini., 2003). Literature within the gaming area has also depicted gaming as an isolated and lonely leisure activity for antisocial young men (Bryce & Rutter, 2002), but has the recent years emerged into being something that is a big part of many people's social life (Bryce & Rutter, 2003) which could be explained by the phenomenon of online-gaming where it's possible for millions of gamers all over the world to compete and communicate with each other's (Kuznekoff & Rose, 2012). Statistics show that 97% of the teenagers in USA plays video games in 2008 on a regular basis (Lenhart, Dean, Middaugh, MacGill, Evans & Vitak, 2008). In addition, some literature suggests that women are a minority compared to men when it comes to the average number of gamers (Bryce & Rutter, 2005), even though recent studies shows that this gap almost is gone (Wilhelm, 2016), which is strengthen by the statistics provided from *Entertainment Software Association* (ESA) where 44% of the gamers are considered to be women (ESA, 2015).

The field of ICT has traditionally been seen as a masculine work area (Oreglia & Srinivasan, 2016). Because of this view research within informations system (IS) has shown that it's problematic for women to enter this field (Reid, Allen, Armstrong & Riemenschneider, 2010). Another problem that has become visible is that motivating and keeping women within the industry is quite hard (Hoonakker, 2008). A problem that has become transparent with the industrial growth of the gaming industry is that gaming is seen as a masculine area (Fox & Tang, 2014) where a majority of games that tend to be designed within the male-appealing themes of war and competition (Bryce & Rutter, 2002; Lazzaro, 2008) where females often are objectified (Bryce & Rutter, 2002). The definition of stereotypes used in this study is the following; stereotypes in the terms of gender are believed to consist of perceptions within individuals on what could be considered as female or male (Behm-Morawitz & Mastro, 2009).

Literature suggests that this male-dominated discourse is said to origin with due to that females usually are driven away from gaming and computer science when they are young (Heeter, Egidio, Mishra, Winn & Winn, 2009) and the number of females working within the gaming industry is considerably low if you compare to the male counterpart (Jenkins & Cassell, 2008; Kafai, Heeter, Denner & Sun, 2008). Heeter et al. (2009) argues that males tend to design games where males are the targeted group, whereas females usually try to design games that are appealing for both males and females. This could be coined as problematic looking at the term of

inclusion, which describes a state where someone is included within a structure (Oxford Dictionaries, 2017).

Studies have shown that game-developers in general have a hard time recognizing values of surrounding gender and societal values (Flanagan, 2005) and those surroundings, as well as the developers sex, are heavily influential on the game's end design (Heeter et al., 2009). Consequences that are derived from this unfolds in different ways; stereotypical game design (Beasley & Standley, 2002) and the understanding of the word stereotypical in this study consist of perceptions within individuals on what could be considered as female or male (Behm-Morawitz & Mastro, 2009). Other consequences are game-related communities and events dominated by males (Bryce & Rutter, 2003), negative reception of females in online gaming and communication (Kuznekoff & Rose, 2012) and higher rewards for male teams in the competitive gaming environment compared with female teams (Taylor, 2008). In contrast to this discourse, studies claim that the gaming industry can expand into new markets and business opportunities if they can highlight the discrepancies between genders (Ray, 2003) e.g. by reducing violence and add more emotion to the game (Lazzaro, 2008).

The background described above points out several factors that are problematic within the field of *gender* and *gaming*. The highly influential medial tool in *gaming* is shaping what way people mold their perceptions, beliefs and values when it comes to *gender*. In addition, the statistics explains that *almost* everybody are playing games nowadays, both *genders* close to divided in 50/50, which makes it astonishing that *gaming* and its industry is viewed by the society as a masculine area. The working force is dominated by males, the games are designed by males, for males. Hence, there are reasons to believe that way we are being affected on a societal level is decided by male people as they are the ones who are designing the games. A lot of responsibility in these issues are therefore on the shoulders of actors within the gaming industry.

Gender has a wide scope of interpretations attached to it and it is important to demarcate the lens of analysis to certain areas within research (Unger & Crawford, 1993). This study uses the concept of *doing gender*, coined and defined by West and Zimmerman (1987) as *"… creating differences between girls and boys and women and men, differences that are not natural, essential, or biological. Once the differences have been constructed, they are used to reinforce the "essentialness" of gender."* - (West & Zimmerman, 1987, pp. 137).

Our lens is concentrated on the concepts of gender *stereotyping* and gender *inclusion* in the gaming industry. There are a lot of studies done within the area of *gender* and *gaming*, mostly by analyzing the *stereotyping* and *inclusion* of the product created (the games) and its consumers and how they use and are affected by them. However, less studies have been done from the inside perspective of the gaming industry, the ones who are responsible for how these games are designed and perceived. Hence, the aim of this study is to create a greater understanding of how gender and gaming are interrelated and affects each other, as well to provide empirical data conducted from actors and practitioners from the gaming industry to the fields of *informatics*, *gender* and *gaming*. The research question that will guide this study is:

How is the gaming industry doing gender?

Doing gender is something that everyone is doing all the time and the gaming industry is no exception. This can be done either on a conscious or an unconscious level, because we are influenced by society and exposed to social interactions every day (West & Zimmerman, 1987).

This paper is structured as follows, in the first section, a brief introduction to the subject of gender inclusion and gender stereotypes in relation to the gaming industry. In the second section, theories about doing gender, gender consciousness, gender inclusion and what the IS research are focusing on when discussing gender and IT. In the third section, theoretical framework with four gender stereotype components are presented and described, these will work as an analytical lens for interpreting the empirical data. The fourth section describes how the study was conducted and which methods were chosen. In the fifth section the empirical data will be presented and divided into gender inclusion and in the four gender stereotype components. In the sixth section the empirical data will be discussed in relation to the theoretical framework and the theories about doing gender.

2. Doing gender

2.1 Gender and information systems in IS research

The discourse in studies within information technology with a focus on gender has been focusing on the gender divide which is one of the biggest inequalities (Moghaddam, 2010; Reagle, 2013). Moghaddam (2010) discusses how ICT and the digital revolution might be increase this gap and this affects every woman across all social and economic groups. Women faces inequalities throughout the globe and it's not only in economic, social and cultural areas, females will meet different obstacles that will prevent them from accessing and using ICT (Moghaddam, 2010; Ahuja, 2002). Furthermore, studies have shown that women have a harder time to advance in the hierarchy inside IT organizations and that they are paid less than a male equivalent (Ahuja, 2002).

Since a computer can be seen as a social product, there is a lot of values and norms that are connected to the usage of the named product (Oreglia & Srinivasan, 2016). In a study about online communities shows that the gender gap is large and in this study, they could see that there were some obstacles (Reagle, 2013). They could see that females had a lack of role models and mentors in this communities, another thing that hindered females from being active in communities was the discriminated language and the communities being dominated by men (Reagle, 2013). A possible result of a gender imbalance inside a community or inside an organisation less knowledge production (Reagle, 2013).

Traditionally and somewhat now as well the ICT field has been seen as a masculine area and that men are better suited to work with it (Oreglia & Srinivasan, 2016; Reid et al., 2010). Since females are expected to prioritize family over work, they always must work against the traditional gender roles. Females working in the field of ICT and women working in general must fight to break these gender roles and negotiate and balance work and family, while men are often inspired or motivated to work (Oreglia & Srinivasan, 2016; Reid et al., 2010; Ahuja, 2002). Furthermore, Ahuja (2002) discuss that women are less hired for certain jobs that requires a lot of traveling and long work days, because they are perceived by organization hiring to be less willing to sacrifice time with their family and this could also be a factor why women have a harder time climbing the organizational hierarchy.

Research has pointed out that there is a need for more knowledge within the fields of gender and IT for a long time, however the efforts in theorizing the subjects has been ineffective (Trauth, 2006). To highlight the relationship between women and IT, Trauth (2006) argues that researchers should aim to add and theorize more.

2.2 Gender and Sex

The words *gender* and *sex* is often used as synonyms to each other's, however, research suggests that there is a relevant difference between these words. *Sex* is completely correlated as biological (Unger & Crawford, 1993). West and Zimmerman (1987) defines *sex* as a determination made by using socially accepted biological classifications which are used to categorize a person as male or female. *Sex category*, is another dimension of gender and sex

which are described by West and Zimmerman (1987). For a person to be placed in one of the sex categories it requires that the person is perceived by the society to belong to a certain sex-category (West & Zimmerman, 1987). However, a person can still join a certain sex category without fully meeting the sex criteria (West & Zimmerman, 1987) *Gender* on the other hand, has more and complex meaning to it than *sex* (Unger & Crawford, 1993).

Gender could be conceived as a psychologically status, socially constructed - something that can change through time and context, usually through social interactions with different people and cultures (West & Zimmerman, 1987). Studies within the field of *gender* suggests that *gender* is a status that is achievable, but as West and Zimmerman (1987) argues, *gender* tends to stagnate and become as static as the values and perceptions of *sex* at an early age. This may derive from the fact that the attributes that distinguishes men and women has its origin in genetics and biology which, as West and Zimmerman (1987) explains, has effects on the psychology and social life of individuals. The way the society is moulded, is heavily influenced by the distinctions of biological attributes between men and women, the authors continues. When the rules for these differences are set, they are embraced and strengthen to a point where they become characteristics for the particular gender (West & Zimmerman, 1987). These socially constructed rules and characteristics about genders, sometimes even translates into societal rules and laws. A concrete example of how gender is done in the society could be gender-distinguished bathrooms at public places, where the differentiations between the genders are made completely by the biological attributes, even if the needs that are to be fulfilled are the same for both genders (West & Zimmerman, 1987).

Humans distinguish each other through their natural attributes, where masculinity and femininity are considered as the two main prototypes for these attributes (West & Zimmerman, 1987). Kessler and McKenna (1978) explains this phenomenon through what they call a *gender attribution process*. This is a process every individual go through when interacting with others, where they categorize the person into a *gender* without knowing how that person is identifying him-/herself (Kessler & McKenna, 1978).

As long as humans differentiate each other by their biological attributes and are dividing people into *sex categories*, "doing gender", will always occur (West & Zimmerman, 1987). In a societal scenario, if gender is done the traditional way, the institutional beliefs about sex categories will stay the same. However, if the institutional beliefs are questioned, and gender is done in new ways, the questioning people may be facing resistance, which could be exemplified by active feminism (West & Zimmerman, 1987).

2.3 When are we starting to do gender?

The way children learn to perceive gender comes from their own gender identity that is developed, whose shape is decided by the children's surroundings (Bussey & Bandura, 1999; Spence & Buckner, 2000).

At a certain age, children reach a level of *gender constancy*, which Bussey & Bandura (1999) define as a level where beliefs and values regarding the own gender becomes static and settled. When this level is reached, and accepted, children starts to behave in accordance with the developed conceptions about the gender identity. In addition, Bussey & Bandura (1999) further

explains, drawing on an example made by Slaby and Frey (1975), that *gender constancy* consists of three dimensions; *identity, stability* and *consistency*. *Identity* is when the child comes to a point in life where he or she can categorize him- or herself as either a male or female, and at the same time be able to do so with others as well (Bussey & Bandura, 1999; West & Zimmerman, 1987). *Stability* is reached when the child learns that their gender will be settled for the rest of their lives, no matter what gender that was identified, it will still be the same when grown up. Approximately, at the age of seven, the child is believed to behave with gender *consistency*, which is when he or she understands that gender cannot change, even if he or she dress or behave in new and different ways. When these dimensions are reached, the child start to act and behave according to the developed perceptions of chosen gender (Bussey & Bandura, 1999).

2.4 What affects the way we are doing gender?

Bussey and Bandura (1999) argues that what affects the way gender is developing in human life, consists of mechanisms within three "modes"; *modelling, enactive experience* and *direct tuition*. The concept behind *modelling,* is that the societal conceptions of gender that floats around every individual is portrayed and created by role-models, such as parents, teachers or influential people. There is also a dimension of *modelling* that is produced and represented by media that affects our gendering behaviour and roles in social interactions. *Enactive experience* is something that is learned from how humans act in certain situations. Bussey and Bandura (1999) explain that these actions provides important information when humans are to mould the believes and values about gender. In addition, they also argue that these actions are evaluated by the society and people, who will decide whether the actions made are acceptable for the sex in question. Their reactions are important for the individual to be able to perceive what kind of behaviour is acceptable. The *direct tuition* is an effect of how people in the surroundings of an individual "teaches" and generalises what is wrong, what is right and what the rules are for an appropriate behaviour of chosen gender (Bussey & Bandura, 1999).

Bussey and Bandura (1999) also explains that the effects of each one of the modes differ dependent on time and space. Since cultural aspects and socially structures may differ from different environments, one mode can be more effective than another (Bussey & Bandura, 1999). However, the authors argue that *modelling* is a mode that always is present for each individual, especially for young children. When at their youngest, *modelling* is the source of information that most heavily mould perceptions of gender and its roles for children (Bussey & Bandura, 1999). Bussey & Bandura (1999) argues that young males are more vulnerable than young females in terms of being exposed and moulded by societal models, especially same-gendered representations. The authors argue that children tend to choose and follow models that comes closest to their own gender. This has its roots in *gender* constancy, which is something that feels good for every individual to reach. A sense of comfort is perceived when the surroundings acts and behaves in patterns that are aligned with societal beliefs and values (Bussey & Bandura, 1999).

One of the concepts behind gender consciousness, describes how one is aware and can identify with same-gendered persons (Chow, 1987) where you feel connected and empathy with those persons (Herring & Marken, 2008). Another important concept of gender consciousness is that the awareness of different privileged groups is rewarded differently in society (Bierema, 2003).

However, gender consciousness is not only about being able to identify with humans within the same gender structure, but also a broader gender consciousness could indicate that a person is more knowledgeable about the gender inequality that exists in our society (Bierema, 2003). Cassese, Holman, Schneider and Bos (2015) describes this awareness of different rewarding as a perception of discrimination, which involves the sense of inequality. Where women are seen to have access to fewer resources and are seen as less powerful than they really are and what they deserve (Cassese et al., 2015).

3. Theoretical framework

The theoretical framework of this study will focus on the basic concepts of *gender inclusion* and *gender stereotypes* - and then zooming in at the work that has been done with these concepts in relation to the gaming industry.

3.1 Gender inclusion

Gender inclusion in the gaming industry

The gaming industry and its culture is considered to be a masculine area (Ito, 2008), since the field has a perception about it of being extremely scientifically technical, which in it selves have been regarded as a field dominated by men for a long time (Fullerton, Fron & Pearce, 2008). Looking at the games, the dominating genres (in sales) are in the theme of war and sports (Lazzaro, 2008) and the gaming environments are often built for violent causes like shooting and fighting, or competitive reasons (Fullerton et al, 2008). There are differences between the genders when it comes to the taste of gaming genres, as female gamers are more likely to play games that have elements such as puzzle and creating relationships (Dawson, Cragg, Taylor & Toombs, 2007). Games that are intense, action-oriented and competitive doesn't appeal to females since they tend to have no intentions of achieving a higher status their social life through their gaming experience (Dawson et al., 2007; Klimmt & Hartmann, 2006). Instead, a female may seek the path of gaming to flee the reality for a bit to find relaxation and creativity (Vosmeer, Jansz & van Zoonen, 2007) and usually play alone in non-social environments (Dawson et al., 2007). Dawson et al. (2007) argues that this isolation may have its cause in that females believe that gaming interferes with their social life.

Studies shows that the taste of genres may not only be the only cause for a gender gap in the gaming industry. Yee (2008) argues that some females may find male-associated gaming genres that are themed in violence entertaining. Instead, the author explains that a cause for seeking other genres may be because males are acting very excluding and dominating when a female enters the stage. In addition, Carr (2005) highlights that cultural aspects (e.g. accessibility) may affect what type of games that will appeal to a certain gender. There are differences in how games are designed between males and females, according to Heeter et al. (2009). Pointing at a study that was looking on young males and females in middle- and high-school, Heeter et al. (2009) explains that the young males tended to design characters with less options of customization compared to the young females. The author also argues that games with a high level of freedom, with less strings attached to choices, will be a game with a higher chance to be appealing and satisfy both males and females.

As gaming is growing into a norm of the modern society, Ito (2008) suggests that the gaming industry should be careful with niching and targeting their games to certain groups. Looking at the group of females as an example, the whole industry takes damage since exclusion in gaming leads to a lack of competence and technological skills in the group excluded (Ito, 2008).

Researchers argue that an increased number of women working in the gaming industry would lead to game designs that are as much appealing to females as for males (Culp & Honey, 2002;

Heeter et al. 2009). Ray (2003) argues that video game companies must reach out to this segment of the market to continue its growth.

3.2 Gender stereotyping

Stereotypes in the terms of gender are believed to consist of perceptions within individuals on what could be considered as female or male (Behm-Morawitz & Mastro, 2009). According to Deaux and Lewis (1984), there are four components of stereotypes; *traits*, *physical characteristics*, *role behaviors* and *occupations*. These components affect one another in different ways, however, the attributes of each component may work independently in certain scenarios and should be viewed as separate components (Deaux & Lewis, 1984). When information about one component is known, for example, this may affect the way another component is perceived (Deaux & Lewis, 1984).

Traits

Traits are a set of attributes and properties that are tied to and describes the genders (Ashmore & Del Boca, 1979). Studies have shown that some *traits* are more applicable to one gender than the other. Females are more constantly related to "soft" attributes, such as being *sentimental*, *naive* (Ashmore & Del Boca, 1979), *warmth* and *expressive* (Deaux & Lewis, 1984), whereas males more often are described in relation to "hard" attributes where *scientific*, *critical* (Ashmore & Del Boca, 1979), *competent* and *rational* (Deaux & Lewis, 1984) are examples.

Traits in gaming

Much of the research that has been done within stereotypical *traits* in gaming is focusing on the *traits* of the gamer. The general beliefs about the *traits* of a gamer has been the antisocial teenager for a long time (Bryce and Rutter, 2002), however, this has shifted due to gaming becoming a very social activity (Bryce and Rutter, 2003). Looking at the gamer, both male and female gamer tend to show more aggressive personality traits compared to the non-gamer (Norris, 2004).

Not much have been done within the areas of *traits* when it comes to gender in the games. However, the research that has been done concludes that female characters are more likely to have traits in line with thoughtfulness and caring, when being in the role of by standing the main character, as well as being innocent and harmless (Miller & Summers, 2007). Also, looking at the playable characters in games, no matter what race or sort of animal that is portrayed (human, dog, mice etc.), the gamer tend to prefer characters with the personal traits of a human being when the choice is possible, since they are more likely to be perceived as believable (Nowak & Rauh, 2005).

Physical characteristics

The component of *physical characteristics* is the prominent one in terms of gender stereotyping (Deaux & Lewis, 1984; Green & Ashmore, 1998), since people often describe genders based on the physical appearance of another individual (Six & Eckes, 1991). As enacted by Green & Ashmore (1998), *physical appearance* is one of the three dimensions in the stereotyping of physical characteristics, along with *uniform* and *setting*. The authors explain that *physical appearance* is comprised by the look of a person's face and body. *Uniform* is the type of clothing

used and *setting* describes in what scenario the interaction takes place (Green & Ashmore, 1998).

In alignment with the *role behaviour*-component of stereotypes, studies suggest that men with a desire to attract women, casanovas, relies heavily on being perceived as attractive from the counterpart and the surroundings in *physical appearance* (Green & Ashmore, 1998). However, looking at a woman with the occupation of being a prostitute, the same rules applies for her as for the casanova who needs to be perceived as attractive. The contrast on the other hand is that the female prostitute is judged by her *uniform*, rather than the *physical appearance*, where the *uniform* should be lightly dressed and sexual (Green & Ashmore, 1998). As pointed out by Luoh and Tsaur (2009), attractive people are considered to be more influential than others, hence, companies often label a product with a person with attractive *physical characteristics* in order to increase revenue.

Physical characteristics in gaming

Looking at the gaming industry, studies have found evidence that the design of a male videogame character usually is portrayed and based on photos where the model is considered to be a normal looking male (John, 2006). However, the same study also shows that the design of the female counterpart in the same game, was based on unrealistic and animated pictures, as the normal pictures of females posing wasn't considered as attractive and sexy (John, 2006). Glaubke, Miller, Parker and Espejo (2001) argues that these models heavily influence the way both males and females develops their idea of the normal woman. When the female videogame character is portrayed in a sexual way, females often construes these models as the normal and ideal way of look, as well as they are starting to questioning how well they themselves are living up to these images, which can cause bad self-esteem. This insecurity may also translate into how males perceive and expect the ideal picture of a woman (Glaubke et al., 2001).

Miller and Summers (2007) argues, drawing on a broad analysis of several video games, that the stereotypical male character is big and muscular, while at the same time being viewed as the game's protagonist. In contrast, the study showed that female videogame characters often are portrayed as physically attractive and sexual bystanders. However, Grimes (2003) suggests that the attractiveness of a female character could work well as a role model, if she isn't sexualized. More recent studies have also shown that these sexualized video game characters aren't desired by the gaming audience, since both men and women tend to like and choose characters that are dressed in a more normal way, than those who are excessive sexual (Larsson & Nerén, 2005). In situations where a female gamer is to design and create the character herself, she is more likely to design the character in a way that can make it thrive in the given environment, than creating a representation of herself (Reinecke and Trepte, 2007). Barlett and Harris (2008) argues that both men and women are negatively affected by stereotypical physical characteristics in videogames, since both genders are affected in a way that makes them believe that the portrayed model in the game is the ideal one.

Role behaviour

Ridgeway and Correll (2004) discusses how the society expects a person who looks like one of the different sexes to behave in a predefined way. The general stereotypic belief is that women are more communal and nicer, while men are more instrumental and rational and more

competent in general (Ridgeway & Correll, 2004). Studies has shown the things men are believed to be better at are valued higher than the things that stereotypical women are good at (Ridgeway & Correll, 2004). Hence why the expected behaviour of people that are sex categorized by society can be hindering and limiting. Most people tend to behave accordingly to the sex category they are categorized in (Ridgeway & Correll, 2004). These gender constraints can be seen as background identity, which means that they will work as a set of rules on how to act for an example a female, in the same way as you are expected to act if you are a doctor or a manager (Ridgeway & Correll, 2004).

Role behaviour in gaming

The main story is often based around the male protagonist saving the princess from the big bad guy, a couple examples would be Super Mario and Zelda (Grimes, 2003). This also reinforces that women are subjects to men and there to reinforce the man and the hero that he is pictured to be. Another example of sexism in stereotyping in games is that the topic in various conversations differs depending on the sex of the persons. Conversations with females often had a sexual or offensive undertone to the female, while men don't encounter these problems in the same amount (Grimes ,2003). Glaubke et al. (2001) made a study which showed that female characters were affected by violence three times as often as a male character, but still male characters were more often engaged physical fights. Female characters in games are often bystanders or props that are there to complement the story or the male protagonist (Glaubke et al., 2001).

Miller and Summers (2007) discusses how these stereotypes will shape the players and think that the games reflect the real world. But the fact that the games focuses on the stereotypical woman or man, the players will get a skewed understanding of the world. Males might think that every woman needs to be rescued or that it's okay to sexualize or objective them (Miller and Summers, 2007). This just further cement the sex categories into the society, where men and women should act a certain way depending on their appearance (Ridgeway & Correll, 2004).

Occupations

Glick, Wilk and Perreault (1995) argues that an *occupation* is mostly associated with the type of person who occupies the job, rather than the job tasks themselves, and that everyone's picture of an occupation is socially constructed. The authors continue that people tend to feel discomfort to seek for job opportunities where that picture doesn't reflect how they perceive themselves socially or the chosen gender. Shinar (1975) suggests that occupations are highly stereotypical where one could be seen as either masculine or feminine. When an occupation is generally viewed as masculine, we often see that *traits* like competence and rationality are highlighted, whereas feminine occupations often are represented by *traits* associated to nurturance and warmness. Shinar (1975) also describes an example, drawing on a study made by Schlossberg and Goodman (1972), where a child was to choose whether a man or women should be working with a given occupation. The results of that study showed that children thought that a woman shouldn't work with fixing technology or building houses, and that they were more suited with nursing. Men on the other hand, didn't have as limited choices (Shinar, 1975).

Occupations in gaming

In a historical perspective and looking at games over time, we have seen that there has been a dominant main theme in videogames, where the gamer often steps into the shoes of male characters and have the job or mission to rescue a female one to finish the game (Bryce and Rutter, 2002). Looking at games within the fantasy genre, Bryce and Rutter (2002) mean that the occupations of the female character is very stereotypical, arguing that they often are portrayed as a princess or sexual object that are a subject for the male character.

Grimes (2003) highlights a case in the game series of Resident Evil where the main character is a female. Even if she is the one to save the world from a zombie apocalypse, she is still being rescued by men in edgy situations throughout the game. However, it's more common that the female character has an occupation in relation to being some sort of healer or nurse (Miller and Summers, 2007).

4. Method

This is a qualitative study that was done over a period of five months, focusing on how the gaming industry is doing gender. The qualitative approach was expressed through semi structured interviews, which were done eye-to-eye, by Skype and by E-mail with 8 actors in the gaming industry. The research method builds on combined elements from Corbin and Strauss (1990) grounded theory, Kvale's (1997) seven stages of the qualitative interview and Myers and Newman's (2007) dramaturgical model. Following an example made by Kvale (1997), the study was conducted with an ad-hoc characteristic, where data and literature was revisited, added and processed with an iterative approach between the phases of collecting data and data analysis.

4.1 Setting

The setting for our study was the Swedish gaming industry, partly because it was convenient as the researchers were situated in Sweden. Another reason why the Swedish gaming industry is an interesting field of study is that Sweden is one of the dominating forces in the industry's overall growth over the world. In Sweden, the industry had doubled its revenue between 2013 and 2015 and the total revenue ended up in 60 billion in 2015 (Dataspelsbranschen, 2016). Swedish developers are famous for releasing a wide variety of games with high quality and is disputed to be amongst the world leaders within for example AAA-developing (Dataspelsbranschen, 2016). "AAA" is a term that is used in the gaming industry to describe a game that was developed with a high budget and production value (Lipkin, 2013).

4.2 Data Collection

The interviews were semi structured since it allows the interviewee to reflect with less boundaries, which can produce empirical data with an increased possibility for the interviewer to create a deeper understanding of the information given (Myers and Newman 2007; Patel and Davidson, 2011). Eight interviews were done in Sweden through Skype and face-to-face conversations. The interviewees in this study was found and selected by following the purposeful sampling (Corbin & Strauss, 1990). The sampling started when we were looking though which big game firms that existed in Sweden and then the firms that looked interesting were contacted either through their PR manager or directly to a specific person. When selecting the game journalists/critics and the educator we contacted the specific persons, because we expected that these persons had knowledge that could help us in our study (Corbin & Strauss, 1990). The interviewees of this study consist of actors within the gaming industry, where we define the actors as either game- journalist/critic, gaming educators and game developers. It is important to hear voices from different angles and perspectives when it comes to complex questions, since people with different positions and background have different experiences (Myers and Newman, 2007). We interviewed three game journalists, three game developers, a person who is a game developer, game educator and researcher and lastly a person who is a game journalist and studying to be a game developer.

	Role	Place of interview	Gender
Interviewee 1	game journalist/critic	Face to Face	Male
Interviewee 2	game educator, researcher, developer	Skype	Female
Interviewee 3	game developer	Skype	Female
Interviewee 4	game journalist/critic	Skype	Female
Interviewee 5	game journalist/critic, soon to be a developer,	Skype	Male
Interviewee 6	game developer	Skype	Male
Interviewee 7	game journalist/critic	Skype	Male
Interviewee 8	game developer	E-mail	Female

Research about the interviewees was done before the interview took place, about the person and his or her background, to tailor questions which could create a scenario where the interviewee can feel comfortable and confident in the situation, since this can have a huge implication on the output and its quality (Kvale, 1997). To comfort the interviewee, we also did as Myers and Newman (2007) describes as a mirroring technique, where we reused words and descriptions of different subjects that occurred during the interview.

The first minutes of the interview are the most important, since the first impression of openness and empathy of the interviewer often is mirrored by the interviewee throughout the interview (Kvale, 1997; Myers and Newman, 2007). To create the best possible opening, we described who we are, what we are studying and why we are interested in talking with the person. Since the subject of discussion could be considered as political opinions, which could be sensitive and personal to talk about, we ensured the interviewee that the empirical data would be treated as confidential and anonymous. This is considered as an obligation for the researchers, to fulfill ethical standards (Myers and Newman, 2007).

4.3 Data-analysis

The first iteration of our data analysis began during the interviews, when notes were written down and we started to discuss and reflect on the subjects that were brought up. This enables the possibilities to reshape the coming interviews (Corbin and Strauss, 1990). When all the interviews were done and the data was collected and transcribed we started to read through the data and clustered it into our gender stereotype components and into the theme inclusion. The clustering and categorizing of the data was made by going back to the theories to ensure that they were fitting for the chosen component for example role behaviour. When the text was placed in a certain category, we started to find good quotations in these texts that could be used to highlight important findings.

The third loop of our analysis took place before we started to write our discussion, the goal was to identify patterns between our components, our empirical data and the theories about doing gender, which together formed the discussion. It was during this loop that our new component "Setting" was discovered, we could see that some of the other components were dependent on the "Setting" and therefore we felt the need to make this new component. Setting or theme is a port of the physical characteristic component, but we could see that it affected all components.

5. Results

The empirical data are structured in the same way as the theoretical framework. Gender inclusion is divided into four different sub categories, workplace, education, keeping the females in the gaming industry and poor representation in the gaming industry. Some of the quotations that are placed in a certain component or category can still illustrate another component as well.

5.1 Gender inclusion

Workplace

Many of the interviewees got the understanding that inclusion among genders has been an issue in the gaming industry for a long time, with a major emphasis on that females aren't enough included and *"has been underrepresented in both the industry and in the products"*, as interviewee 1 put it. Looking at the industry it has a lot to learn when it comes to think and being more inclusive, especially when recruiting and putting together the organization that is going to develop the product. However, interviewee 2 who identifies herself as a female says that a lot has happened in the recent years:

"Much have happened and I would say that there have been major changes lately. I started 1996 and I was the only woman I knew about that was working with game development" - Interviewee 2

These changes are due to an increased consciousness about the issues and firms within the gaming industry are working a lot more on recruiting women. There is an image of that the industry has a lot to gain in an increased inclusion of females at the workplace. As interviewee 3 says: *"I believe that you can get more perspectives, which in the long run could benefit a company"*. This understanding has led to, as interviewee 4 puts it, that *"many gaming firms actively are working on finding women to hire … everything is just going a bit slow"*. There is another issue in how firms are constructing its teams and are filling out certain roles with recruits when it comes to the production. As interviewee 5 describes:

"There are specific roles that usually goes to women once they arrive and it tends to be different types of management and project leading, or a role with graphical design elements. On the organisational level, there could be some women in leading roles, like middle-managers. The harder code-writing roles are usually filled with men. Game design, producers and directors are roles that usually are held by men as well" - Interviewee 5.

However, the problems in getting women into the workplace is founded on an earlier stage since the education needed for these kind of jobs lacks in the ability to generate an interest in females. To get into the workplace *"more women should get into the education, and if they are to do that, there must be more women that are interested in working in the gaming industry" - Interviewee 5.*

Education

A workplace is often moulded by the shape of the available educations and how males and females are distributed among the different alignments. When education in f. e. game-design is majorly held by males, the opportunities of an employment in game-design at a game-developing firm are likely to be greater for a male as well. Interviewee 5 gives an example by explaining that *"within game-educations, the branches with a focus on graphics are more balanced. Looking at coding or pure design, we are more likely to see boys"*.

Schools and universities, as the firms, are as well working hard on recruiting and attract female students. In addition, interviewee 2 describes that there is a large focus on the content of the education and how the programs structure is influenced by a gender-thinking perspective:

"We are working with equality within the education. It's about the culture and creating an environment for the students where we can integrate gender- and equality-perspective in the education." - Interviewee 2

Good games are produced when new perspectives and ideas are influencing the development, where a gender-minded thinking is one of the factors. This is one of the more important areas when it comes to educate the future game-developers. Interviewee 2 says that *"working with a game is about thinking outside the box and then, the gender-question has to be there and this could be the how in how you create games for a wider audience"*. The same interviewee also explains how this is being done:

"The students have to analyse their ideas all the time to know what kind of choices they have done and why. It's not about that they aren't allowed to do this or that, or even always have this perspective in mind. The important is that you know why you have made a certain choice, and all choices should be done consciously" - Interviewee 2

Keeping females in the Gaming industry

The workplace is dependent on how the education is moulded. Education, however, is dependent on the fact of females being interested in working in the gaming industry. The problem lies with the fading interest of gaming among young females when growing up. Interviewee 5 explains this:

"We are working pretty hard with girls when they are young, to continue playing, because, when you look at children, the balance between the genders are equally distributed. We can see that boys are continuing playing in their teens, whereas the girls turned to other interests. What this does is that, when these boys become grown up men, they still may have an interest in gaming. It's not unusual to see a 22 years old guy, who isn't the typical gaming nerd, still playing games like FIFA" - Interviewee 5.

There are several reasons that imply this behaviour, one of them is that *"it's not as accepted that girls play games. They may not be encouraged at home where they may not have access to consoles and game, if they don't have any brothers" - Interviewee 2.* There could also have been a lack of real life female role models or representatives who can put her face on the gaming industry. However, we are seeing more female representatives today which could be a contributing factor of attracting females to the gaming industry, as interviewee 4 puts it:

"The fact that there are people like me who are just talking about games and could be seen on a big platform, could make it possible for girls to see that there actually are girls that likes games, and maybe think that they should try it out as well". – Interviewee 4

There are several factors of what could frighten away females from the field of gaming when they are in their teens, one of them is the theme of the game. Interviewee 2 explains that:

"We have to look on the representation in the games and how to avoid stereotypes, but the meaning of stereotypes is also a part of the genres we can see, the themes that we have in our games. The ideas we get, they are also a stereotype that we must get rid of. We need to be more innovative in the gaming industry" - Interviewee 2

Looking at certain themes that could exemplify this, interviewee 3 has an idea: *"I would say that it is online multiplayer that could scare away many women … The [girls] I know rather prefer cooperation than competing with each other's. Then you have the others, which consists of boys, and the only thing you get to hear is ugly words when you show up as a girl in the chat".* The interviewees agree that certain themes may attract one gender or the other and that game developers often target the male-group, as interviewee 1 explains:

"One girl, working at Company X, gave insight of that the whole idea from the beginning was to represent girls since they had a lot of criticism not doing this in the last game they made. However, in the last second, they changed their mind as they were afraid of making the boys angry" - Interviewee 1

Looking among the most popular franchises, they often go by a theme that are typically more appealing to males. Even at the stage of marketing it stands clear that game-developers often have a targeted group of males. *"CoD (Call of Duty) may not be marketed to fifteen years old girls, as they are against fifteen years old boys"*, interviewee 7 describes. In addition, interviewee 4 explains that *"… there are many who plays typical male games, but the gaming industry is a little afraid of putting a girl on the cover. There are good examples, but the feeling is still very blokely. I believe that girls that go into a gaming store doesn't feel very comfortable to be there, that is a feeling that I experience myself."*

Poor inclusion in games
However, the issues don't lie just within how the games are marketed and what the theme is, but there is a great emphasis and agreement among the interviewees that there is a poor representation of the female gender within the games. However, we are seeing that the tone is shifting, as interviewee 5 puts it:

"It's not homogenous among all firms and genres, but if we look only at the games released in 2017, we can see that it's a good year when it comes to representation and content within the games" - Interviewee 5

Interviewee 6 explains that *"… it is foremost the representation we are looking at right now, how we can get more female characters and increase its accessibility".* In addition, the same interviewee means that there are different opinions about this within the firm:

"… there are those who thinks that it's important with these questions, female representation for example. Then there are those who thinks a good story is a good story, and that we should focus on the good elements of the game instead of the bad things. If the game is good, there is no point in tweaking with it, that it doesn't matter if there are more women in it if the game already is good." - Interviewee 6

Within a gaming company interviewee 6 means that *"we as individuals have a lot to do with the decisions regarding game-design, f. e. if there is going to be a female main character"*. Interviewee 4 highlights the fact that this is one of the most important questions, explaining that *"we have to get female characters into the games, that is the most important part, there are too few"*. Why this may be important when it comes to an increased inclusion is that *"… it is easier to identify with a female character than the contrary as a gamer. It is more important to put a female character as the main character. It's funnier to play for many women, at the same time it is not getting boring for many men"*, as interviewee 6 puts it. Interviewee 4 continues by explaining that an increased inclusion of the female gender in the games, may lead to an increased inclusion at the workplace:

"When we are getting more female characters into the games, more girls want to play the game because they can relate to the characters. I believe that, to get these characters into the games, we need more women in the industry who designs the games. I think it's a single circle." - Interviewee 4

One interviewee also implicates that the usual person who sits on this position today, may have to broaden the perspective:

"I'm a white heterosexual guy, so I'm in the privileged group. I'm always represented in all the games I can play. I'm also always the hero. If this wasn't the case, I may have asked more often: "Why am I not in there?" … You have to learn what the surrounding world is saying as well, not only what your own feelings are" - Interviewee 5.

Looking at the gaming industry, in cases where an exclusion of the female gender has been obvious and questioned, there are often economic reasons behind the decisions, that are whitewashed. As interviewee 5 explains, *"If you create character gallery that only are men, the usual explanation is that it is historically correct"*. A game developer with a major title with an historical theme may exemplify the whitewashing according to interviewee 2, who describes that *"they didn't make it possible to play a female character. The technical director explained this with "We thought we were to include it, but it takes so much time and we had to prioritize"*

In addition, the question of economy and prioritization, may not only be in the hands of a developer, but by another actor:

"I believe that they [game-publishers] have a great power when it comes to game-design, since they are the ones with the money. There are some game-developers that can finance their own projects, but it's more often a game-publisher that uses its own focus-groups … and then there is the aspect of that new thinking doesn't sell as well as something tested" - Interviewee 6

5.2 Traits

When the interviewees were describing and discussing different traits that game characters can have, they brought up a lot of examples that were positive in a non-stereotypical way. But even if the gaming industry is trying to give non-stereotypical traits to their characters, they manage to make the game characters predictable in a boring way. An example of this would as when the designer tries to give a female character some typical "male" traits such as being independent or strong, but this is what our fourth interviewee thought about that.

"She is pretty decisive, curious and confident, but honestly I don't think she's got a strong personality. She feels more like a tool or an excuse so the player can go around and shoot robot dinosaurs. She feels like a copy of Katniss Everdeen." – Interviewee 4

"I have noticed that the people creating the games, doesn't always know how females behave. They think "damn, it's cool to have a female character", but then the characters feel like a typical male personality wise." – Interviewee 4

As these quotations illustrate the game developers are trying to give female characters' traits that aren't typical for female game characters, but still they don't give enough depth to the characters. This might be because some developers are creating the female characters simply by just changing the biological sex of the character, which is a quick fix.

"Write your characters as a guy and then simply swap the biological sex and keep the same traits. This is a pretty easy way to do it." – Interviewee 6.

"It gets generic and empty. I would like to see female characters can be weak and sensitive, but still strong as well. Not just the typical strong women, because then she will be just like the standard boring male character" -– Interviewee 4

But this method only seems to work when the traits are seen to be socially accepted to apply them to females as well. As interviewee 7 said; *"To simply swap the sex without changing the story of the character would just be weird"* when we talked about how it would work if you took the typical Casanova or lady´s man and changed the character to a female instead.
"This is also the problem, when you do female characters, you think they have to be strong and cool" – Interviewee 4

One of the interviewees discussed a very interesting view of how the gaming industry is working with traits in their character design. The developers implement other stereotypical traits than just personal skills, this is what interviewee 5 said; "It's easy to say that "these people should be evil" so let's give them evil voices. Which tends to be in modern games stereotypical voices of a black male or an Arabic male". We asked the interviewee 5 if he/she could think of any reason why this was the case and the answer we got; "Because that's what we are afraid of right now I suppose".

Interviewee 8 describes how the stereotypical male and female are designed in a video game, including traits:

"Men should live up to a certain gender pattern, women to another … the male patterns are designed to be capable, capable of protecting their family … numb or at least suppressing their feelings, solving problems with violence, etc. For men, it's about acting. When it comes to women, it's more about appearance and being passive, to be rescued, the bystander, to which the man acts." - Interviewee 8

5.3 Physical characteristics

One of the most prominent discourses when talking about gender stereotypes is the physical characteristics of characters within a game. Interviewee 2 mean that *"… it's easy to land there* [physical characteristics]*. Kind of the same when you talk about gender equality, people are counting heads to decide whether something is equal or not, so, it's one important aspect, both in games and in general. But it is not all".* One of the issues that has been included in this discourse is the concept of sexism. Looking at the games that many game-developers release today, and those that were released yesterday, interviewee 4 says that *"… there are a lot of sexist portrayals of women"*. Interviewee 3 points at this fact as well and argues that *"… games with the usual properties that attract teenage boys, often contains sexy and light-dressed women"*. From the eyes of the older groups of gamers there may be a difference however, as interviewee 5 puts it: *"… when you design lightly-dressed women, their role within the game tend to be eye candy, not so much more, and that is kind of boring"*.

There is a difference when designing the stereotypical male compared with the stereotypical female when looking at physical characteristics. Interviewee 5 would describe a stereotypical character in a game as *"A man, he is white, and he has brown hair"*, whereas interviewee 1 would describe it as *"… big, muscular, tattooed and bold"*. Interviewee 1 uses a AAA-game as an example, and is continuing the description of the female characters as *"… being made sexy for the boys who plays, however, the main character has been designed to make the boys feel powerful, he's not designed as eye candy for a woman … they have also created minigames where the goal is to have sex with women and gain points for doing so"*.

Two of the interviewees were told to describe the same character from the same game, and both identified this character as a female and put emphasis on the physical characteristics when describing her, as interviewee 1 says: "She has long braided red hair, not unattractive but … a normal look". Interviewee 4 describes that," She's *covered up with clothes, which I feel is nice. The clothes are very practical, made for running and hunting."*. Interviewee 6 means that "… *it's not unusual that you can't tell the differences* [regarding what gender a character has] … *Usually they look in a way which is founded in their background and what world they live in."*. The same interviewee continues by explaining that their firm have created a character that is *"… beefy, but it's through gene manipulation, so you can't tell explicitly if it's a man or woman. It has more muscles than what any human being can have any way."*. The decision makers regarding this kind of character design, especially when it comes to main characters, are the publishers, who can *"… give us some inspiration of their idea of how the character should look. It's the main character that they care a lot about"*, as interviewee 6 puts it.

Interviewee 2, drawing on an example of one game developer, explains that there are more factors into design choices regarding how characters look visually, in fact, there are conscious decisions behind not having character models that represent females:

"It becomes exhausting and it takes a lot of effort and suddenly you need new animations and then you can't reuse material that was created when designing the male characters, and it's incredibly more expensive and that's why they don't do it." – Interviewee 2

5.4 Role behaviour

How characters interact with each other in games is something that game developers can work with to both include a lot of different people and to avoid gender stereotyping. An example of when game developers failed to seize this chance to avoid creating characters with stereotypic behaviour is according to interviewee 2," As *in Outrun, which is a bad example, of how they create bad values. You are man who is driving the car (of course), then there is the hot girl sitting next to you and she says that you are sexy of you drive good and if you drive badly she will leave you.".* In this case the role behaviour of the female is just simply to boost and appeal to the male players. The interviewee 2 explains the character as, *"She is simply just a bimbo".* Another of the person we interviewed also points out the stereotypical male and female relationship, where females are simply objects to the man and the male gamer.

" He stares a lot on the women in the game I have to say.". Interviewee 7

Another typical behaviour of the protagonist is that (which is true most of the games), he acts like a killing machine or like interviewee 1 called it a "dudebro" which is an internet slang for a hyper masculine dude, *"It's a dudebro and he wakes up and puts on his spacesuit and run around and kills demons.".*

Even though when developers try to include other sexualities than heterosexuality, they still tend to set that as a main character behaviour instead of acting like it's nothing special. Interviewee 5 described it in a good way,*" It's easy to include a gay character or a female character, but the problem is when the person isn't anything more. Developers tend to "say" look here is our homosexual man and look how "gay" he is. That's his whole character, instead of just putting that he is homosexual in this backstory.".* With one of the interviewees we talked about how the character behaves in the game Mass Effect and in this game you as a player can choose to either engage in hetero or homosexual relationships, this is how the interviewee 4 said it, *"You can choose to fall in love with anyone, there isn't any constraints and it's not really a big deal".*

Interviewee 5 describes the newest iteration of the game Tomb Raider, and explains that the character was very real and got many things right when designed to break an old and stereotypical view of the same character. But the developers fell into a pitfall when they wrote the game from a gender stereotypical perspective:

"Tomb Raider … got a very real human in the leading role in a British woman named Lara Croft, who has a history of being a very stereotypical and silly character" … "The early plot in the game

was that her first murder in the game was when she defends herself against a rape attempt" … "So far, I haven't seen a single game where the male leading role had a catalyst for being a murder machine explained by that someone tried to rape him. That stereotype only exists when it's a woman" - Interviewee 5.

Another rather classic theme, is the occurring thing with females having to be rescued by a male protagonist. *"I think the thing started when Super Mario was released by Nintendo and then they put the lady in distressed",* this is where this typical theme started at least what interviewee 7 thinks. But this theme is starting to get old and quite predictable, interviewee 5 said the following on this topic, *"There is an adoptive daughter which he is escorting because she got something that can stop the outrage pandemic, but of course she gets caught and the father has to rescue this girl.".*

In games where there is an open world the character is interacting with other NPCs and how that society is constructed is also one way for the game developers to create games that goes against the stereotypes.

"In Mass Effect since its Sci-fi and environment is more forgiving and open, the "game" won't question you." – Interviewee 4

But in some cases, the game developers want to be historical correct by their or the society's understanding of that specific era.

" Paradox makes very historical games and if you look at Europa Universalis so is it really historical correct." – Interviewee 3

How the character interact with each other in the games is strongly connected to historical era the game is representing. An example that was very illustrative was given by interviewee 4, when talking about the game Dragon Age which is taking place in the dark ages and the dialogue are trying to reflect that.

" The game Dragon Age, which takes place in the dark ages and then if you play a woman then people inside the game can say something like "What the fuck, who do you think you are? You are a woman; you can fight and things like that".". -Interviewee 4

5.5 Occupation

The component of gender stereotypical occupations was clearly the one that our interviewees hadn't built a clear understanding around. However, interviewee 4 discusses how a game-developer who is one of the most praised ones when it comes to diverse thinking, are open about the distribution among genders and jobs:
"Women can be both soldiers and scientists … nothing is really stereotypical. There is one guy who an engineer and takes care of spaceships, but you can see women do technical stuff as well" – Interviewee 4

When it comes to the most popular franchises within the industry, that typically have both shooting and violence as the surrounding, we usually see the same type of stereotypes

according to interviewee 5, who describes that *"… these games are developed with an image that builds on the imagination of some kind of masculine power fantasy about being a super soldier, where everything is portrayed from the perspective of being a man.*

Interviewee 6 is arguing that there may not be easy to develop a game that are representing both genders when setting the characters' occupations, and is pointing on the factors of economy and how the gamers will receive the game:

"Would the gamers believe and buy the fact that there are common cops hanging around, or would the buy the fact that there are only female cops hanging around? … The thing is that having female cops would require an explanation, more than male cops would. If people buys the game not thinking about it you can focus on other stuff … because, we can't afford doing variants of characters and we have to choose one" – Interviewee 6

Interviewee 1 also believes that you only would recognize these things if something would appear as odd, describing that *"It's easier to see if something is off, than it is to see that something is correct."*

6. Discussion

6.1 Gender inclusion

The area of IT, and gaming in this case, is mirrored by masculinity (Ito, 2008), both in the industry and the games that are produced as interviewee 1 states. According to Dawson et al. (2007) there are typical elements in games that appeals to certain genders, where feminine persons like, for example puzzle games or building relationships. The industry dominating themes of war (Lazzaro, 2008), include elements that are non-appealing to females (Dawson et al., 2007). This may have its due in that the game developing firms and that certain roles like game design within these firms for the most time is occupied by males. Interviewee 5 explains this and argues that this is the reason for why the most games have these violence and competitive elements. This is confirmed if we look at the example given by Heeter et al. (2009), where they could see that young males tended to design games that had less flexibility in it, where the choices of customization were limited while the young females on the other hand designed games that had more freedom and open-minded options. The freedom-factor here, the author explained have a bigger potential of being appealing for both genders. This behaviour has its foundation in what we learn when we grow up, according to what the theories says about the way we are doing gender. Bussey and Bandura (1999) explains that young males in fact are more fragile and affected by societal models (video games in this case) as well as being weaker when exposed to same-gendered representations. Playing male-attractive themed games with a narrow representation of the male characters in a male-dominated community, may therefore have a heavy influence on how these young males in an unconsciousness way design their games in the future.

A narrow gender consciousness constraints an inclusive gaming industry
There was a consensus between the interviewees that an increased inclusion of females within a gaming firm would lead to more diverse game design that could reach out players to a broader audience. The concept of gender consciousness fits well into this discussion. Since the term suggests that recognizing and identify themselves with the characteristics and interests of persons of the same gender (Chow, 1987), there are reasons to believe that f. e. a white male knows what a white male likes or dislikes in a videogame, and a white woman would know what a white woman can identify with. Hence, the evidence is strong that a more diverse workplace will lead to a more diverse product, if there is a gender balance in game design specific roles. And this is the perspective that is the leading force in the gaming industry right now, looking at the empirical evidence. We can see that actors within gaming education is working hard on attracting females, but it's not only about counting heads, as interviewee 2 explained. What they focus on is the content, learning the students to grow their consciousness regarding the choices they make while designing a game, seeing beyond and outside the box and challenging their comfort zone. Broadening one's gender consciousness would eventually lead to a greater understanding of what people who are placing themselves in other gender structures feels. In addition, as mentioned both in theories and amongst the interviewees, the challenge in getting females to the educations, is to keep young females playing the games when growing up, not letting them go away to other interests.

There are however several reasons behind why this happens which lies in the perceptions of IT and gaming being a masculine area. Yee (2008) explains that there are males who are actively excluding when females are trying to enter "their" area. This idea is shared with some of the interviewees as well, as interviewee 3 described, it's hard for females to join and share the experience of playing games within the genre of competitive online shooters, since some of the males are constantly abusing them with ugly words as soon as they out themselves by their voice. As explained by Kessler and McKenna (1978) this is a part of the gender attribution process, and a reason behind this behaviour amongst these males, could be explained by their childhood gender development. Applying the concept of f. e. enactive experience (Bussey & Bandura, 1999), the behaviour these humans are showing, has been learned as something acceptable and a characteristic for the male gender in situations like this. And if the direct tuition of surrounding people doesn't "wrong" the behaviour as something unacceptable, it will remain and enforce as an essential characteristic and being suitable for the male gender in the scenario.

Resistance in the gaming industry towards gender inclusive marketing and game design
There is also an ongoing exclusion when marketing the games. As seen, some of the most popular franchises are heavily linked to certain targeted groups, as interviewee 7 described, Call of Duty might represent these games. It's a violent multiplayer competitive action shooter with a clearly niche marketing against *"... fifteen years old boys"*. Interviewee 1 also mentioned the marketing, explaining that there are many who plays these games, but that there is a strong unwelcoming feeling when entering a video game store, as you usually find men on the cover of every game and poster. Ito (2008) would describe this kind of marketing as dangerous, since the gaming industry would be damaged in the longer perspective as the implications may be that the excluded group will lose interest, eventually won't have the required competence to work in the industry.

However, the empirical data gathered, suggests that there is a shift going on right now. Interviewee 5 mentions 2017 as a year where many good exemplary games were released in terms of representation and content, but is also mentioning that this is not *"... homogenous among all firms and genres"*. One example of these contradictions is described by interviewee 6, who describes that they are working actively on including more female characters into their games. But, there are also those who thinks that it's nonsense, that a good game is a good game whether it represents a wider group of people or not. The focus should instead be put on the good elements of the game. This resistance is not unusual to see, as the institutional beliefs are challenged by doing gender in different ways (West and Zimmerman, 1987). The institutional beliefs in this case is that a game is just a game, it doesn't represent something special and if it's good, it's good from a gaming standpoint. Interviewee 6 admits that there lies a big responsibility in the hands of the game-designers, as they can influence the decisions made. However, there is an understanding amongst some of the interviewees that gender excluding decisions often are whitewashed by the explanation of for example economical restraints, limited time and historical incorrectness, which also shows some evidence towards that there is a resistance within the industry regarding an increased gender inclusion. These arguments would fail to entangle their roots when arguing from an academically standpoint, as studies show that reaching out to the market segment of the female gender would create new business opportunities (Ray, 2003).

The gaming industry in need of more female role models

Interviewee 4 is arguing that putting more female characters into the games is the most important part to make females feel included, which is a statement that is enlightened by interviewee 6 as well. The argument is that females would want to play a certain game more if they can relate to the characters in it, which is true, drawing on the underlying concepts of doing gender. People, especially children, tend to follow models that represents and come close to their chosen gender, since gender constancy creates a good feeling within a human being (Bussey & Bandura, 1999). If video games can't portray these models and are limited to give relatable representations for only one given gender, another will be let outside. Eventually, as argued by interviewee 4, more feminine characters will lead to more feminine players. This would be solved by getting more women into the gaming industry and in the specifically relevant roles, as these roles for creating and designing female representative and relatable models most often are occupied by men with a gender consciousness that is limited to their own in the gender structure. Interviewee 5 gives an explicit and self-critical image of this problem, describing himself as the white heterosexual guy who always have been represented in everything he has seen or done, and that he may need to broaden his perspective and stop giving way to his own feelings.

6.2 The components of gender stereotypes

Putting the lens on traits as one of the components of gender stereotypes, we could see that the literature advice that typical traits for the female gender are related to the "soft" ones, such as being sentimental (Ashmore & Del Boca, 1979), whereas the typical traits for the male gender tend to be "harder", where rationality is an example (Deaux & Lewis, 1984).

Game designers are doing the right thing, but are thinking wrong

Looking on the empirical evidence, there are a couple of question marks that need to be sorted out. The first factor is the limited representation of female characters in games, and that the gaming firms are doing quick fixes to balance this inequality. The second factor is that they have also been criticized for not being able to create realistic and trustworthy female characters. Starting from the understanding given from Interviewee 6, they are consciously working on increasing the female representation as well as breaking the stereotypical traits of the female character. As the interviewee described, they are simply writing a character as a male and when they are done, they switch the biological sex of the character and keep everything else. So, essentially the female characters designed will have typically male traits.

However, the stereotypical traits of a female videogame character from the beginning haven't been mirrored from the stereotypical traits of a female human. The stereotypes that they are in fact breaking are the ones that have been extreme and associated with sexism and the female character as an object or bystander to a male one. Hence, the problem will withstand with this kind of fix, we're just switching from one problem to another. A female character with stereotypical male traits won't be perceived as relatable and representable for a female gamer. Interviewee 4 confirms this problematic as well, describing that the developers don't always know how a female behaves, that the female character feels like a typical male and becomes *"… generic and empty"*. As explained by Deaux and Lewis (1984), all the components of a gender stereotype are interlinking with each other's and that information in one component may affect how another one is perceived. In this example, the designers are simply switching a property

within the component of physical characteristics, without thinking about how this affect the properties in the trait component.

Less extreme, more inclusive
The physical characteristics component is described as the most influential, since the properties set in the other components usually are set based on what a person can see (Deaux & Lewis, 1984). For example, a person's occupation can be judged looking at one's uniform. Theories explain that especially the uniform-dimension of physical characteristics is prominent when judging a female person (Green & Ashmore, 1998). This thesis is confirmed looking at the empirical evidence, as there was a heavy emphasis in the clothing worn when given the opportunity to describe a female video game character. Looking at the description of the male video game character, we could also see that the theories are accurate, as the interviewees were focusing on the dimension of physical appearances such as being *"… big, muscular, tattooed and bold"* as interviewee 1 described. This also mirrors the game design, where the interviewees in general argued that female characters often are portrayed as lightly dressed objects, to be eye-candy for a younger audience of male gamers. However, confirmed by both previous research and the empirical data, gamers in general don't prefer the sexualized and lightly dressed character, and feel more comfortable playing a "normal" looking character. The stereotypical male character, often the main character, is usually designed to make the male gamer *"… feel powerful"* and is contrasting with a gender-equal perspective, since he is not designed to be *"… eye candy for a woman"* as Interviewee 1 describes.

Since this component is such influential on the other ones, it is important how the gaming industry is designing it, as it may play a big part in how our future generation may mold their gender stereotypes, values and beliefs. Looking at the lightly dressed woman as an example, which is, in accordance to the empirical data and previous research, the most occurring one that are representing the female gender in video games in general. As discussed by Green and Ashmore (1998), the properties of being a lightly dressed female are associated with, for example, being a prostitute whose role is founded in attracting male persons. If the game designer is to design a female character as lightly dressed, they should put effort in how they shape the component of role behaviour as well. If she's a bystander to a male character and if she is a subject whose mission is to attract him, all set properties in the other components will become associations with this behaviour as well. The more this kind of game design and stereotypes occur, the more essentialness it will put into those properties of the genders.

A child's behaviour could be influenced by their video game role models
Drawing on the concept of doing gender, children are the most vulnerable to this when being in the process of reaching gender constancy (Bussey & Bandura, 1999). Another example could be described if the child has chosen a feminine gender, where attracting males is one very common property and behaviour. Video gaming as the most influential modelling tool, could play a big part in how this child learn *how* to attract a male person. If the most occurring and common physical characteristics and role behaviour in the games are founded in being lightly dressed and behave as a subject to male character, the child will learn that those properties are essential to attract a male person. Bussey and Bandura (1999) would explain this behaviour as natural, since they argue that children follow models that comes close to the own gender. Children who are placing themselves in a masculine gender, are more vulnerable to these models, and will put even more emphasis in how a feminine person should look and act to *be* attractive.

Continuing with the component of role behaviour, there are types of behaviour that are occurring within video games. As already explained, we usually see the female character as some sort of bystander to the main character, who usually is a male. Interviewee 2 concretized this by giving the example of the characters in a game called Outrun, where the driver (a male) was rewarded with uplifting comments such as "you're sexy" from the bystander (a female) in the passenger seat, by driving good and if he was a bad driver, she would leave him. When doing gender, the three modes of *modelling, enactive experience* and *direct tuition* are essential when it comes to social interactions and role behaviour. In this example, you accomplish to fulfil the goals of the game when you're driving good and the characters' act in a certain way when you do. The male gamer learns that accomplishing and succeeding with a difficult task is attracting the female, whereas the female learns that good drivers are considered as attractive and sexy. Looking at the enactive experience in this specific situation, the accepted behaviour for the female is to becoming a subject to the male driver when he does something good. It also shows that it is unacceptable for a male person to be a bad driver, since the female person will leave you. The direct tuition also sets the appropriate behaviour of each gender in this scenario. There are more examples given by the interviewees that have this kind of reward-system. Interviewee 5 gave the example of a game where you gained additional points for having sex with women. In this case the gamer learn that is it a good thing to have sex with as many women as possible, as well as we learn that the females here are objectified rewards for doing good. This main character is a part of a AAA-franchise, which means that he will be played by many persons and that he may be a role model for some people. As theories explain, these role models are the source of information that are most heavily influencing children, as persons they look after and want to be like (Bussey & Bandura, 1999). If the role model is seen to increase his success by the number of women he sleeps with, this becomes an essential property and behaviour that is recognized by the ones who identify themselves in the same place of the gender structure.

We could also see that the behaviour of the characters in interactions between male and females could shift depending on where in time the game was set. Two games were exemplified that were developed by the same gaming firm. Mass Effect, a game that is put in space, somewhere in the future was described by interviewee 4 as more open when it came to dialogue and roles and nobody would question your role as a female character in this universe. However, the game Dragon Age which is supposed to be set in the past, characters within the game could questioning your ability to fight if you played a female character. What this could implicate is that a game designer may be fairly restricted to a perceived picture of what the real life society in the past would look like. However, when creating a game that is set in an environment that is yet to be experienced in real life, the design may have been more open due to the fact that there hasn't been set any rules and values by the society. The designer simply has nothing relatable to this futuristic world and may create an idealistic view of what he or she wishes to see.

The occupations we see in games usually reflects the real life society
Drawing on the example of Mass Effect again, interviewee 4 described that women and men were equally distributed among the different occupations within the game. Women could be both soldiers and scientists, which is something that doesn't align with the previous research about occupations. The scenario could be situational, as discussed above, since the game is set in the future and tended to be open regarding role behaviour among the characters as well. But looking at the theories, occupations are highly stereotypical from a society point of view, where

one or another usually is heavily linked to either the feminine or masculine gender (Shinar, 1975). As a component of the gender stereotypes, it is however as important as the other ones since it may influence how properties in another component are moulded (Deaux and Ashmore, 1998). We could for example see that some occupations have a strong relation to specific traits as well as specific uniforms.

However, we have findings in the data that implies that there is a limited view on occupations as a relevant component in game design. Interviewee 6 discussed design choices regarding occupations from a gender perspective, referring to "… common cops" as male ones, pointing at their gaming audience and thought that they would question a choice where they were to put only female cops within the game. Interviewee 1 said that *"It's easier to see if something is off, than it is to see that something is correct."*, which could point in a direction where the gaming industry is doing gender the traditional way in accordance with institutional beliefs and values when it comes to occupations. This implicates that portrayals of stereotypical occupations within video games is yet to be questioned if we are to change the societal view of which job and occupation is to be associated with what gender.

6.3 The Setting component of gender stereotypes.

We found patterns in the empirical evidence, as well as in the theoretical framework, that were pointing in the direction of certain circumstances and scenarios, as very influential on how the components are designed. In the component of physical characteristics, the dimension of *setting* was described as the scenario in which interactions takes place (Green & Ashmore, 1998). The concept of doing gender and how it is moulded is very dependent on occurring interactions between humans. Also, looking at the four components of gender stereotyping, who are interlinking and affect each other's, and how these are designed, was discussed by the interviewees as a "it depends on the scenario"-question in many cases. Hence, we would like to define the setting-dimension as one component of gender stereotypes, as the *setting* in which the game takes place may change the properties of all the components, not just only physical characteristics.

The institutional beliefs are decided by the setting in which the game takes place
As discussed by interviewee 5, the question of equal gender representation is not on the agenda in all gaming genres. In this case, the *setting* would be in which genre the game is set. If the setting is f. e. the sporting genre, specifically football in this case. The question of how to design gender stereotypical traits may not be relevant, as the characters within the game is controlled and acts in accordance with how the gamer wants to act by using the controller. As the characters in a football game is a representation of a real-world person, we could instead see traits that are inherited from how that person is acting on the football field, when AI-controlled, such as "selfish" or "tries to beat the defensive line". In another setting, action adventure for example, the properties of the components may shift dramatically. As some of the interviewees discusses, these games could tell a story that takes place back in history. Interviewee 5 described that the design choices within these games often are explained by the gaming firms as historical correct. Hence, a female character would be met with a degrading behaviour in social interactions with others, such as "you're a woman, you can't fight" as described by interviewee 4. These examples implicate that gender stereotypes components are designed through the institutional values and beliefs in different settings.

6.4 How gender inclusion and -stereotypes are interrelated

In the introduction, we discussed the problems in having gaming as a medial tool for shaping gender values and beliefs in the society. As the male gender is the dominating force in the gaming industry, there are reasons to believe that the male gender also is responsible for how gender is perceived in the society. We believe this study can provide an understanding in how this works and the reasons for why things are what they are. The topics we have discussed above, Doing Gender, Gender Inclusion and Gender Stereotypes are all a part of an interrelated circle, where concepts within one topic affects and can be explained in how attributes within another topic works.

Today's workplace in the gaming industry is heavily occupied by males. Gaming firms are aware and are looking to recruit female members to even out the numbers. However, we argue that this won't sort out the problem, even if it of course is a positive thing from a gender equality perspective. Certain roles within the gaming firms are decisive for how the finished product, the game, is designed and how it will be perceived. We can see that these roles, for example game designers and game writers usually are roles where men position themselves. These males will design games from a perspective of their own place in the gender structure, which is founded by what models, what enactive experiences and what direct tuitions they were exposed to when growing up. Their gender consciousness is limited to understand what people at the same place in the gender structure can identify with, which mean that they won't know how the world is perceived from the eyes of a person who has another place in the gender structure. This means that if 90% of the games released are designed by white heterosexual guys, 90% of the games will probably be more appealing to white heterosexual guys. In addition, we can see that this is inherited from how it has been at an educational level, where the education to these specific roles also has been occupied by males. The empirical evidence suggests that actors within the gaming industry are working hard in this area, firstly by increasing the number of females educated for these roles, but also by broadening everyone's gender consciousness, no matter what gender they have. This will be essential if the games in the future are to attract a wider audience of people.

A broader gender consciousness in the gaming industry is essential to attract females
Children are heavily influenced by role models. Since close to 100% of all children plays video games, there are reasons to believe that figures and characters within these games can become a role model for many children. How game characters are designed, and by who, is therefore essential to attract for example young female gamers. If a female gamer can't find models within the games, or in the industry that are representing their own gender, they will seek comfort in other areas where they can recognize patterns that are in line with their own societal values and place in the gender structure. Hence, the poor inclusion of female representations in games is a factor why young female persons tend to leave the area of gaming when growing up. However, there are obviously games that have female characters in them. The problem lies within who has designed these characters.

Designers need a holistic view when designing characters to make them appealing for a broader audience, as you design from gender stereotypes that exists in the society. These stereotypes are built up by components and there must be an understanding that they are interlinking. Hence, you can't design each component completely demarcated from each other's if you are to

design a character that challenge traditional gender stereotypes. An illustration of this was made by interviewee 5 who described latest iteration of the franchise Tomb Raider. The character Lara Croft was perceived as a believable character from the audience. She had credible traits and was considered as a normal a looking female person with physical characteristics that challenged the old and sexualized version from the 90's. However, her setting and background story was written in a way that emphasized on the prejudice of women as less powerful and as a sexualized object in relation to the male gender. Her catalyst to become a killing machine was that she was a victim of a rape attempt. The interviewee described that he had never seen and could never imagine that a game designer would apply this setting on a male protagonist as reason to go on a killing spree. This indicates that game designers are still influenced and reinforces the prejudices of females being less powerful than males.

Video games may play a big part in enforcing institutional values and beliefs in the society. Drawing on the same example of a football game mentioned earlier, that has an exclusively representation of males in the character gallery could illustrate this. Games in the sporting genre tend to be recommended from the age of 3, which means that children encounter these games in the process of reaching their gender constancy. When playing a football game where they only see men, the child will learn that only men play football and could enforce the perception of football as a masculine sport in their real life.

6.5 Theoretical implications

The main finding of this study is that we can see that the gaming industry is doing gender with a broader gender consciousness, especially when it comes to education, where it all begins. Education is essential to create the necessary conditions for the assignment of design crucial roles within gaming firms, as these roles are decisive if the firm is to create relatable role models both in the games and in real life. If young females can see female characters on game-covers, see that there are female game designers and can relate and be inspired by female main characters in the games, they could be more tempted to stay in the business of gaming. However, even if we can see that actors in the gaming industry are trying work with these issues - and is seen to be going in the right direction, this study provides additional knowledge on how you should approach questions regarding game design and gender.

Another finding this study contributes with is that it's possible to apply West and Zimmerman's (1987) concepts and theories about doing gender on the gaming industry and get interesting results that could be used to get a better understanding on how gender is treated in the gaming industry. By synthesising doing gender and our framework of gender inclusion and gender stereotypes, we could see how these two parts of the framework affects how the gaming industry when they are doing gender. For example, how you can divide the design process of a video game character into five different components of gender stereotypes.

We argue that it is a necessity to have a holistic view of the different components designing a video game characters when it comes to gender stereotypes. There is a need for a red thread through all the components if the gaming industry is to break the patterns of a traditional gender stereotype or to create a relatable role model. To do this, we suggest that you define the

setting where the game is to take place and what institutional beliefs and values that lies behind it. If this can be done, it could become the guideline for how the other components should be designed. This study describes how the gaming industry is currently doing gender, as well as giving implications on what it can do to broaden the gender consciousness even more.

6.6 Practical implications

In this section, we provide a list of practical implications that has been revealed during the study. These implications can be used by different areas in the gaming industry to broaden its gender consciousness.

- Show and represent the female gender on for example covers, banners or posters to demonstrate that females are welcome into the gaming industry.

- Depending on the setting, ensure that you mix the perspectives to design a less excluding product and dare to challenge gender stereotypical patterns that exists in society.

- Understand that persons who are at different positions in the gender structure have different preferences when it comes to game content.

- Regardless what setting it is, include a diverse range of gaming elements to appeal for a broader audience.

- Use the components of gender stereotypes as a guideline or model when designing your video game characters to ensure that you have everything in mind.

- Design characters thoughtfully through a holistic perspective and be careful in how you design all the components of gender stereotypes - keep the red thread intact.

7. Conclusion

In this paper, we contribute to a deeper understanding of how IT, in terms of gaming, can affect the way society is perceiving gender. Our concern was to analyse how the gaming industry is doing gender, by applying a theoretical framework based in theories on gender inclusion and gender stereotyping.

Our study shows that the gaming industry is doing gender with a broader gender consciousness, by the way games are designed and how the industry is coping with making it more inclusive. This is an important factor when developing a more lucrative field to attract a broader mass of people with different genders and perspectives. A higher understanding of gender consciousness is needed within the design and developing processes if to create inclusive video games. This can be achieved by recruiting females or other persons with a different understanding of how gender is being done by society, into roles that can influence and decide how the video games will be designed.

We also show that some companies lack in the understanding of how to compose a complete character that is breaking traditional gender stereotypes. By using the theoretical framework, we revealed that they may design one component with thoughtfulness that is challenging the traditional ways of doing gender, but could sometimes miss out on another component. To break a traditional gender stereotypical pattern in full scale, a complete and continuous gender consciousness design through all components is needed.

Further, we contribute with the new component of *setting* - and we argue that it is a very influential component that could be decisive in the definition of the other components of gender stereotypes.

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