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REPRESENTATION AND STEREOTYPING IN BOARD GAMES

A Study of How Gender, Race, Sexuality, Ability and Age Are Portrayed in Strategic Board Games

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Abstract

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Purpose: The purpose of this investigation is to see if contemporary strategic board games maintain a stereotypical representation of different societal groups. The main objectives are to see *to what extent* different social groups are represented and *how* they are being represented. Special attention will be directed at stereotypes.

Theory: Gender theory combined with intersectionality theory is used to analyze the stereotypes and the gender roles, whereas the cultivation theory is used to analyze the representation of social groups and its importance.

Method: This study uses a qualitative method combined with a quantitative method. Primarily, this study is a critical discourse analysis-study. It is a small-scale content analysis performed on four board games. The main categories in focus of the analysis are gender, race, sexuality, age and ability.

Result: The combined analysis shows a high overrepresentation of able-bodied, white cis-males of a working age. In the four games analyzed all other societal groups are underrepresented. Some of the games show a just representation of some societal groups, but none is 100 % equal concerning all categories. Male characters are shown to be portrayed as working professionals to a higher extent than female characters, and genders roles are often portrayed in a stereotypical way.

Foreword

How gender roles are being portrayed in entertainment media and other mediums has always been an interest of mine. Ever since I became aware of how differently people are portrayed depending on what social group they belong to it has become difficult to ignore it and just enjoy entertainment media. This study will give examples of the importance of inclusion which surpass the simple principle of justice and show the psychological and societal aspects of its importance. How we represent and talk about people of different genders and societal groups impacts our way of perceiving people belonging to these groups. If we hope to ever have a just and equal world, we also must stop portraying people differently, cementing old stereotypes and not giving people the space to which they are entitled. I have since long heard discussions mainly on how people are portrayed in advertising, television and the cinema. I conducted a study myself on representation in children's literature and found traditional gender roles to be very present in the analyzed books. But I had little knowledge about the state of the matter in board games. I like playing board games, even though I don't do it half as often as I would like to. But when I have played, I have primarily noticed the lack of female characters in games and I have come across instruction books referring to the player solely as "he/him". Since I identify as a woman this immediately made me feel excluded. It made me feel as if the creators of the game didn't wish for me to play it. I don't know if it was their intention to exclude approximately half of the population when writing their instructions. I doubt it, since they probably wish people of all genders to purchase their product. Yet, that makes it even more interesting. The fact that they put so much effort into making this board game (which was otherwise well elaborated, and much enjoyable), and still without thinking excluded half of their customer group. This says a lot about how society views women. This realization made me want to conduct this study to get a better image of how board games treat stereotypes, women and people of different societal groups.

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Table of Contents

1 Introduction

This study is a small-scale content analysis of four of the most popular contemporary strategic board games on the market. The analysis is made using quantitative and qualitative methods and particularly critical discourse analysis will be utilized. Used as a tool of analysis and to theorize upon the results are intersectionality theory, gender theory and cultivation theory. This study will investigate the extent of which people of different genders, LGBT+ people, people of different ages, with different physical and mental abilities and races are represented in board games. The analysis will also include *how* people belonging to these respective groups are being represented, e.g. if gender roles are depicted in a stereotypical way and if female characters hold an occupation to the same extent as male characters.

In the following chapters, first, a background with the importance of representation is included, then the purpose and limitations of this study and a hypothesis by the author. This is followed by a literature review which includes a selection of previous studies conducted on representation in board games and video games, and then a selection of studies conducted on stereotyping in several different mediums of entertainment and communication such as television, school books and children's' literature are presented. Then the utilized theories intersectionality theory, gender theory and cultivation theory are presented in the same chapter.

After that, in the 4th chapter, a thorough introduction of the research selection is presented, including an introduction to board games in general. This chapter also includes a thorough outline of the methods of analysis utilized.

The analysis presented in the 5th chapter has been divided into five parts. First there is one part each covering the analysis of each of the four games. Each analytical part is divided into a first sub-part which covers the discourses of the instructions and cover boxes of the games, and a second sub-part covering the characters of the game. This is followed by a fifth part combining the analysis of the four games.

The last part of the body of this work is chapter 6 which consists of the final discussion reflecting on the result of the analysis combined with the theories and the previous studies. In this chapter there are discussions contemplating the results of the analysis using the perspective of the respective theories utilized (gender theory, intersectionality theory and cultivation theory). There are also references to critical discourse analysis being the main method of analysis and of course discussions relating to the literature review, comparing the results with

the results of studies of investigations within the field. Finally, there is a conclusion drawn from the results found during this research project.

Second to last in this essay, there is the reference list and an appendix with tables compiling the results of the four games. Tables 2-6 shows tables from each separate board game with the most important traits respectively compared, and table 7 covers the four games with the categories the four games have in common and is therefore a clearer comparison of the games. And lastly the back cover can be found. And that is the essay "Representation and Stereotyping in Board Games" as a whole.

A board game is a type of game which can be defined by the fact that it is played on a board which is placed on a table, which is why board games are often referred to as tabletop games. In this study the terms "board game" and "tabletop game" will therefore be used interchangeably. Their design can vary from very simple (e.g. Checkers) to highly elaborate with several parts making one big board which you play on. Sometimes a game not containing and actual board, but which is played in a similar manner as a board game can be referred to as one, though it might technically rather be a card game (e.g. Dominion). In some games, such as Carcassonne, you make up the board during the course of the game with tiles. Settlers of Catan is played in a similar way with tiles. All these different types of games will fall under the category "board games/tabletop games" and will be referred to as that in this analysis.

To analyze representation of societal groups in entertainment media and other mediums of communication one must first understand the meaning of representation. It is a concept which has been theorized by different thinkers, mostly during the 20th century. One may start by looking at it from a linguistic and etymological point of view. The word can be traced back to the old Latin word *repraesentare* which had a slightly different meaning than it does today, and then came into English by making its way through Old French. The meanings of *repraesentare* in Latin was "manifest", "pay down", "pay in cash", "represent", "depict", "show", "exhibit" and "display" (Latdict 2019).

Through the last centuries, representation has been used mostly within the terms of politics, where we generally consider anyone working for the government as a representative of the country and its population. According to Pitkin (1972), this usage of the word is to be consider quite loose and free, for it is a very complex word (Pitkin 1972, 3-4).

Looking at the semantics of the word *represent*, we have the morpheme *re-* deriving from the Latin word for again, and we have *present*. In order words, the literal meaning of the word

is making something present which is not anymore. However, it is not only used in its literal sense, since what is usually represented is rather a sense of something, whether it has been there before or not (ibid, 8-9).

Pitkin's definition of representation is that it should be divided into four different categories. There are symbolic, descriptive, formalistic and substantive representation. Though there are practically as many definitions of representation as there are its theorists, these four make out a good basis as to understand how the meaning of representation can be defined and understood. Descriptive representation can be defined as when something or someone resembling the principal (the object being represented) is present in its place, so within this definition race, gender, sexuality, ability and age are of utmost importance (ibid, 60-91). Symbolic representation also focuses on the "who" of the principal, but instead is present in its place by a symbol and thereby has a metonymical representation (ibid, 92-111). It can be a flag representing a country or linguistically "The White House" representing the United States' government. Formalistic representation however, is quite different than the former two, and is what one usually refers to when speaking of political representation (ibid, 38-59). Formalistic representation is when a representative is present in one's stead. This is also the case with substantive representation, but within politics one refers to this type of representation as formalistic, and in non-formal representation the term substantive is used (ibid, 112-143). Out of these four definitions, the type of representation which is pertinent to representation in mediums of entertainment, and not in the political context, is mainly descriptive representation (ibid).

The reason the investigation has its focus both on representation and stereotyping is that the two are closely related. The objective is to see how people from different societal groups are being represented and both how they are represented and to what extent is an important part of that. According to cultivation theory (Shrum 2017), which will be further developed in chapter 3; if a group is not present at all, that also forms our image of that social group as well as if it is present and represented in a stereotypical way. Consequently, there will be an almost equal distribution of the focus on both representation and stereotyping since the purpose of the study is to see the message conveyed by board games regarding people in society.

2 Background

2.1 Background

Representation of all minorities, societal groups and age groups in entertainment media affects our perception of these groups. It is important how much the groups are represented, in other words, if their representation concurs with their representation in the population, but also how these groups are portrayed. The less real experience and contact one has in their own life with a societal group, the more does the image shown in the media affect our image of this group. If one has had little personal experience with encounters with for instance black people, we are more affected by the image portrayed in the entertainment media of black people and understand it as a true representation of this societal group (Martins and Harrison 2011, 339; The Opportunity Agenda 2011, 14).

The fact that we understand entertainment media's portrayal of societal groups as a portrayal of the real world makes it important how representation of all groups looks like in different entertainment mediums. A negative image displayed in the media of a societal group can thereby lead to an increase in homophobia and ableism as well as racism, ageism and sexism. But it does not only affect our perception of societal groups which we do not belong to, but also our own. The study conducted on children by Martins and Harrison (2011), for example showed a clear correlation between their television consumption and their self-esteem. The self-esteem of the black boys and girls as well as the white girls decreased with high television exposure, whereas it increased for the white boys. The researchers found it plausible to be due to how these groups were portrayed, since white males are portrayed in the most positive way on television and are also over-represented when it comes to how much we see of this group compared to how many white males there are in the United States where this study was conducted (Martins and Harrison 2011; The Opportunity Agenda 2011).

Other essential reasons to the importance of a fair representation are mentioned by Williams, Martins, Consalvo and Ivory in their article on representation in video games (2009, 818-819). It is a matter of social justice and of course crucial to prevent stereotype formation and if the world is ever to hope for just a power balance. And according to Williams et al., media mirrors social power structures in real life just as real-life mirrors power structures in the media (ibid).

2.2 Purpose of Study

The purpose of this study is to see if contemporary strategic board games maintain a stereotypical idea of gender, race, sexuality, ability and age. It is also to see if discriminated groups such as women, people of color and LGBT+ people are underrepresented. The investigation will show if women are present to the same extent as men, if anyone that is not part of the heteronorm is portrayed and if there is a place for children, older people, people of color and disabled in these media. Since the analysis will be conducted only within a small selection of strategic board games, the purpose is not to find an average of the portrayal of these aspects in board games, but rather give a sense of how it can look in a small randomly made selection.

2.3 Research Questions

- Are different social groups fairly represented when it comes to age, race, LGBT+ people, ability and gender?
- Are different social groups (with focus on gender, race, sexuality, age and ability) portrayed in a stereotypical way?
- Are female characters portrayed as working professionals to the same extent as male characters?
- Do the instructions of the games only address male players?

2.4 Limitations and Reflexivity

To get a clear view on how stereotypical strategic board games are, one would need to look at a larger selection. It could be considered better to look at all the games on the market to get an absolute idea of the status of representation. But since that is quite the comprehensive task, one could start by just looking at more and other games than the ones analyzed in this study, thereby making the selection bigger. One could also choose the top ten best sellers of a year or e.g. the 20 latest published. The more material analyzed there is, the clearer and more accurate will the result be of what representation looks like in contemporary strategic tabletop games. Considering the broadness of this research and the fact that it will cover both representation and stereotyping and these two matters regarding gender, race, ability, age and sexuality, it was not necessary for this investigation to have a larger selection. The four games selected provide an extent idea of representation and stereotyping in board games since the analysis is exhaustive.

It was viewed as more appropriate to conduct a broad and thorough analysis of these games, rather than focusing on only one or fewer of the categories, e.g. gender, since an intersectional approach is viewed as more ethically appropriate since these matters are always intertwined and it is better avoiding overlooking large societal groups when studying representation and stereotypes.

Another limitation are the ethics of stereotyping analysis. It is difficult to look for stereotypes without oneself using a stereotypical eye. In the search for e.g. transgendered people, it must either be somehow stated that the character is transgender, or it must be obvious that the character is not presenting as the gender they were assigned as at birth, making it clear that the person is in fact transgender (or possibly a cross-dresser). It could just as well be that a character is transgender, only that the creators chose not to put any focus on it. It could of course also be that a character is transgender but has not yet physically or socially transitioned.

The only way to know the sexual identity of a person is of course to interview them and ask them how they identify. This is not possible in this case since the characters are all fictional. However, it is irrelevant since what matters in this study is how matters appears to be, meaning that if someone is meant by the creators to be transgender and they appear to be cis-gendered, it does not affect the player out of a cultivation theoretical perspective. This is further developed in section 3.2.3; where it is explained that people's perception of different social groups is affected by their portrayal in entertainment media. Because of this, what we perceive as a person belonging to a certain social group is what matters for our perception of them, not their actual belonging. The conscious as well as subconscious message the player will get when seeing a female character who likes shopping is that females like shopping. This idea will be reinforced even if the creators mean that this cartoon is a male going against the norms when it comes to hobbies, hair style and clothing. That would make this character very atypical in today's norms. But unless it is somehow mediated that this person identifies as male, the person will appear female to the player and the ideas of a female will be enforced. Because of this, one must be prejudiced and assume everything is as is it "appears to be" to make an analysis on stereotypes. Therefore, no interviews will be conducted with the creators to find out the sexual identity of the characters. What the player sees and perceives is what will affect them according to cultivation theory (Mastro, Behm-Morawits and Ortiz 2007; Shrum 2017, 1-2).

This matter is less complicated in the representational aspect. Since descriptive representation is about the character looking as the person they represent, it is irrelevant if a

character appearing as a cis-male according to traditional norms is in fact intended to be a transgender male, since the players will perceive this character as a male and females will not be able to relate to this character based on their gender.

Another difficult category to analysis is ability. Physical disability is often visible to the naked eye. A physical disability could be the loss of a limb or sitting in a wheel chair, both of which would be relatively easy for the analyst to find in a character, and it could also be blindness or deafness, being a bit more difficult to see. Blindness could be visible if the character was carrying a cane, sunglasses and being accompanied by a seeing eye dog for example. However, a mental disability is usually not visible to the naked eye and is often referred to as an "invisible disability". Because of this, it is very possible several of the characters are supposed to have a mental disability, but no focus was put on it. In this case, the situation is the same as with sexuality, that it is difficult to know what the creators intended, but this is not relevant from a representational perspective, since people with a mental disability will not be able to see themselves represented in the game if it is not obvious that the character has a mental disability.

2.5   Hypothesis

My hypothesis is that there likely will be a high representation of males compared to females. It is also probable that they will be portrayed in quite distinct and gender stereotypical way, in the sense that the male characters might be portrayed as working professionals to a greater extent than the female ones. There will likely be focus on the males' physical strength whereas the females will have other qualities. It is not to be assumed that that there will be a high representation of young nor old people. There will likely not be much focus on the characters' sexual orientation at all, but if it is ever transparent, it is expected to be heteronormative. When it comes to race, I would expect an overrepresentation of white people. It is not likely there will be much representation at all of disabled people. These assumptions all concur with my idea of how these aspects are generally represented in different mediums of entertainment including board games.

3   Literature Review and Theoretical Framework

3.1   Previous Studies

3.1.1   Previous Studies on Representation in Games

According to Galloway (2004), most studies on representation have had as their prime focus whether representation in the form of images, language, characters etc. is a representation which reflects the society as is, or if it differs from the society depicted. In additon, there is a significant difference in the importance of representation when it comes to video games compared to other mediums such as books and television, since the audience (reader/viewer) is not just passive, but rather an active player, and this can make a difference in how our brain is affected by the exposure of video games compared to television. Galloway explains that since the player plays an active part in games, it has higher requirements than e.g. the cinema to depict a realistic world, so that the player will understand how to play the game. In film, the audience can just sit back and watch as something occurs on the screen, which is maybe not realistic, relatable or even understandable. This means that games have something called "congruence requirements" (Galloway 2004).

Pobuda (2018) conducted a quantitative study on the top 200 ranked board games on the table-top gaming community BoardGameGeek in 2018 (Board Game Geek 2019). The racial and gender representation of the designers of the illustrations in the games and the cover art of the top 200 ranked board games were analyzed. The result of the top 200 ranked board games showed a high overrepresentation of white males compared to white females or people of color in relation to the population demographics in the United States and Canada (Pobuda 2018).

The designers of the top 200 BGG-ranked games had a total of 93.5 % representation of white males according to the study conducted by Pobuda (2018). Men of color represented 4.1 % of the designers and white women 2.4 %. The author found that out of the top 200 ranked games on BoardGameGeek the designers were predominantly North American and European. The majority were American representing 40.5 % of the designers. 21 % of the designers were German, 8 % were French and 4 % were Italian (ibid).

In the analysis of the cover art of the top 100 ranked board games at BGG Pobuda found that 169 of the characters depicted where people of color, compared to 869 white characters, which makes a total of 83.7 % representation of white people compared to a 16.3 %

representation of people of color. 73.3 % or 761 of the characters were male whereas 26.7 % or 277 of the characters were female (ibid).

Williams et al. (2009) conducted a study on representation of gender, age and race in video games sold in The United States. Their study material consisted of the top selling 150 games from across different platforms (e.g. PlayStation 2, GameCube). They researched both how well represented the different social groups were in these games, and if games with a representation of e.g. people of color sold equally well. Their results showed that there was quite a discrepancy between the percentage of people belonging to these groups in society and to what degree they were represented in these games. White and Asian males and adults where overrepresented in the games in relation to the sizes of these groups in in the United States. All other groups were underrepresented. The researchers could see a correlation between the makers of video games and the people represented in them (Williams et al. 2009).

When it came to the representation of gender there was a large discrepancy in the main characters. In the United States' population, 50.9 % are males and 49.1 % are females and in the research material, 85.23 % of the main characters were male versus 14.77 % female. They also found that the discrepancy was even higher for the acting character or the "doer". If there is a female character she is likely to be a bystander (ibid, 824). The study also showed that even though there was a low representation of women in the produced games, there was an even lower representation in the top selling games, meaning that the games featuring a female lead had worse sale numbers than the games with a male lead (ibid, 827).

3.1.2 Previous Studies on Stereotyping

Martins and Harrison (2011) conducted a longitudinal panel study on 396 preadolescent males and females who were both black and white in American middle class-communities to research correlation between self-esteem and television exposure. The study showed a clear correlation on the impact of their self-esteem in relation to their television exposure. It showed that the self-esteem of black and white girls as well as black boys decreased along with high television consumption, whereas the self-esteem of white boys increased (Martins and Harrison 2011).

According to Martins and Harrison (ibid), possible reasons for the discrepancy in the effects of television exposure on kids are that people of different races and gender are portrayed very differently in the media. Firstly, television portrays these groups in ways which reinforce racial stereotypes as well as gender-roles. These traditional depictions of males are what in our culture is viewed as positive compared to the traditional depictions of women. As Martins and

Harrison phrase it: "Indeed, males are portrayed as powerful, strong and rational whereas females are portrayed as frail, emotional and sensitive." (ibid, 351). They also explain that "Black male characters are disproportionately shown as buffoons, or as menacing and unruly youths, and black female characters are typically shown as exotic and sexually available." (ibid). Considering how we socially value all these traits, it is a reasonable conclusion to draw that the qualities portrayed on white males would have a positive impact on a viewer belonging to that groups' self-esteem, whereas the effect would be the opposite on the self-esteem of a viewer being female, black or both (ibid).

Another important aspect on how women and men are represented in different mediums is the professional aspect. Previous studies have shown that when a woman is present, not only is she often a bystander, rather than the main character, but it is also likely she is playing a passive part rather than an active one, and women are not featured as working professionals to the same extent as men. Hyllengren (2015) conducted a study about how men and women are represented in school books and analyzed a Spanish grammar book used in Swedish schools. Out of the examples given, 52 of the acting agents appearing were working professionals. Out of these 52, only five featured women and 47 of them were men. The same study also showed a higher presence of males in total, irrespective of their roles or activity. There was a total of 179 agents in the grammar examples, and 52 of these were female, meaning there was a 29 % representation of females. This means that 9.6 % of the featured females were professionals, compared to 37 % of the males. This shows that men are more often portrayed as working professionals than women. The same study also showed that there was more focus on the women's appearance than the men's (ibid).

A previous study conducted by the author (Karlsson 2018, 25-26) on gender representation in children's books published in Spanish in 2008-2019, was made in 10 books with a female protagonist and 10 with a male protagonist. Each ten books were transcribed and compiled into two long text. The texts were then analyzed using a program called Antconc which can sort and count the words (Laurence 2017). Antconc sorted out the words with a high keyness, meaning the words that were most common in one text in relation to the other. In the books with a female protagonist, the most common adjectives were *contenta (happy)*, *asustada (frightened)*, *emocionada (emotional)*, *pequeña (small)*, *guapa (beautiful)*, *sorprendida (surprised)* and *tonta (stupid)* and in the books with a male protagonist they were *egoísta (selfish)*, *gran (grand/big)*, *cansado (tired)* and *solo (lonely/alone)*.

The results of this study concur with the claims of Martins and Harrison (2011) that gender roles are mostly portrayed in a stereotypical way. What is especially interesting is how both *big* and *small* ended up being keywords in their respective gender category, clearly showing the dichotomy that girls are portrayed as small whereas boys are portrayed as big. Also interesting is how we have *frightened*, *emotional* and *beautiful* among the keywords in the female books, reproducing the gender roles of girls as scared and emotional and putting emphasis in her appearances. This study made in twenty randomly selected books published during the last decade clearly showed that girls and boys are still portrayed in distinct and opposite ways in accordance with traditional gender roles (Karlsson 2018, 25-26).

3.2 Theoretical Framework

3.2.1 Gender Theory

The term "gender" is very broad and has different meaning to different people. It is used as a grammatical term, as the relation between the male and the female sex, and by some as simply a synonym to "women". What used to be called women's studies is now called gender studies in many (but not all) universities, including Swedish universities. The scholar Lykke instead prefers the term "feminist studies" and regards it an intersectional term (Lykke, 2010, 11-18). One of the reasons for this switch was to have an intersectional perspective to the studies. One cannot study women and their situation without looking at the male role (and that of people of all genders) in the spectra. In our traditional definition of a "woman", almost all is interpreted in relation to a "man", and since the man is considered the norm and simply a regular human and the woman a subspecies of human, whatever is considered female, is considered a deviation and specific for women and not a general human trait, which would instead be that which is considered typically male. Using the term "gender" abandons this way of seeing the man as the norm and women as a deviation, and instead focuses on the big, intersectional picture. The term "gender", as used by theorists and universities, includes all the aspects. It includes all sexes and genders, both concerning the identities and the biological sexes of people and can therefore be viewed as intersectional term, and will be taken so in this study, albeit not commonly accepted by all theorists as an intersectional term. Drawing from a theory clearly stating the inclusions of all genders is cardinal in this analysis, and of course in society as well (Smith 2013, 82-85).

Gemzöe (2017) explains that we live in a society characterized by this male/female gender dichotomy, which places the woman in the subordinate role. To maintain these structures, most

cultures have treated the male and female as exclusive opposites. Gemzöe explains that the French anthropologist Claude Levi-Strauss, though not a feminist himself, had identified these structures, and several of his ideas have been used in gender theory, since the anthropologists Gayle Rubin has drawn on his theories. Rubin was the scholar who also coined the expression "gender/sex system" in 1975, also referred to as patriarchy, which is a society with the woman in a subordinate role (Gemzöe 2017, 85).

According to Gemzöe, there is no doubt that females are treated as subordinate to males in our society. Women have less power in society, earn less, are at a much higher rate the victims of gendered violence and sexual violence and the recipients of less and worse health care globally. In our society there is a hierarchy and women stand below men and qualities considered masculine are valued higher than so called feminine qualities. According to some scholars, gender is the largest human trait which determines oppression, whereas some scholars rather puts emphasis on the intersectional idea that it is gender combined with several other factors such as race, religion, social status, etc. which determines oppression and subordination. Either way, the woman finds herself being in a subordinate position (ibid).

The primary focus and very basis of gender theory is that gender and how we interpret male and female as a binary dichotomy is a social construct. This constructivist approach makes out the very foundation of this study. One of the earliest manifestations of this idea in Western literature is the publication "The second sex" by philosopher and feminist Simone de Beauvoir in 1949 in which she states the famous quote "One is not born, one is made a woman." (ibid). This quote is in a way a summary of the whole idea behind gender theory which is drawn on in this thesis. According to this gender theory, the reasons men and women behave so differently, have different hobbies, different speech patterns, different taste, different qualities, different areas of expertise and so on is simply because we are raised differently and because we reproduce norms. It was long the belief of science and the general population that all these differences were due to biological reasons. Today, science has shown it is but a social construct. Björk (1996) covers this binary misconception and points out that the "making" of a woman (as Beauvoir put it) starts already in the maternal ward when babies are traditionally given an either a pink or blue blanket depending on their genitals.

Today, many things which were considered biologically impossible only a century ago (and still are in some places), such as women having a career, men being caring and loving parents, women holding high political positions, women owning property, women riding

bicycles (without injuring their reproductive organs) are considered the most natural thing in the world. Few Swedes would today question the appropriacy of a woman owning property or riding a bike, but this was not always the case (Gemzöe 2017, 82-98).

Today we know this is all but a social construct as shown by e.g. gender theorist Judith Butler in *Gender Trouble* as well as West and Zimmerman in *Doing Gender*, and this study will draw from this theory. Even though these ideas are considered outdated by most people today, the subordination remains, and ideas about what is appropriate for men versus women remains, both in our subconscious and conscious minds. Cultural phenomena such as these are most often so arbitrary that they are difficult to notice until they are pointed out to you, either by someone enlightened or by seeing a different culture and realizing that this behavior is in fact not a given, but rather a construct of ones' own culture. By using gender theory to analyze society, and in this case board games, we can become aware of the differences in how we treat people depending on their gender (Butler 1990; Candace and Zimmerman 1987; Gemzöe 2017).

3.2.2 Intersectionality Theory

The theory of intersectionality grew large in American feminist debate since the 1980s and is therefore a quite new theory in academia and the most prominent names behind this theory was Kimberlé Crenshaw, Bell Hooks and Patricia Hill Collins. Intersectionality theory is the idea that all social features of a person generates an intertwined result of how that person is treated, understood, perceived, and the rights they have. Intersectionality theory claims that one cannot view a person of color simply as oppressed because of their race and then see the outcome of that, but one also must consider all other aspects affecting this person and other peoples' perception of them, such as gender, social status, class, ability, appearance, religion, sexual orientation, social network, personality, etc. One aspect can never truly be separated from another since they are all inextricably intertwined. Because of this, researchers must keep intersectionality theory in mind when studying subjects as representation and stereotyping. For one to understand the effects misrepresentation can have, one must also keep in mind the viewer is not only relating to the character by the color of their skin, but also their gender, ability, age and everything else (Gunnarsson 2017; Lykke 2009, 67, 101-106, 168-173).

Gunnarsson (2017) explains that it can be viewed as paradoxical to claim that it is not possible to separate components such as religion, race, gender, sexuality, etc. because they are intertwined. If one views something as intertwined, it is because they are separate entities, combined into one. The fact that they are intertwined states that they are in fact different

components. However, the idea remains that these may be separate entities, but which are intertwined, and thereby inseparable separate entities, and how we refer to this matter is utterly philosophical. The conclusion of intersectionality theory is that the terms "double" or "triple" oppression should not be utilized neither as an expression or more importantly as a way of thinking, since many factors are always intertwined and intra-acting with each other within power structures and identity categories in society. The very term "intra-acting" that was coined by Barad (2007) is itself intersectional and useful when trying to grasp the concept. It is "intra-action" where intertwined entities work together, as opposed to "interaction" where separate components work together (Barad 2007; Gunnarsson 2017; Lykke 2009, 107).

According to Lykke (2009), feminist theories on gender and intersectionality often overlap, and have very much in common. Sexist, homophobic, racist and xenophobic discourses are much alike and very much operate in the same way. This is not a coincidence, but rather shows that the same kind of thinking leads to the different kinds of discrimination, which is why it can be questioned if they should be considered different at all. Understanding and fighting these complex matters is facilitated by an intersectional view (Lykke 2009, 105).

3.2.3 Cultivation Theory

Cultivation theory has been used in several studies on representation in media; primarily in studies on television, but also on other kinds of entertainment and communication mediums. Cultivation theory is a sociocultural theory and it theorizes on how exposure of representation of e.g. social groups in the media shapes the viewer's perception of this social group. Naturally, if television were to depict societal groups in an accurate way which is in line with reality, then television could not have any measurable effect on our perception of the world. But since this is not the case, we can measure how much impact representation has on the audience. Three entities are of utmost importance in cultivation theory, and these are message production, media institutions and message effects on viewers, and these three entities are intertwined. The message effect on viewers is also called "cultivation analysis" and this component is the angle which media research has mostly been focused on (Shrum 2017, 1-2).

According to Shrum (ibid), it has been shown that the more exposure of television a person has, the more is their perception of the social groups depicted (or not depicted) shaped by the representation shown on television. According to cultivation theory, the storytelling function of television is very powerful when it comes to shaping our idea and understanding of reality. Even though television sends a variety of messages since there is a lot of diversity when it

comes to e.g. the genres available on television, it has still been seen in systematic analyses that there is a most clear consistency in the value systems which are generally dominant. The high frequency of the viewers' consumption of television along with this consistency in the moral messages sent shape societal values along with individual values (ibid).

Representation of societal groups and stereotyping are not the only things which are inaccurate on television compared to the reality. Some occupations are overrepresented, such as police officers, lawyers and doctors, whereas blue-collar workers are underrepresented. There is an exaggerated display of violence, and mainly towards certain groups, as children, the elderly and minorities. All of this affects our perception of the world and makes us conceptualize reality as it has been displayed on television. There has been done a lot of research which supports this hypothesis, and Shrum states that "Television viewing is positively correlated with estimates of societal violence, anomie, fear of walking alone at night, and perceived danger." (ibid, 2). These studies do not only show a relation between violence depicted on television and people's fear, but correlation is found regarding other matters. Shrum explains: "For example, TV viewing is positively correlated with negative beliefs about the elderly; more conservative attitudes toward criminal justice; more sexist attitudes; greater faith in doctors; higher estimates of the prevalence of doctors, lawyers and police officers; and greater interpersonal mistrust" (ibid). There has also been found a correlation between materialism and social affluence in previous studies. (ibid).

Cultivation theory specifically shows that there is a correlation between the level of peoples' television exposure and their adopting of the persistent and consistent messages and the portrayal of reality which television sends, regardless of the veracity of this message. This makes television a co-constructor of the social constructions gender theory is attempting to identify, explain and battle against. According to Mastro, Behm-Morawits and Ortiz (2007), the message which television conveys will have an even greater effect when it coincides with our own personal experiences of the world. From this, one can hypothesize that people who have had little personal interaction with a racial group and therefore almost exclusively has experience from them from the television, would be even more affected by a stereotypical portrayal of this group, and thereby is the cultivation effect enhanced (Mastro et al. 2007).

4　Study Material and Methods of Analysis

4.1　Board Games

There are ancient board games such as Chess and Backgammon, and there are the traditional newer ones such as Monopoly. But today there is an almost endless variety of elaborate games with different designs, purpose, strategies, etc. Some games can be played through in a matter of minutes whereas some games take several hours and sometimes days to finish. Some games can be played with just one player and some require several players, and there are games for different ages and fields of interests. Today, there are several organizations for board game gamers such as Sverok, there are stores specialized in tabletop games and there are cafés and bars where one can play board games. Some of the more popular board games, such as Agricola, are even available online and in app-form (Science Fiction Bokhandeln 2019; Sverok 2019).

According to the board game expert and head of the Swedish game organization Sverok Alexander Hallberg (Sundell 2018), board games are increasing in popularity and have been during the last few decades. It is his belief that tabletop games are growing more and more popular both because the "video game generation" (the people who grew up in the 80's playing video games) are all grown up with families and do not have the time to play more time-consuming video games and therefore turn to board games instead, because board games are becoming more and more elaborate and is increasing in quality. In the United States and Canada board game sales reached over a total of $1.5 billion (U.S.) for the first time ever in 2017 (Pobuda 2018). The older and more traditional tabletop games like chess, Monopoly and Trivial Pursuit have a simpler strategy, whereas today's board games are practically video games on a board with elaborate stories, characters, alternative endings, role playing and are sometimes even cooperative (Sundell 2018).

Another reason for board games' increasing popularity according to Hallberg is the social aspects of it (ibid). In today's age of social media and computer and video games which you can play online with your friends and players from around the world we long for a reason to meet "IRL" (in real life), and with physical tabletop games you have a reason to come together to play and socialize. This is also nostalgic for the "video game generation" who grew up going to each other's' houses to play together. Now, thanks to board games, they get to relive that. The tabletop game has become a "camp fire" for friends to gather around (ibid).

4.2   Selection of the Study Material

The selected material for the study makes out of a selection of four contemporary board games. The reason it is important that the games are contemporary, is so the result will reflect how societal groups are portrayed today in board games. The selected tabletop games are Agricola, Betrayal at House on the Hill, Dominion and Pandemic.

The games are all multiplayer strategic board games and from different genres, and there is a mix of realistic and fantastical games. In popular culture, entertainment mediums such as movies, games, books, etc. can be divided into different genres, and the genre is basically the world and theme of the setting of the story. E.g. the books Lord of the Rings are written within the fantasy genre, and so are the movies and tabletop games based on these books. The word "genre" has entered the English language and comes from the French and is closely related to the English word "gender" which is the protagonist in gender theory (Merriam-Webster 2019).

The reason games from different genres were chosen were so the result would not reflect one genre, but instead strategic board games in general. Agricola is an economic, historical game, Betrayal at House on The Hill is a horror adventurous game, Dominion is a historical fantasy game and Pandemic is a science fiction medical game (Board Game Atlas 2019).

Besides from being strategic and multiplayer, they have one important quality in common. In all of them, either a character is chosen or randomly selected for each player to play with, or there are passive well-developed characters present in the game. This was one of the most important criteria in the selection of tabletop games since it will be in focus of the study. Betrayal at House on the Hill and Pandemic are both cooperative games, whereas Agricola and Dominion are individual ones (Board Game Atlas 2019).

Another important criterion was that the games would be popular. The games are currently number 5 (Pandemic), number 10 (Dominion), number 11 (Agricola) and number 65 (Betrayal at House on the Hill) on Board Game Atlas' Most popular list which lists the 25.925 most popular games of the site in order of popularity (Board Game Atlas 2019). This list includes all types of board games, and therefore includes games not matching the criteria set for this study. The popularity of the games is also displayed in other medias than Board Game Atlas. They are all available at board game stores in Sweden, such as Spelexperten (Spelexperten 2019), Science Fiction Bokhandeln (Science Fiction Bokhandeln 2019) and Amazon.com (Amazon 2019). Agricola and Pandemic are both available in a Scandinavian edition and all four of the games have expansions. An expansion is a game which can sometimes

be played alone as is, but it is usually an addition to the original game, and one therefore needs to have the original game as a basis before adding an expansion. It can contain new characters, alternative endings, add the possibility for more players, a new board or new event cards. It adds new levels to the game and variety and thereby helps keeping the game feeling new when it is played a lot. If a board game is a success, the creators often produce expansions, in the same way that Hollywood produces sequels to continue to thrive off the success of an original idea (Science Fiction Bokhandeln 2019).

The selected games are also winners of different prestigious awards. Agricola won Game of the Year at the Board Game Geek Golden Geek Awards in 2008, Gamer's Game at the Board Game Geek Golden Geek Awards in 2008 and Pandemic won Family Game of the Year at the Board Game Geek Golden Geek Awards in 2009 (Board Game Awards 2019). Pandemic also won the Meeple's choice award for Game of the Year along with Dominion in 2008 and Agricola won the same in 2007 (Board Game Geek 2019). Betrayal at House on the Hill won the Gamer's Choice Award for Best Board Game in 2004 (Origin Award Winners 2019).

Criteria for the selection

For the result to display a picture about a certain type of board games, the narrowing down of the selection is important. The following are the criteria set for this study.

Board games: The games are all board games.

Strategic: The games are all strategic.

Popularity: The games are all very popular.

Contemporality: The current editions of the games have all been published within the last decade and are still in print.

Developed characters: The games all have elaborate characters with different characteristics which are used by the players to play with or which are passive characters in the game.

4.3 The Selected Board Games

4.3.1 Agricola

Agricola is a historical board game set in the 17th century in a farmer's community and is to be considered a realistic game since there are no supernatural features depicted and as it mirrors in general a typical agrarian community in the 17th century. It is a game for 1-4 players with the

age recommendations of 12 + and is estimated to take 120 minutes to play and the plot is centered around each player building their own farm. There are rounds and stages in this game, and during each round each player has a certain amount of actions to play, and at the end of each stage, the harvest comes and the people on the farm must have food. During the game, each player must plow fields to grow crops, build fences to keep animals, build a house to keep family members, upgrade their houses to a clay and stone house and of course reproduce to get more family members. At the end of the game the players calculate on the total collection of animals, constructions and crops on the farm and calculate a final score from it. The player with the highest score wins the game (Agricola 2010).

The character cards in this game are used as aids to expand the farm and in the end collect a higher score. The more occupational cards a player has, the better advantage it will be during the game. Though, it is possible to play an entire game without using a single occupation card.

4.3.2 Betrayal at House on the Hill

Betrayal at House on the Hill is partially a cooperative game within the horror and adventure genre and is to be considered a fantastical game since it features many fantastical supernatural beings such as zombies. The game is for 3-6 players above the age of ten and takes approximately 60 minutes to play according to the instructions and the setup is that a group of characters that get stranded at a large house or mansion. The player randomly selects a character, each of which have different levels of life, strength and other ability depending on their character (Betrayal at House on the Hill 2010).

The board is not complete at the beginning but makes up out of tiles which the players place. The tiles are new rooms and the players choose where to place them in relation with the already established board. They need to be connected to a door and can be placed on three stories of the house: ground floor, second floor and basement, depending on what each room tile specifies. During the course of the game, the characters do not only build the house, but they also collect items and draw cards. After a certain amount of omen cards have been drawn, the setting changes. Up until then, the game has been completely cooperative, but then, depending on several different variables, the "haunting" of the house is triggered and one of the players' character turns into the villain of the house, and tries to kill the rest of the characters who are still working as a team. The game ends when one side has killed the character(s) of the other side.

4.3.3 Dominion

Dominion is not technically played on a board and is therefore not always regarded as a board game. It has one small tile which is used as a board, but mainly it is played with cards and is therefore sometimes also considered as a board game. Dominion is a game meant to be played by 2-4 people aged 13 +, it is estimated to take 30 minutes to play and belongs to the fantasy genre. It must be considered a fantastical game since it features a witch, though it is one of very few supernatural occurrences in the game. Most of the game is quite realistic, though fictional. The players are dealt a certain number of cards and several piles of cards of different sorts are placed on the table making out the set of the game. Each player has a certain amount of actions to play at every turn and the objective for each player is to gather as many cards with the highest score possible. At the end of the game, the amount of points each player holds is added up and the player with the highest score wins (Dominion 2016).

4.3.4 Pandemic

Pandemic is a cooperative game for 2-4 players, is meant for people aged 8+ and takes approximately 45 minutes to play according to the instructions. The board of the game is a world map, and the players are meant to stop the four pandemics spreading across the world by the path of different major cities. The genre is medicine and science fiction and the world map is a map of the real world and the cities featured are all real cities e.g. Karachi, Atlanta and Cairo. The players randomly select a character to play. Defining whether this is a realistic or a fantastical game is a judgement call since it is a science fiction game. It does feature a world-wide spread pandemic at a magnitude which the world has never seen (so far), but it is on the other hand not an impossible or supernatural scenario (Pandemic 2012).

The characters have different skills depending on their profession. There is for instance a medic who has the special ability to cure diseases faster than the other characters can. Since it is a cooperative game, the players must consider what special ability the different dealt characters have and make a suitable plan with that in mind. The objective of the game is to save the world from these four deadly diseases, and the players must both cure the infected cities and at the same time prevent the diseases from spreading further. The game is won when the characters have found a cure for all four diseases and lost if the diseases spread out of control.

4.4   Method of Analysis

This study is a small-scale content analysis researching representation in four board games. Using the definitions of representation according to Pitkin (1972), which are more thoroughly presented in the introduction, this analysis has been conducted with a focus on primarily descriptive representation and on occasion symbolic representation. A qualitative method is used in content analysis and it is combined with a quantitative method to calculate the percentage of the representation of people belonging to different societal groups. Critical discourse analysis is used as the predominant method to analyze the instructions of the tabletop games. The results will be analyzed with an approach based in gender theory, intersectionality theory and cultivation theory which are all presented in the theoretical framework part in chapter 3.

Critical discourse analysis is a methodology which is referred to with the abbreviation CDA. It provides methods and theories which are often applied in academia and the empirical study of the relations between cultural and social developments in a variety of social domains and in discourse. Critical discourse analysis can be conducted both with the utilization of a qualitative method and a quantitative method. The analysis conducted in this thesis will be both qualitative and quantitative but can also be referred to as a CDA or a small content analysis.

According to Jørgensen and Phillips (2002), critical discourse analysis is a method and theory which is utilized to understand the sociocultural context behind our way of expressing ourselves, both with language, but also pictures, motion picture, and other kinds of communication mediums. How we use language, both as the active speaker or writer and as the passive recipient, being the listener or reader, is affected by sociocultural structures. Our culture and way of understanding the world is reflected in our language and our communication. A purely linguistical critical discourse analysis will e.g. be utilized in this essay in the textual analysis of the instructions of the games, when seeing whether they address players with a gender neutral and inclusive language or not (Jørgensen and Phillips 2002, 60-66).

Both the qualitative and the quantitative methods utilized when studying the images, language and characters of the games are a content analysis, and it is to be regarded as small-scale since it is conducted in four games, instead of for instance a hundred. Four games are enough for this study since the purpose is to use a random selection out of the most popular strategic tabletop games on the market to see the image it provides regarding the matters which are in focus of this study. It is also a natural choice since any given player would not play all

the top 100 games on the market but rather an arbitrarily small number of these games. Because of this, a thorough analysis of a random selection can be viewed as more appropriate than a shallower analysis of more games which would be a larger scale content analysis. Content analysis is a method frequently used within the social sciences of academia (University of Georgia 2012).

Qualitative research and quantitative research are two methods of research which are common when it comes to understanding social phenomena within the social science field and the humanities field. In many studies, one out of the two is used, whereas many other investigations use a combination of the two as a method of performing the analysis and concluding the results. In this thesis, a combination of the two will be utilized. Qualitative methodology, as opposed to quantitative methodology, does not have its focus on the "what", but rather on the "why". It is often used within social sciences since it is useful when trying to explain and understand social phenomena and how experience shapes humans as acting agents in their everyday lives (Health University of Utah 2019).

Quantitative research, as the name entails, is focused on measurable results, numbers and statistics. Whereas a qualitative method allows for an in-depth analysis, quantitative method can give a more superficial and simpler picture of the state of something, but also more concrete. Because of this, it is the intention of the study that determines which is the most appropriate to use, and since this study has both representation and stereotyping as its primary objective, it is a combination of the two which would be considered most applicable. In the representational analysis, there will be focus on to which extent people from different social groups are represented. This is a purely measurable occurrence, which is why it will be performed by facile counting and calculation to determine the extent of representation. Because of this, a quantitative method is the obvious tool (ibid).

However, there will also be focus on *how* the social groups are being represented. One of the purposes of the analysis is to see if people belonging to the different social groups are portrayed in a stereotypical way, if traditional gender roles are being enforced, e.g. if females are portrayed as working professionals to the same extent as the male characters, and if the social groups are depicted differently depending on the belonging to each respective social group. To conduct a proper analysis of these social phenomena, a qualitative method will be utilized (ibid).

5 Analysis

5.1 Agricola

5.1.1 Analysis of the Instructions and the Cover Box

The instructions were printed in 2016 and use a gender-neutral language by always referring to the player as "the player" or "person". There is however a character or person giving instructions to the reader in a bubble, and that character appears to be a male. There are two images portraying the game in the instructions, one of which also appears on the cover of the game. The image on the cover of the instructions and the game is a picture of the house on the farm with a man holding a tool, a sheep, a pig and a woman carrying food. In the background there is also a male using a bull to plough a field. These images can be interpreted as heteronormative and gender stereotypical with the male working outside of the house with a tool and a woman coming from inside the house carrying food. The other image is a gathering of ten people. Two of these people appear to be female, one of which looks like she is wearing a nun's habit, and the eight others appear to be male, one of which is a priest.

The players are supposed to choose one out of the wooden pawns of different colors included in the game. The pawns are not very detailed since they are carved out of wood and completely painted in one color. The character pawns do appear to be male since they display legs and not skirts, and they wear a hat in the style of a cowboy hat. However, that they are interpreted as male is only in accordance with how we usually portray males versus females with symbols, and the fact that they are wearing pants and not skirts and a hat does not necessarily mean that they are male.

5.1.2 Analysis of the Characters

There are 48 character-cards used in the game and a table covering the details of all 48 in the appendix marked as Table 2. They are not named, but all have an occupation and the cards are called "occupation cards". One of these, being the consultant, has an image making it difficult to determine the gender of the person, but it does appear to be a male and is therefore included in the total of male characters. 45 of the characters are males holding different professions such as "frame builder", "conjurer", "conservator" and "plow driver".

One of the 45 male characters stands out in a linguistic critical discourse analysis since it is called "manservant", thereby treating servant as a woman's occupation by default, and this person has a variety of the occupation being a "manservant". It could be viewed as atypical of

the creators letting a male hold a traditional female profession, though it is doubtful if "servant" in general is regarded as something traditionally female. Also notable is that even though servant is treated as a female profession, there are no female servants, and this is remarkable, since there are only three females among the 48 character cards, and yet they chose to include a male version of an occupation they consider to be female and exclude the female version.

In fact, there are only two completely female cards. One of which is "cattle feeder" and the other "childless". It is highly notable how a female character has been chosen for the role of "childless" which strongly underlines the norm that women long for children and that children are a "woman's matter". There remains one card featuring female which is "adoptive parents". This card features a female and a male and because of this, it will be regarded as neither male nor female in the calculations of representation in this investigation. This means that even though there are 48 character cards in total and 45 feature males, the creators chose to include what they consider a female occupation in a male version, which does not show much intention to include females. It also excludes the hypothesis that female occupations were not included because there were to few of them or because the occupations they held (such as midwife, sales person, servant) were inappropriate for the game.

The "adoptive parents-card", along with the "childless" card are the only ones concerning children, and both feature females. This is highly notable since only 3 out of the 48 cards appear to feature females and in all of them, the woman is either taking care of or longing for children or animals. Not a single woman is included as a sort of thinker, manufacturer or sales person, all of which are included amongst the male characters multiple times.

The card of the "adoptive parents" is heteronormative and the picture is quite notable. There is one person appearing to be female judging by the clothes and the hair, and the same goes for the male characters. The picture shows a couple with the male standing in the back in a somewhat relaxed position and the woman standing in front of him with bent knees and open arms ready to welcome the much-anticipated child. It is obvious in the picture that she is the parent longing for a child whereas the man is portrayed as quite indifferent. This again strengthens the stereotypical idea of women as the ones longing for children and children being a woman's matter. Even though the cards are referred to as "occupation cards" it is notable how two of the three featuring females, "childless" and "adoptive parents", hardly even can be considered as occupations at all.

The characters all appear to be adults of varying ages, but they are all normatively built (not overweight, no disabilities, not "too" muscular), and all are white. None of the characters appears to be sexualized, either in attire or pose. The role cards all have the same color coding. No person with any kind of mental or physical disability seem to be featured in the game and only young and middle-aged adult persons are represented since there are no children or senior citizens featured. It appears there is no stereotypical representation of LGBT+ people.

5.2 Betrayal at House on the Hill

5.2.1 Analysis of the Instructions and the Cover Box

Betrayal at House on the Hill has a quite extent rule book because of the many different variables and possible outcomes of the game. In the instructions, gendered personal pronouns have been avoided and instead the author has used "the explorer", "the player" or something similar also gender neutral. The cover art depicts the haunted house and does include a few of the characters from the game. These characters are Professor Longfellow twice, Ox Bellows twice, Heather Granville and Peter Akimoto. Out of these six characters only the little boy is Asian and the rest are white. This means that there is a total of six characters depicted on the cover, and five of the six depicted characters on the cover are male and five out of the six are white. This in spite of an 50/50 gender distribution and racial distribution of the characters in the game.

5.2.2 Analysis of the Characters

There are six role cards in Betrayal at House on the Hill and a thorough description of their features can be seen in Tables 3 and 4 in the appendix. Each has a front side and a back with a character on each side, meaning there is a total of twelve characters. The front and the back of each card has the same color and the characters on the two sides are of a similar profile looking at gender, age, and profession. Both the male children are above the age of ten and share a card, and both the female children are under the age of ten and share a card. The characters have relatively detailed information told about them. On the cards we can see their age, height, weight, birthday and hobbies. Not included is the sex of the characters. This could have been intentional as to not put any importance in gender, and it can also be because the sexual identity is considered obvious. This means that the conclusions drawn on stereotyping will be drawn on prejudice assumptions that the characters identify as they appear to according to traditional norms.

The distribution of characters is half males and half females. The characters are all of normal weight except for one, Darrin "Flash" Williams, who is obese according to his BMI (body mass index) which is stated on this character card. Judging by the picture, he does however seem to be muscular rather than have a high fat percentage. The images on the role cards only show the characters' face and upper body and they are not always very clear, which is why it is sometimes difficult to decide how the character is racialized. However, according to what it looks like, there are six white characters, two black, two Asian, one Hispanic and one Roma. The Heather Granville/Jenny LeClerk pawn appears to be sexualized as she wears quite revealing clothes, and is the only one who does so. There seems to be a good representation when it comes to age since four out of the twelve characters are children, and the adults are of varying ages. No senior citizens are however represented, nor do any LGBT+ people seem to be represented in the game. There appears to be no display of any romantic relations, making it difficult to judge if the game displays heteronormativity or is inclusive of other sexual orientations and relational forms. However, all characters appear to be cis-gendered.

None of the characters appear to have any physical or mental disability. However, one of the variables in the game is that a character dies, and the player is out of the game, when it loses all its sanity, knowledge, speed or might. The characters all start out with different levels of these four traits as a base and are therefore more or less vulnerable depending on what they have a lot of and what they have less of. There does not appear to be any discrepancy in the division of the different traits depending on the character's gender.

The colors of the characters do not seem to be in accordance with the traditional male/female stereotypes. The most stereotypically female colors we have here are purple and red and most stereotypically male are green and blue. As it appears, one of the female coded colors and one of the male colors is for female characters and the other for male characters. Meaning that if gender stereotypes have been considered when assigning the colors to the characters, the creators have likely distributed them in neither a stereotypical nor atypical way.

When it comes to professions, there is a higher representation amongst the male characters, but only slightly. There are two males with a profession, and one female. The female is likely a fortune teller and appears to be Roma, and one of the men is a white Christian priest. The two characters are both in the faith business, albeit being a priest is traditionally viewed as a more respectful occupation, since it is the conventional religion in the west. The last character with a profession is the professor, which is considered a highly respectful occupation in society,

and it is held by a male. Notable is also that it is a white male at the age of sixty-two, so it is very much in accordance with the traditional stereotype of a professor. This means that the three occupations that are represented are all extremely stereotypical. There is the white, male, older Christian priest, there is the white, male, older professor, and there is the female Roma fortune teller. She would probably also be older for it to be even more stereotypical, but besides from that she fits the stereotype with her voluminous hair, big earrings, coloring, headband, and off-shoulder top.

Another quality which is interesting to look at are the hobbies of the characters. Several of them are gender stereotypical, such as "dolls" for the little girl, "astrology", "cooking", "horses" "reading" and "shopping" for the grown women. The most stereotypically male hobbies are probably computers, camping and bugs, and they all belong to a male character. Several of the characters also have sports as favorite hobbies, which traditionally tend to be viewed as male hobbies, with the exemption of e.g. ballet and gymnastics. There is a total of 10 sports mentioned, if we include "horses" and "camping". Six of the sports (basketball, camping, hockey, track, football, fencing) belong to the male hobbies, and four (swimming, horses, baseball, soccer) belong to the female hobbies. This shows the hobbies are close to evenly distributed, but there is a slight over representation on the male side.

5.3   Dominion

5.3.1   Analysis of the Instructions and the Cover Box

The instructions use a gender-neutral language referring to the players as "you" or "the player". There are several pictures included in the instructions; most of them pictures of the cards included in the games. The cards seem to be a random selection of many different cards. On the sides of the box there is cover art. On each of the four sides on the box there is an image from the game. One is of a moat with no characters, one is of a horseman or knight riding into a village about to come across what could be a heterosexual couple, as it appears to be a female and a male and they appear to be a couple. Behind them is a man standing. The two remaining sides each depict an image of a character from the cards in the games. Both the characters are female. On the front of the box is a large image of the kingdom or the land. In a corner of the image are two men at horse. The immediate impression is that both males and females are depicted on the cover art.

5.3.2 Analysis of the Characters

There are several different decks of cards and not all are used every time a game is played. In the deck called Randomizer cards is a mix of 26 different cards (which make out some of the other decks used to play the game). Out of these, a number of cards are randomly selected each time the game is played to decide which decks will be used. Each card represents one deck. Out of these 26 eight are places such as "workshop" and "moat" and their picture only depicts the place without any characters. These cards are therefore excluded from the analysis. Left are 18 cards featuring either an occupation such as "bandit" or a place such as "market" which has characters included in the pictures. These can be found in Table 5 in the appendix.

Analyzing the racial features of the characters was sometimes difficult since the images are sometimes unclear. Therefore, one or several of the images might have been misread, but the judgement made was made by the appearance of the images. How a player perceives the race of the characters judging by the images is in the end what will affect them according to cultivation theory (Shrum 2017). The race of the witch was determined as n/a since she appears to be non-human and the race is unclear, and she will not be accounted for in the race representational statistics. Several of the characters appear to be darker than white but it is difficult to classify them, and they are therefore classified as Mediterranean/Middle Eastern which should be interpreted quite loosely since they could also be for example Hispanic. They are people with slightly darker skin than white and dark hair. There are also two characters appearing to look Asian and the rest appear to be white with different hair colors ranging from blonde to black. No character can be interpreted as black. Ten of the 18 cards were interpreted as white, five as Mediterranean/Middle Eastern and two as Asian (and one is unclear).

Several of the cards have multiple characters depicted on them, but it is always clear who the title is referring to, and the gender of the card will be in relation to that character. The "smithy" is e.g. an Asian male, and in the picture is also a white male. This card will be considered one Asian male in the evaluations and the bystander will not be accounted in the main character-evaluations. Seven out of the 18 cards appear to be female and 11 appear to be male. A large majority of the background characters are also male. The characters do not seem to be very stereotypical. The "harbinger", "bandit", "sentry" and the "poacher" would traditionally be considered male occupations which are here held by females. The "witch" is however quite traditionally female. The "militia", "smithy" "moneylender" and "vassal" are all traditionally male and held by males.

All the characters appear to be normal sized and sometimes a bit muscular. Everyone appears to be able-bodied and healthy. However, the main character of the festival card does look different. It is hard to decide whether he is supposed to be a fantasy character like a midget or dwarf or similar, or human and physically disabled. Either way, the only character appearing to have any kind of disability is in fact used as a "show freak" at a festival. There have been several both real historical and fictional examples of this kind of ableism, but it can be questioned whether it is the most appropriate representation of someone disabled, in a game appropriate for children especially. Not only is that the representation of a physically disabled person in Dominion, but it is also the only representation of a disabled person, meaning it is not even compensated by having a disabled character treated with respect and regarded as normal.

There are no children, but some of the background characters appear to be senior citizens. But all the main characters and most of the bystanders are adults of a working age. The impression the images give is that there is slightly more weight put on the appearance of the female characters, but the difference is not big and hard to measure and calculate. One of the "main" characters has clothing which shows off a lot of skin and it is the "poacher". She also appears to be beautiful and she has a slightly sexualized pose. None of the male main characters are "underdressed" but one of the male bystanders is. There is not much focus on romance and in the main characters there appears to be no relationship visible. None of the characters appear to be stereotypically LGBT+ people. The coloring of the characters appears to be very mixed.

5.4 Pandemic

5.4.1 Analysis of the Instructions and the Cover Box

In the instructions for Pandemic the language used is mostly gender neutral. Instead of using gendered pronouns, they use "the player" or "you" which are both gender neutral. The only exception is when they give examples. In the examples they use names, and they use the pronouns belonging to those names e.g. "Anna" and "she". They give five different example situations. In one of them they use the male "Ben". In the next they use two players and have both the female "Anna" and the male "Georg". In the three last examples they only refer to one person and in all three cases that person is the female "Anna". The cover art on the box features several of the characters. On one of the sides is the quarantine specialist who is a black female depicted and on the opposite side is the contingency planner who is a white male depicted. On the front cover are four characters depicted. Again, is the white male contingency planner

depicted, along with the medic who is also a white male, the operations expert who is a black male and the scientist who is a white female. This means there are six characters depicted on the cover, out of which four are males (one is depicted twice) and two females. Three of the four depicted males are white, and one is black. Two of the six depicted characters are female, one is black, and one is white. On the front cover, the white female stands in front with the three males in the background.

5.4.2 Analysis of the Characters

Pandemic has 7 different characters that are called "roles" and an exhausting description of their features can be found in Table 6 in the appendix. They are all people with different professions pertinent to fight a pandemic. They are color coded and each role card has a pawn in the color of the card. The professions are researcher, contingency planner, scientist, medic, quarantine specialist, operations expert and dispatcher. The selection of characters does not appear to be stereotypical at first sight. They are all adults, but the lack of children and senior citizens is self-explanatory since they are all meant to be working professionals. People of different color is however represented and non-white characters make out 42.9 % of the seven characters. No kind of romantic or sexual relationships are ever a part of the game making an analysis of possible heteronormativity difficult, as in Betrayal at House on the Hill. However, in this game as well, all people appear to be cis-gendered and no character appears to be LGBT+ people portrayed in a stereotypical way.

Three of the characters are female and 4 are male, meaning there is an almost fifty/fifty distribution, but slightly in favor of the men. The colors belonging to each character do not seem stereotypical. We have the colors green (light), green (dark), brown, white, pink, orange and turquoise. The colors least gender neutral of these is likely pink, which is traditionally female, and green, which is traditionally male. In Pandemic, the pink pawn belongs with the male character the dispatcher, and the light of the greens belongs with a male character and the dark with a female. In other words, the colors seem to be randomly distributed between the sexes and if anything in opposition with the stereotypes. None of the characters appear to be sexualized in any way. Their poses do not look sexual and none wear revealing clothes. They all appear professional in their occupations.

Analyzing the appearance and attire of the characters a few interesting things should be noted. Three of them, the female researcher, the male contingency planner and the male dispatcher, all wear casual clothing. The other four, however, wear professional attire. The

female scientist wears a doctor's coat, the female quarantine specialist wears a uniform which includes a gas mask, the male operations experts wears a protection helmet and a vest, and the male medic wears a military medic's uniform. Though all these professions are traditionally considered male, three of the seven are females, and the roles distributed between the sexes seem to be random. Looking at the appearance of the three "active doers" who are out on the field, the quarantine specialist, the operations expert and the medic, one of them is female. And of the four "thinkers" there are two females and two males. It is also notable that the probably most prestigious role of the scientist has gone to a woman. However, what appears to be very stereotypical, is that the dispatcher sitting in front of the computer is an Asian male. Looking at the special abilities of the characters, there does not appear to be a difference in what kind they are. Both male and female characters have "passive" abilities such as aiding others, and both male and female characters have "active" abilities such as building a research station.

5.5 The Combined Analysis of the Four Games

5.5.1 Representation

There is a total of 85 characters in the four games which can be found in Table 7 in the appendix. Seven of which are from Pandemic making an 8.2 %, twelve of which are from Betrayal at House on the hill making out 14.1 %, 18 of which are from Dominion making out 21.2 % and 47 of which are from Agricola making out 55.3 % of the total. This means that Agricola will be overrepresented in the overall results, even though it is technically one fourth of the games analyzed. Keeping this in mind, the overall results will reflect the combined results, although Agricola will affect the average significantly more than the other three games (see Table 1).

None of the games seem to feature anyone with a mental or physical disability, or any LGBT+ people, except for the one character who appears to have a physical disability in Dominion which is portrayed as a show freak. Pandemic and Betrayal at House on the Hill feature people from different races, whereas Agricola is 100 % white. Betrayal at House on the Hill is the only game featuring anyone but adults since they have 40 % children amongst the characters. As a total counting all the characters, that makes a percentage of 6 % children represented.

Betrayal at House on the Hill is the only game with half female and half male characters whereas Pandemic has a slight overrepresentation of males with 4 men versus 3 females, Dominion has a slightly higher overrepresentation of males with 61.1 %. Agricola, however,

has an outstanding overrepresentation of males, with one role card featuring one male and one female, two female role cards, and 45 male role cards. Not counting the "adoptive parents" combined card, that gives a 95.7 % representation of males amongst the role cards. Combining all the three games, that gives us a 21.4 % representation of females amongst the characters, not counting the adoptive parents.

Not counting the card with the "adoptive parents" or the four children, there is a total of 80 characters. Out of these characters, 73 have an occupation, not counting "childless" as an occupation, which makes 96.9 % out of the total. However, only one of the two female characters in Agricola has a profession compared to the 44 males with a profession rate at 100 %. And only one female character in Betrayal at House on the Hill has an occupation, compared to two male characters. It should also be remembered that the men hold quite respected professions whereas the woman is a fortune teller which is not as respected by society, even though it is practically the same occupation as the priest, only in different religions. In Pandemic all the seven characters have an occupation, but there are 4 male characters compared to 3 female characters and in Dominion all the 18 characters have an occupation, but only 7 are female. In total, 96.2 % of the featured males have a profession, whereas only 80 % of the featured females have one.

5.5.2 Stereotyping

Looking at *how* gender is represented, rather than *to what extent*, we see that there is a great discrepancy between the games, as there was in the representational aspect, which can be explained by the fact that they have different creators and possibly the a difference of intention of the creators when making the games. In Pandemic, the characters are featured with similar and equal abilities and professions. In Betrayal at House on the Hill, there is a difference in how they are portrayed, since their hobbies are quite stereotypical. Several of the female characters have stereotypical hobbies as "dolls", "shopping" and "horses". Both genders are into sports, but the male characters seem to be more interested in sports than the female ones, since more of the male characters have it stated as a hobby. So, there is a clear difference in their portrayal, though it is not very large. In Agricola, however, the difference is remarkable. Not only are females hardly present at all but in the few examples they are, they are caretakers of animals or children, or grieving their lack thereof.

In Dominion several of the occupations are stereotypical, but several are atypical. In Pandemic, Betrayal at House on the Hill and Dominion however, the most notable stereotypical

formation is not a gendered one, as opposed to Agricola. In Betrayal at House on the Hill, the probably most remarkable stereotypical formation is "Madame Zostra" who is a female Roman fortune teller, which is an occupation highly related both to the Roma population and women. In Pandemic, there is the "dispatcher" which is the "computer geek" and in accordance with traditional stereotyping it is held by the Asian young male. And in Dominion there is the "festival" card featuring what appears to be a physically disabled male being showed off as a "show freak". Dominion and Pandemic both contain completely atypical depiction of gender roles along with these stereotypical depictions of an Asian male and a physically disabled person, so it appears as eliminating stereotypes might have been a concern for the creators, but these two were overlooked. That does not make it any less serious since especially the ableism is very degrading.

Table 1. Representation and Stereotyping in the Four Board Games

Representation	Agricola	Betrayal at House on the Hill	Dominion	Pandemic	Combined result
female	4.3%	50%	38.9%	42.9%	21.4%
male	95.7%	50%	61.1%	57.1%	78.6%
LGBT+ people	-	-	-	-	-
white people	-	50%	58.8%	57.1%	71.2%
people of color	-	50%	41.2%	42.9%	29.8%
children	-	33%	-	-	8.25%
senior citizens	-	-	-	-	-
physical disability	-	-	5.6%	-	1.1%
mental disability	-	-	-	-	-
professionals	97.9%	37.5%	100%	100%	83.85%
female professionals	50%	25%	100%	100%	8%
male professionals	100%	50%	100%	100%	96.2%
female sexualized pose	-	-	5%	-	1.2%
male sexualized pose	-	-	-	-	-
female sexualized clothing	-	16.7%	5%	-	3.5%
male sexualized clothing	-	-	-	-	-
female on cover	23%	-	43%	33%	33%
male on cover	77%	-	57.1%	67%	67%
people of color on cover	-	-	-	33%	-
white person on cover	100%	-	100%	67%	67%

6 Final Discussion

Analyzing the overall result of the four games it must be stated that there is an underrepresentation of female characters, though it of course must be considered that Agricola has many more characters which shifts the combined result greatly, and that there actually was a 50 % representation in Betrayal at House on the Hill. But that also means that even though Agricola is the big culprit in this regard, in fact three out of the four games has an underrepresentation of females, meaning it cannot all be blamed on Agricola.

There is also a clear underrepresentation of other ages than working adults (18-65) with only four minors, and a clear underrepresentation of people with physical disabilities. Even more remarkable than the underrepresentation of people with disabilities is probably that the only person depicted with a disability in all the four games is depicted as a "show freak". According to cultivation theory, there is a cultivation effect both from the extent to which a group is represented, but also from *how* they are represented, and in the case of the "festival" character ableism is obviously very present (Mastro, Behm-Morawits and Ortiz 2007).

There is an underrepresentation of people of color, but again Agricola becomes the culprit shifting the combined result for the worse. 8 out of the 67 characters are people of color giving this group a representation of 11.9 %. However, looking at solely Betrayal at House on the Hill, Dominion and Pandemic, the number is 16 out of 34 or 47 %. This means that even though not all ethnicities or races are represented, there is a clear presence of people of color in these two games, showing us that albeit Agricola is a 100 % white game, this is probably not a general trait for board games of today. It must also be noted that there is in fact a 50 % presence of people of color in Betrayal at House on the Hill. This large discrepancy between Agricola with a 100 % white representation and Betrayal at House on the Hill with a 50 % people of color presence is possibly due to awareness amongst the creators of Betrayal at House on the Hill since a 50/50 percent representation is not always the case. It could also be due to ignorance of the importance of representation by the creators of Agricola. It could be an attempt from their side to make the game historically correct, but since that was not an issue when representing women who made out approximately 50 % of the population and only 4.3 % of the characters in the game, it is can very possibly be racism (intended or unintended) behind that decision, just like sexism seems to be behind the decision of underrepresenting women to the extreme.

The overrepresentation of professional males compared with professional females is remarkable and it is present in all four games (though all characters have a profession in

Dominion and Pandemic, but there are more male characters). This result concurs with the result in the study made by Hyllengren (2015) who also found that males are to a higher extent represented by professionals. However, in this result there is not a very notable difference in the kind of occupation the characters have, contrary to the result of Hyllengren which showed a much stereotypical representation of the characters' professions, apart from Agricola which showed a very stereotypical portrayal of occupations (ibid).

The presence of a witch in Dominion must also be contemplated. Historically in the west, women have been burned at the stake to a greater extent than males, and primarily as a punishment after being accused of being witches. Anyone could be a victim of such an accusation, but it was often women skilled traditional in medicine. Currently, when we have a better understanding of medicine (and it is now traditionally a male occupation), instead of burning the experts at the stake, being a doctor is an occupation given a lot of respect and in which the pay is very good. Nowadays, witches would rather be women interested in magic phenomena such as a fortune teller which we have an example of in Dominion. Being called a witch is still not a positive thing, so it has not changed in that sense. The definition for "witch" in today is primarily "one that is credited with usually malignant supernatural powers", especially: "a woman practicing usually black witchcraft often with the aid of a devil or familiar, and then "an ugly old woman", "a charming or alluring girl or woman", "an adherent of Wicca" (Merriam-Webster 2019). Magical phenomena however do not include the dominant religions. In the dominant religion, which in Sweden is Christianity, the dedicated people and professionals are not considered witches and they are often highly respected and males.

There are examples of priests in Agricola and in Betrayal at House on the Hill and they are both males. On the female side, there is "Madame Zostra" who is not disrespected other than the fact that it is quite stereotypical that she is part of the Roma community. There is also the female witch in Dominion which is an evil and ugly characters. There is also the "childless" character in Dominion who wears something like a habit and is also wearing a cross. It could be that she is supposed to be a nun. This means there are 5 characters in total in the supernatural business, and a slight overrepresentation of females. It is notable that both of the male characters are Christian priests, and thereby prominent and respected people of the Christian community. The nun is also part of the Christian community, but since the nun is subordinate to the priest she is not the one with the most respected position. Fortune tellers are often referred to as charlatans or witches and is not given the same respect as a priest even though the occupations

are very similar. Then there is the witch who is instead just evil. The conclusion one can draw from the characters involved in the supernatural is that the males were given the respected professions in the respected and conventional religions, where as the females either got the subordinate role within the respected religion or roles in less respected religions or even the role of the evil villain.

The critical discourse analysis of the instructions showed all the games deserve an A+ regarding the gender equality aspect of the instructions since all use a gender-neutral language in the instructions. This is a very important matter when having gender theory in mind and it should be considered a self-evident thing and not something impressive to not use a language which only includes males. But it is not a self-evident thing since both best-selling board games Talisman and Battlestar Galactica (number 83 on Board Game Atlas most popular games) only use the male personal pronouns "he/him" when referring to the player in their instructions. (Battlestar Galactica 2008; Board Game Atlas 2019; Talisman 2008).

Overall, Pandemic is the game which probably can be considered the best at representing societal groups since it is least stereotypic and discriminatory. Betrayal at House on the Hill is better than Pandemic in two regards, and it is the fact that they have an even distribution of male and female characters and a better representation of age with a 33 % inclusion of children. Betrayal at House on The Hill also has a 50/50 distribution between characters who are white and people of color. However, Pandemic is a game featuring professionals being the best within their certain field, which makes the lack of children and people with more severe disabilities quite natural (though it does not explain the lack of people with disabilities compatible with this type of occupation, e.g. deafness or a missing limb), and the distribution of the sexes is as close to 50/50 as one can get without reaching it (with this number of characters). And one can claim they make up for it by using more female examples than male ones in the instructions. Though, a better choice would have been to make 4 out of the seven characters female instead of the males to compensate for the lack of women in entertainment media there is overall. It would be better choice if the goal is to represent the genders equally.

Furthermore, on the cover art six characters are depicted, and instead of choosing six of the seven characters, only five where chosen and one of the two white males depicted twice which seems to be a very odd choice. Making this choice, only two out of the six characters are female, and only two are black. The fact that a white female is placed in the front of the front cover with males in the back ground does even out the lack of females (but not people of color).

A similar situation was found in Betrayal at House on the Hill and without interviewing the creators behind these games, it is impossible to know the reason behind the underrepresentation of women and people of color on the cover of the boxes. But having the study conducted by Williams et al. (2009) on video games in mind which showed that games featuring a female lead had lower sales rates, one can suspect it might have been a conscious choice for not to risk the sales numbers of the game (827). If that is the case, it can be considered cowardly, but on the other hand also smart. This means that the consumers who (consciously or subconsciously) prefers male leads in the end will be stuck with a game with an almost half female representation when the box suggests less. Keeping the cultivation effect in mind, it could be a smart move to hide an even or high representation of a game on the cover box, since the players in the end then will have a positive exposure of societal groups even when preferring the worse games. The cultivation effect should still work since women are portrayed in a stronger and more present way than in the average entertainment medium. It is not a likely hypothesis though since a woman was placed in the front and is pure speculation (Shrum 2017).

Conclusively, Pandemic is the best game when it comes to avoiding stereotypes, despite the very stereotypical young Asian male "dispatcher". This shows that it is at least is better than the rest and better than much of the produced material out there. Betrayal at house on the Hill however, is quite stereotypical, but is probably better at representation than Pandemic being the only game with a 50/50 male/female representation and as much as 50% people of color.

In Betrayal at House on the Hill, the plot is that a random group of different people end up in a haunted house. It would have been a disgrace if the group had been equally homogenous as in Pandemic and not to mention Agricola. And they do represent children, different races and a fifty/fifty representation of the sexes. However, the hobbies are quite gender stereotypical, and there is a higher representation of professionals among the males. The conclusion can of course be debated, but Pandemic appears to be the game out of these three which is the most inclusive and least stereotypical, with Betrayal as a runner up being the best at representing societal groups in the game. Improvements can however be made in both, especially considering the extreme underrepresentation of women and people of color on the cover.

Dominion probably wins the bronze in this study. It is of course better at representation than Agricola, but the low female representation of 38.9 % is far worse than Betrayal at House on the Hill and Pandemic. All characters are also professionals which is not the case in Betrayal at House on the Hill with a higher male professional representation. There also seems to be

some focus on women's appearance which is not the case in the other three games. In total, Dominion is worse than Betrayal at House on the Hill and Pandemic, but not as stereotypical as Agricola. It can also be mentioned that Dominion as well as Agricola is an historic game, displaying that the historical aspect is not an excuse for almost complete eradication of a female presence. The fact that the main character of the "festival" card appears to have some sort of disability is not in their favor. If that is the case for the character, then Dominion is the only game with any representation of disability but depicting him as a show freak cannot be viewed as a positive thing and is ableism. One can argue that all four games contribute to indirect ableism. The fact that they have no representation of disabled people other than using the only disabled character as a show freak must rather be considered as active ableism.

Agricola, on the other hand, can't even be viewed as in the running of being considered a good game representational vise. A 3 % female representation doesn't even come close to what it is often like in entertainment media where females already are underrepresented. Compared to the result of Hyllengren (2015) who found a representation of 29 % in the analyzed Spanish grammar book, the 14.77 % represented in the games analyzed by Williams et al. (2009) and the result of Pobuda (2018) in her study of the cover art of the top 100 ranked board games at BoardGameGeek showing a 26.7 % representation of women a 4.4 % representation of women is quite remarkable. With a perspective with the importance of fair representation which was explained by representational theory in mind, the extremely low representation of women and the complete absence of representation of people of color is quite disastrous. Even more so when the game is a depiction of society and has no storyline which would explain this exclusion of minorities. This is something which could easily be revised for future editions without in any way changing the essence of the game which is why a revision should be considered by the creators assuming this was not their intention (Shrum 2017).

Agricola does not represent anyone with a mental or physical disability (same as the two of the other games), and no children are represented either. It is also important to notice the complete lack of people of color, and looking at the professional characters, the males are again overrepresented. That women are represented in an extremely stereotypical way as caretakers of children and animals only being represented by "childless", "adoptive parents" and "cattle feeder" is just as problematic as their almost complete absence. All these factors made it very easy to determine that Agricola fails on every single equality basis one can search for. Critics might claim that the game is set in the 17th century when gender equality and all kinds of equity

were much worse, and the creators might wish to make a true representation of its time. It is true that matters were worse in the 1600s. However, women did have occupations and they made up more than 4.4 % of the population even back then. There were also other horrible and exploitive societal matters other than gender inequality such as widespread prostitution and slavery and there were bowel movements. These matters are not depicted or represented, so it does not seem important to give a true representation of the era in other senses, so there shouldn't have been a need to almost eradicate women from the game. In addition, it should be mentioned that only a few of the role cards are ever present at once during the course of a game, making the lack of females less obvious when the game is played rather than analyzed.

The result of this analysis shows that all social groups are not represented in these four tabletop games. Since these games are intended for people of the ages 8-13 +, it must also be taken into account that all of these games are supposed to be appropriate for children, who likely will play them repeatedly and thereby will have these stereotypes repeatedly reproduced. When the study of Martins and Harrison (2011) showing that (under)representation in television affects children's self-esteem and cultivation theory are considered, it is quite alarming that four of the most popular 65 board games on the market has such a low representation of disabled people, people of color and women (Shrum 2017).

It is a difficult philosophical question to answer whether it is better to completely exclude a social group or to include it but in a degrading and stereotypical way. Cultivation theory explains that both cause prejudice and ignorance and alters and deforms our perception of reality, but it is difficult to be the judge of which is worse. The study conducted by Martins and Harrison (2011) showed us that the children who were represented to the least extent and in the worse way on television were also the children suffering from the lowest self-esteem. The study did however not answer which of the two had the largest effect (ibid; Shrum 2017).

Although it is an interesting philosophical discussion, the point is moot seeing as intersectionality theory has shown that different kinds of oppressions are inextricable. Cultivation theory has shown that both underrepresentation as well as misrepresentation affects people's understanding of reality and the depicted social group. And intersectionality theory explains that the focus should not be on one or the other, but that the two are closely intertwined and even though there can be studies conducted on either stereotyping or representation, oppression is always intersectional, and it will always be difficult or impossible to determine which kind of oppression is worse (Lykke 2009, 104-106; Shrum 2017).

This investigation clearly showed that discrimination in both representation and concerning stereotyping was very present in a game as Agricola, but it also showed that Dominion was better at avoiding stereotyping than underrepresentation, and Betrayal at House on the Hill the reverse. Whereas Pandemic was quite good from both perspectives. But there are the same type of structures and mechanics in function in all the games. Considering gender theory and how cultural structures are behind our perception of stereotypes and discrimination, this shows us that the creators of these games likely do not have the same view on gender roles and social groups in general (Smith 2013).

To make any sort of generalization about representation in board games, or strategic board games, more analyses must be conducted of more games. These are only four out of several thousand on the market. However, the result does speak for the four games analyzed, and these might be a just representation of strategic tabletop games in general. But to know for sure, more games must be analyzed. The general conclusion which can be drawn based on the analyses of these four games is that males, non-disabled, cis-gendered people, people of a working adult age and white people are overrepresented and there is a heteronormativity present. It must also be said that gender, race and ability are still treated in a stereotypical way, and males are still portrayed as the working professionals. To conclude on a positive note, the instructions were not regarded as discriminatory and had an inclusive discourse.

When considering the theories drawn from in this analysis, the result is somewhat alarming. Gender theory explained that we live in a gender system which keeps the woman in a subordinate role with less power over their lives than men have. This is problematic since it also explains that women and men are treated as a binary dichotomy meant to maintain these gender structures. Not only does this keep women subordinate, but it also excludes people of other genders. Cultivation theory has shown that what we see in entertainment media shapes our perception of the world, hence, a stereotypical representation and underrepresentation of gender as found in these games contributes to maintaining these power structures. As intersectionality theory in particular explained to us, one cannot simply look at one aspect in life, but all must be considered since the factors affecting the social status of all people depend on a great variety of intertwined factors. With these theories in mind, the (mis)representation in these games is highly problematic for all the people belonging to these groups, and especially the ones belonging to several of them at once (Barad 2007; Butler 1990; Gemzöe 2017; Gunnarsson 2017; Lykke 2009; Shrum 2017; Smith 2014).

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Appendix: Tables with the Character Profiles

Table 2. The Characters in Agricola

Profession	Gender	Race	Age	Color	Body Type
childless	female	white	adult	n/a	normal
cattle feeder	female	white	adult	n/a	normal
adoptive parents	male & female	white	adult	n/a	normal
manservant	male	white	adult	n/a	normal
frame builder	male	white	adult	n/a	normal
conjurer	male	white	adult	n/a	normal
hedge keeper	male	white	adult	n/a	normal
sheep walker	male	white	adult	n/a	normal
conservator	male	white	adult	n/a	normal
carpenter	male	white	adult	n/a	normal
tutor	male	white	adult	n/a	normal
roof ballaster	male	white	adult	n/a	normal
scythe worker	male	white	adult	n/a	normal
assistant tiller	male	white	adult	n/a	normal
plow driver	male	white	adult	n/a	normal
master bricklayer	male	white	adult	n/a	normal
seasonal worker	male	white	adult	n/a	normal
cottager	male	white	adult	n/a	normal
clay hut builder	male	white	adult	n/a	normal
wood cutter	male	white	adult	n/a	normal
stable architect	male	white	adult	n/a	normal
groom	male	white	adult	n/a	normal
priest	male	white	adult	n/a	normal
animal tamer	male	white	adult	n/a	normal
scholar	male	white	adult	n/a	normal
organic farmer	male	white	adult	n/a	normal
geologist	male	white	adult	n/a	normal
paper maker	male	white	adult	n/a	normal
small-scale farmer	male	white	adult	n/a	normal
wall builder	male	white	adult	n/a	normal
house steward	male	white	adult	n/a	normal
storehouse keeper	male	white	adult	n/a	normal
pastor	male	white	adult	n/a	normal
sheep whisperer	male	white	adult	n/a	normal
pig breeder	male	white	adult	n/a	normal
harpooner	male	white	adult	n/a	normal
lutenist	male	white	adult	n/a	normal
greengrocer	male	white	adult	n/a	normal
animal dealer	male	white	adult	n/a	normal

stonecutter	male	white	adult	n/a	normal
brushwood collector	male	white	adult	n/a	normal
braggart	male	white	adult	n/a	normal
roughcaster	male	white	adult	n/a	normal
grocer	male	white	adult	n/a	normal
firewood collector	male	white	adult	n/a	normal
oven firing boy	male	white	adult	n/a	normal
consultant	male	white	adult	n/a	normal
mushroom collector	male	white	adult	n/a	normal

Table 3. The Characters in Betrayal at House on the Hill Part 1

Name	Profession	Gender	Race	Age	Body Type	Color
Peter Akimoto	n/a	male	Asian	12	normal	green
Brandon Jaspers	n/a	male	Asian	13	normal	green
Missy Dubourde	n/a	female	black	9	normal	orange
Zoe Ingstrom	n/a	female	black	8	normal	orange
Darrin "Flash" Williams	n/a	male	white	20	normal	red
Ox Bellows	n/a	male	white	23	obese	red
Father Rhinehardt	priest	male	white	62	normal	white
Professor Longfellow	professor	male	white	57	normal	white
Vivian Lopez	n/a	female	Hispanic	42	normal	blue
Madame Zostra	fortune teller	female	Roma	37	normal	blue
Heather Granville	n/a	female	white	18	normal	purple
Jenny LeClerc	n/a	female	white	21	normal	purple

Table 4. The Characters in Betrayal at House on the Hill Part 2

Name	Speed	Might	Sanity	Knowledge	Hobbies
Peter Akimoto	4	3	4	4	bugs, basketball
Brandon Jaspers	4	4	4	3	computers, camping, hockey
Missy Dubourde	5	3	3	4	swimming, medicine
Zoe Ingstrom	4	3	5	3	dolls, music
Darrin "Flash" Williams	6	3	3	3	track, music, Shakespearean literature
Ox Bellows	4	5	3	3	football, shiny objects
Father Rhinehardt	4	3	3	5	fencing, gardening
Professor Longfellow	3	2	6	4	Gaelic music, drama, fine wines
Vivian Lopez	4	2	4	5	old movies, horses
Madame Zostra	3	4	4	4	astrology, cooking, baseball
Heather Granville	4	3	3	5	television, shopping
Jenny LeClerc	4	4	4	3	reading, soccer

Table 5. The Characters in Dominion

Card	Gender	Race	Age	Body Type	Additional Character
artisan	female	Mediterranean / Middle Eastern	adult	normal	
bandit	female	Mediterranean / Middle Eastern	adult	normal	
bureaucrat	male	white	adult	normal	male
harbinger	female	white	adult	normal	n/a
festival	male	white	adult	normal	males + females
laboratory	male	Mediterranean / Middle Eastern	adult	normal	
library	male	white	adult	normal	
market	male	white	adult	normal	males
militia	male	white	adult	normal	male
mine	male	white	adult	normal	males
merchant	female	white	adult	normal	
moneylender	male	Mediterranean / Middle Eastern	adult	normal	
poacher	female	white	adult	normal	
sentry	female	Asian	adult	normal	
smithy	male	Asian	adult	normal	male
vassal	male	Mediterranean / Middle Eastern	adult	normal	male
village	male	white	adult	normal	males + female
witch	female	n/a	adult	normal	

Table 6. The Characters in Pandemic

Profession	Gender	Race	Age	Color	Body Type	Special Ability
dispatcher	male	Asian	adult	pink	normal	aiding the moving around of other players
operations expert	female	black	adult	green	normal	prevent outbreaks
quarantine specialist	male	black	adult	green	normal	build a research station more easily
scientist	female	white	adult	white	normal	cure a disease easier
contingency planner	male	white	adult	turquoise	normal	keep extra cards
researcher	female	white	adult	brown	normal	simpler sharing of information to find a cure
medic	male	white	adult	orange	normal	manage diseases better

Table 7. The Characters in the Four Board Games with Common Categories

Name	Profession	Gender	Race	Age	Body Type	Color
n/a	childless	female	white	adult	normal	n/a
n/a	cattle feeder	female	white	adult	normal	n/a
n/a	adoptive parents	male & female	white	adult	normal	n/a
n/a	manservant	male	white	adult	normal	n/a
n/a	frame builder	male	white	adult	normal	n/a
n/a	conjurer	male	white	adult	normal	n/a
n/a	hedge keeper	male	white	adult	normal	n/a
n/a	sheep walker	male	white	adult	normal	n/a
n/a	conservator	male	white	adult	normal	n/a
n/a	carpenter	male	white	adult	normal	n/a
n/a	tutor	male	white	adult	normal	n/a
n/a	roof ballaster	male	white	adult	normal	n/a
n/a	scythe worker	male	white	adult	normal	n/a
n/a	assistant tiller	male	white	adult	normal	n/a
n/a	plow driver	male	white	adult	normal	n/a
n/a	master bricklayer	male	white	adult	normal	n/a
n/a	seasonal worker	male	white	adult	normal	n/a
n/a	cottager	male	white	adult	normal	n/a
n/a	clay hut builder	male	white	adult	normal	n/a
n/a	wood cutter	male	white	adult	normal	n/a
n/a	stable architect	male	white	adult	normal	n/a
n/a	groom	male	white	adult	normal	n/a
n/a	priest	male	white	adult	normal	n/a
n/a	animal tamer	male	white	adult	normal	n/a
n/a	scholar	male	white	adult	normal	n/a
n/a	organic farmer	male	white	adult	normal	n/a
n/a	geologist	male	white	adult	normal	n/a
n/a	paper maker	male	white	adult	normal	n/a
n/a	small-scale farmer	male	white	adult	normal	n/a
n/a	wall builder	male	white	adult	normal	n/a
n/a	house steward	male	white	adult	normal	n/a
n/a	storehouse keeper	male	white	adult	normal	n/a
n/a	pastor	male	white	adult	normal	n/a
n/a	sheep whisperer	male	white	adult	normal	n/a
n/a	pig breeder	male	white	adult	normal	n/a
n/a	harpooner	male	white	adult	normal	n/a
n/a	lutenist	male	white	adult	normal	n/a
n/a	greengrocer	male	white	adult	normal	n/a
n/a	animal dealer	male	white	adult	normal	n/a
n/a	stonecutter	male	white	adult	normal	n/a
n/a	brushwood collector	male	white	adult	normal	n/a
n/a	braggart	male	white	adult	normal	n/a

n/a	roughcaster	male	white	adult	normal	n/a
n/a	grocer	male	white	adult	normal	n/a
n/a	firewood collector	male	white	adult	normal	n/a
n/a	oven firing boy	male	white	adult	normal	n/a
n/a	consultant	male	white	adult	normal	n/a
n/a	mushroom collector	male	white	adult	normal	n/a
Peter Akimoto	n/a	male	Asian	child	normal	green
Brandon Jaspers	n/a	male	Asian	child	normal	green
Missy Dubourde	n/a	female	black	child	normal	orange
Zoe Ingstrom	n/a	female	black	child	normal	orange
Darrin "Flash" Williams	n/a	male	white	adult	normal	red
Ox Bellows	n/a	male	white	adult	obese	red
Father Rhinehardt	priest	male	white	adult	normal	white
Professor Longfellow	professor	male	white	adult	normal	white
Vivian Lopez	n/a	female	Hispanic	adult	normal	blue
Madame Zostra	fortune teller	female	Roma	adult	normal	blue
Heather Granville	n/a	female	white	adult	normal	purple
Jenny LeClerc	n/a	female	white	adult	normal	purple
n/a	artisan	female	Mediterranean / Middle Eastern	adult	normal	mix
n/a	bandit	female	Mediterranean / Middle Eastern	adult	normal	mix
n/a	bureaucrat	male	white	adult	normal	mix
n/a	harbinger	female	white	adult	normal	mix
n/a	festival	male	white	adult	normal	mix
n/a	laboratory	male	Mediterranean / Middle Eastern	adult	normal	mix
n/a	library	male	white	adult	normal	mix
n/a	market	male	white	adult	normal	mix
n/a	militia	male	white	adult	normal	mix
n/a	mine	male	white	adult	normal	mix
n/a	merchant	female	white	adult	normal	mix
n/a	moneylender	male	Mediterranean / Middle Eastern	adult	normal	mix
n/a	poacher	female	white	adult	normal	mix
n/a	sentry	female	Asian	adult	normal	mix
n/a	smithy	male	Asian	adult	normal	mix

n/a	vassal	male	Mediterranean / Middle Eastern	adult	normal	mix
n/a	village	male	white	adult	normal	mix
n/a	witch	female	n/a	adult	normal	mix
n/a	dispatcher	male	Asian	adult	normal	pink
n/a	operations expert	female	black	adult	normal	green
n/a	quarantine specialist	male	black	adult	normal	green
n/a	scientist	female	white	adult	normal	white
n/a	contingency planner	male	white	adult	normal	turquoise
n/a	researcher	female	white	adult	normal	brown
n/a	medic	male	white	adult	normal	orange

Back Cover

This thesis applies a critical discourse analytical view of the portrayal of different social groups in four contemporary strategic board games. The focus was to see if different societal groups are represented to a fair extent among the characters of the games, and to analyze how they are being represented. This analysis focused mainly on descriptive representation and stereotypical portrayal of social groups as females and males, LGBT+ people, people of different ages, people of different racial groups and people with any kind of disability and draws on gender theory, intersectional theory and cultivation theory. The result shows a big underrepresentation of female characters, a high overrepresentation of white male professional characters, a stereotypical portrayal of women and a high overrepresentation of healthy, working adults. In these games, there does not seem to be almost any children or senior citizens, any people with a disability or overweight people. However, there are also many examples which are in complete opposite with the stereotypes and the discrimination is not as apparent in all the games, though one of the games is clearly not focused on having a fair representation of real people.