



Revealing the Differences: Resexualization in the Textual Pluralities of Video Games

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Abstract

Video games can be graphically or narratively overhauled through remasters, remakes, or other forms of textual pluralities to adjust to current game platforms. One of the adjustments is resexualization, narrative and mechanical transformations of bodily and gendered identities of the revisited characters. Drawing upon Gill's (2003) resexualization of women's bodies in media, Klein and Palmer's (2016) textual pluralities, Purnomo et al. (2019) intertextual losses, and Krauss' (2006) narrative negotiation on a corpus of games along with their textual pluralities, we attempted to explain resexualization in games by classifying resexualization, intertextual losses, and strategies to prevent intertextual losses. Spradleyan domain, taxonomy, componential, and cultural theme analyses were applied in the study. We formulated two types of resexualization namely resexualization type 1 (RT1) and type 2 (RT2) with the former related to gender-bending and latter to sexual objectification and de-objectification. These resexualizations trigger intertextual losses on identity and belonging. To prevent intertextual losses, three strategies are also formulated namely signaturization, alternation, and intratextualization. Game developers could employ the results of this study as a consideration when deciding to resexualize their characters in the context of textual pluralities.

Keywords: gender-bending, resexualization, sexual objectification, textual pluralities, video game remakes, SDG 5: Gender Equality

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Introduction

Textual pluralities, as studied by Klein and Palmer (2016), are employing creative techniques to multiply a product from which remasters, reboots, remakes, reimaginations, sequels, prequels, and spin-offs emerge. The production of these textual pluralities is often driven by nostalgia.

Nostalgia is used for a monetizing purpose – revenue milking – due to its the ability to generate positive effects, maintain positive self-esteem, and social-connectedness (Niemeyer, 2014; Routledge et al., 2012). This is why nostalgia has become a part of the money-meaning-making industry generally called retro-culture, which, as suggested by Parikka (2012), has been a significant part of digital culture landscapes. One of the landscapes is video game.

In video game industry, as formulated by Garda (2013), retro-culture encompasses restorative and reflective nostalgia (Boym, 2001; Garda, 2013). In the gaming context, restorative nostalgia deals with restoring the past for an enjoyment of the present. An example of restorative nostalgia is a remade game where graphics are overhauled and narratives are expanded. On the other hand, reflective nostalgia revolves around individual experiences in valuing products intended to evoke nostalgia. Preservation of the original gameplay in a remade game is an example of how games could be nostalgically valued by veteran gamers. Remade games are an example of what Klein and Palmer (2016) call textual pluralities. Through textual pluralities, the nostalgia remade games offer could garner veteran gamers and their new graphic presentation and extra narrative addition could draw interests of new gamers. These textual pluralities might take the forms of remaster, remake, reimagining, reboot, spin-off, sequels, prequels, and any other intertextual forms. In the context of video games, remasters and remakes tend to be more preferred by game developers and publishers to incite nostalgia.

Video game remasters and remakes are mechanically and narratively distinctive from film remasters and remakes. In the context of games, game remasters and remakes tend to be designed for current generation platforms (Dharma and Setiadi, 2023). This means that remastered and remade games are conventionally updated and adjusted to the current technology of the game platforms (Purnomo et al., 2019). These mechanical updates and adjustments allow artists to upgrade games' graphics, as well as the characters, thus enabling physical remodeling

and even narrative revisiting. Jessie Rasberry from Squaresoft's Final Fantasy VII, for instance, received a massive overhaul on her physical appearance and background story after the game was remade into Square Enix's *Final Fantasy VII: Remake*. These massive overhauls are made possible due to the advanced technology of the Playstation 4.

Figure 1.

Jessie on Final Fantasy VII and Final Fantasy VII: Remake



Note: Images taken from Field Model in Final Fantasy VII (Nomura, 1997; Ferrari, 2020).

In the original game played on Playstation or Playstation One, due to the limited 32-bit system, Jessie had a polygonated physical appearance which evoked cartoonishness. She was also played a minor role in the game. For the remake, Jessie's appearance was revisited through motion capture, making her character look more dynamic. Her background story and role were transformed to turn her into a round character, even tending to be characterized as an in-between or alternate love interest for the main character, Cloud, as seen from her teasing and flirting habits. These changes required a strategy to prevent intertextual losses –broken links of narratives between the original and remade version. One of the strategies the developer took is to preserve Jessie's iconic

elements, i.e. her armored Avalanche attire and red bandana. Departing from this, we studied how remastered and remade video games resexualize video game characters in terms of physical appearances and background stories. We asked the following questions:

1. What types of resexualization can be found in the textual pluralities of video games?
2. What intertextual losses does resexualization generate?
3. What strategies can be done to prevent intertextual losses as a result of producing textual pluralities of video games?

To answer those questions, we applied the theories of resexualization by Gill (2003), textual pluralities by Klein and Palmer (2016), narrative negotiation by Kraus (2006), and intertextual loss by Purnomo et al. (2019). The concept of resexualization by Gill (2003) comprehensively addresses the issues of resexualization in regard to media. Through different media, bodies and genders especially those that define women are revisited. These concerns on how media might play a significant role in resexualization suggest that more advanced media might disclose possibilities to deliver resexualization. Video games have reached their ninth generation with the emergence of Playstation 5 and Xbox Series X/S, with each generation, as implied by Amos (2021), marked by advancement in gaming technology. These advancements allow for old games to be remastered or remade to artistically redesign the game characters and narratives. To understand resexualization across video game remasters and remakes, we also employed the concept of textual pluralities by Klein and Palmer (2016).

Since textual pluralities take after the narratives of the original games, intertextual losses by Purnomo et al. (2019) and narrative negotiation by Kraus (2006) were also implemented in this study. These two theories were logically intertwined in addressing the issues of resexualization in regard to textual pluralities. The same games that appeared on different generations of gaming platforms were intertextually connected. This intertextual connection would be disrupted as the results of graphical overhaul and narrative expansion. To address whether the intertextual connection between the original and remade games was lost, the theory of intertextual loss was required to answer. This theory by Kraus (2006) would be able to answer the impacts of resexualization in regard to textual pluralities when the theory of narrative negotiation was applied.

This theory was needed to indicate how game developers or publishers dealt with the issues of intertextual losses and mitigated possible narrative damages on the remade games.

Review of Related Literature

Nostalgia, Remasters, Remakes, and Resexualization

One of the primary reasons why video game remasters and remakes are mushrooming is what Garda (2013) calls “nostalgia trigger.” Through a nostalgia trigger, intertextual references are made by gamers to relate the original games and the remastered and the remade ones. Intertextuality weaves across the memories veteran gamers have with the original games and the expectations these same players might have encountering new features offered in the remastered and remade versions. Concerns on gameplay and character portrayal might become the focus of the intertextuality. The ways players engage with characters in remastered or remade games change as a result of the negotiation between veteran and new players.

The negotiation might result from the responses of both veteran and fresh players to the remade games mostly coming from comments on game teasers, typically found on YouTube. According to Miller and Summers (2007), redesigns of character visuals are often derived from how previous players responded to the original game. These changes are rooted in the principle of localization, where target cultures become the center of concerns in adapting and adjusting the games’ visual, textual, and operative or mechanical elements. Thus, changes over the visuals or mechanics of game characters, wrote Dong and Mangiron (2018), tend to be a common practice in the video game industry. Such changes could lead to what are called intertextual losses.

Intertextual losses, as studied by Purnomo et al. (2019), refer to elements lost when transforming original games into new, remade versions. The losses might encompass gameplay and game narratives. New technologies also mean that characters have to be redesigned or remodeled, reconstructing characters’ bodies through graphical enhancement and their stories through narrative expansion. This opens up the possibility of resexualization. Resexualization, according to Gill (2003), is rooted in the sexual objectification of male and female characters revisited to address different generations. In the realm of video games, resexualization may even serve as fan service (Evans & Riley, 2015; Gill, 2007; Kern, 2015). Characters’ body redesigns to

appear sexually appealing and gender-bending are meant to cater to different generations—not only of gamers but also of game platforms, trends, and genres.

Resexualization may take shape in terms of both visual and mechanical character elements. As studied by Purnomo et al. (2019), the former refers to anatomical visuals, vestimentary codes, and the other cosmetic elements, while the latter to motions, movements, and actions of the characters. The process of resexualization can be exercised both by fans and game developers. In the context of fandom, as studied by Wysocki (2015), Thompson (2018), and Walsdorff (2025), fans employ modding methods to sexualize both the visuals and mechanics of game characters. In the context of game developer and publisher, the introduction of battle-hardened and survival-nuanced *Lara Croft* in 2013, as studied by Liu (2018), without exaggerated chest size and too revealing attire might bring a positive feel to the *Tomb Raiders* franchise. By focusing on Lara Croft's theme of independent woman, gamers are expected to immerse themselves more on the narratives than on the bodily qualities of the main character. From the perspectives of mechanics, the resexualized Lara Croft was designed in role playing game (RPG) fashion. Through this RPG fashion, the action packages of the new Lara Croft demand the players to act more strategically.

Methodology

Data, Data Sources, and Data Analysis

In a study involving objects that contain not only textual elements, non-textual elements like images also need to be investigated (Braun et al., 2017). In the context of video games, gameplay data involving how the games are operationally played need to be considered as well (Wallner & Kirglstein, 2013). Taking after these scholars, the data of this qualitative study are in the forms of textual, visual, and operative or mechanical elements. Textual elements have to do with characters' verbal expressions, visual elements with their images visual attributes, and operative or mechanical elements are related to their motions, movements, and actions. These data forms were taken from the following data sources:

Table 1.

Data Sources

Characters	Male/ Female	Source Game Titles	Target Game Titles	Developers/ Publishers
Angel	F	<i>Actriser</i>	<i>Actriser Renaissance</i>	Enix
Ashley Graham	F	<i>Resident Evil 4</i>	<i>Resident Evil 4</i>	Capcom
Characters with Towel	M/F	<i>Tales series</i>	<i>Tales series</i>	Bandai Namco
Cid	M	<i>Final Fantasy series</i>	<i>Final Fantasy series</i>	Square Enix
Dante	M	<i>Devil May Cry series</i>	<i>Devil May Cry series</i>	Capcom
			<i>DmC</i>	
			<i>Marvel vs Capcom 3</i>	
Female Characters	F	<i>Blade and Soul</i>	<i>Blade and Soul</i>	NCSOft
Geralt of Rivia	M	<i>The Witcher series</i>	<i>The Witcher series</i>	CD Projekt Red
Jessie Raspberry	F	<i>Final Fantasy VII</i>	<i>Final Fantasy VII Remake</i>	Squaresoft
Jun Kazama	F	<i>Tekken series</i>	<i>Tekken Tag Tournament</i>	Namco
King	F	<i>The Art of Fighting</i>	<i>King of Fighters XV</i>	SNK
Lara Croft	F	<i>Tomb Raider</i>	<i>Tomb Raider (2013)</i>	Eidos
Lightning	F	<i>Final Fantasy XIII</i>	<i>Lightning Returns: Final Fantasy XIII</i>	Square Enix
Noel Vermillion	F	<i>Blazblue series</i>	<i>Blazblue series</i>	Arc System Works
Poison	F	<i>Mighty Final Fight</i>	<i>Street Fighter IV and V</i>	Capcom

Characters	Male/ Female	Source Game Titles	Target Game Titles	Developers/ Publishers
Ryu	M	<i>Street Fighter V</i>	<i>Street Fighter V (Mod)</i>	Capcom
Salire	F	<i>War of the Visions: Final Fantasy Brave Exvius</i>	<i>War of the Visions: Final Fantasy Brave Exvius</i>	Square Enix
Skullomania	M	<i>Street Fighter EX series</i> <i>Fighting Layer EX</i>	<i>SNK Heroines Tag Team Frenzy</i>	Arika
Terry Bogard	M	<i>Fatal Fury</i>	<i>SNK Heroines Tag Team Frenzy</i>	SNK
Testament	M	<i>Guilty Gear</i>	<i>Guilty Gear Strive</i>	Arc System Works
Yuna	F	<i>Final Fantasy X-2</i>	<i>Final Fantasy X/X-2 HD Remaster</i>	Square Enix
Yuri Sakazaki	F	<i>The Art of Fighting</i>	<i>King of Fighters XV</i>	SNK
Zaveid	M	<i>Tales of Zestiria</i>	<i>Tales of Berseria</i>	Bandai Namco
Zhang He	M	<i>Dynasty Warriors 6</i>	<i>Dynasty Warriors: Strikeforce</i>	Koei Tecmo

The reasons for selecting the characters on Table 1 and the summary of each game are laid out in the following table:

Table 2

Character Selection Reasons and Game Summary

Characters	Reasons	Summary
Angel	Angel in the original game was portrayed a baby. In the target game she was adultified. It is intriguing to see how the adult version stays faithful narratively	<i>ActRaiser</i> is a side-scrolling and city building game
Ashley Graham	Ashley Graham was portrayed more mature physically and mentally in the remake version. It is intriguing to reveal how the maturation of physicality and mentality influence the game narrative and gameplay	<i>Resident Evil 4</i> is a zombie apocalyptic game where the players assuming the role of Leon Kennedy that has to escort Ashley to safety
Characters wearing towels	The characters are not only wearing towels but they could go adventuring and battling monsters wearing only towels	<i>Tales</i> series emphasize on the narratives of connecting two different worlds
Cid	Cid always appeared on every <i>Final Fantasy</i> games with different portrayal. It is intriguing whether the intertextual connections of each Cid are preserved when the games were remastered or remade	<i>Final Fantasy</i> series, though have spanned to sixteen titles, are not explicitly connected one another
Dante	Dante was portrayed as a middle age man on the first two series of <i>Devil May Cry</i> . On the third entry, a prequel where Dante was still in his youth was made. It is intriguing to see how resexualization was applied on a younger version of the character.	<i>Devil May Cry</i> series are an demon slashing action game emphasizing on stylistic play

Characters	Reasons	Summary
Female Characters of <i>Blade and Soul</i>	It is intriguing to reveal whether the bodily resexualization of all female characters might indicate a pattern in the context of game localization.	<i>Blade and Soul</i> is a Massively Multiplayer Online Role Playing Game
Geralt of Rivia	Resexualization of Geralt's body and his adult narrative through modding might indicate how a game for mature gamers is altered for adult ones in regard to age ratings of mature (M) and adult only (AO) by game rating organization like Entertainment Software Rating Board (ESRB).	<i>The Witchers</i> is an action role playing game with dark tone
Jessie Raspberry	Jessie Raspberry received a major overhaul on her appearance and expansive narrative. It is intriguing to see how the overhaul fits the original narrative	<i>Final Fantasy VII: Remake</i> is the first of planned trilogy of the remake of 1997 <i>Final Fantasy VII</i>
Jun Kazama	Jun Kazama's resexualization appears in a spin-off title. It is intriguing to reveal how resexualization works narratively in a spin-off	<i>Tekken Tag Tournament</i> is a 3D fighting game that introduces tag team fighting
King	King was one of the characters that could suffer from a game mechanics called 'armor break' where the attires of the characters were torn and gamers could see their undies	<i>The Art of Fighting</i> is a fighting game with narrative elements where all characters are connected

Characters	Reasons	Summary
Lara Croft	Lara Croft's resexualization was backgrounded by a game rebranding and the game publisher's signature game features	<i>Tomb Raider</i> is an action game with female character lead and treasure hunting theme
Lightning	Lightning's resexualization was made possible due to a garb system where gamers could change Lightning's outfits	<i>Lightning Returns: Final Fantasy XIII</i> is the last title of the trilogy of <i>Final Fantasy</i> that introduces outfit-changing system
Noel Vermillion	Noel Vermillion's resexualization is narratively driven. When she transformed into Mu-12, she became more revealing and it was followed by a change of personality	<i>Blazblue</i> series are a fighting game that emphasizes on stylistic moves
Poison	Poison's resexualization was intensified when she crossed game genres from a side-scrolling into a fighting game	<i>Street Fighter IV</i> and <i>V</i> are a fighting game with locations connected intertextually to Capcom's other games like <i>Mighty Final Fight</i>
Ryu	It is intriguing to see the narrative relationship between the bearded Ryu modding on <i>Street Fighter V</i> and the official bearded Ryu on <i>Street Fighter VI</i>	<i>Street Fighter V</i> and <i>VI</i> are fighting games that are narratively connected
Salire	It is intriguing to learn how desexualization fits with the narrative of Salire	<i>Final Fantasy Brave Exvius</i> is a mobile game that features a wide roster of characters from the other <i>Final Fantasy</i> series
Skullomania	It is intriguing to reveal the goofy characterization of Skullomania is maintained when he was gender-bent	<i>Street Fighter EX</i> is a crossover fighting game between <i>Street Fighter</i> and <i>Fighting EX Layer</i>

Characters	Reasons	Summary
Terry Bogard	Terry Bogard was gender-bent into a female character and it is intriguing to know how the female version was designed not only on the physical aspects but also the psychological ones	<i>Fatal Fury</i> is a fighting game with narrative elements where all characters are intertwined
Testament	Testament might indicate the presence of binary to non-binary resexualization	<i>Guilty Gear</i> is a rock-n-roll themed fighting game
Yuna	It is intriguing to reveal whether Yuna's resexualization fits with the narrative of the sequel	<i>Final Fantasy X</i> and <i>Final Fantasy X-2</i> are role playing games of which the narratives are connected in a prequel-sequel fashion
Yuri Sakazaki	Like King, Yuri Sakazaki could suffer from an armor break	<i>The Art of Fighting</i> is a fighting game with narrative elements where all characters are connected
Zaveid	That Zaveid's resexualization is narrative driven is intriguing in a sense whether the resexualization aligns with his changing on personality	<i>Tales of Zestira</i> and <i>Tales of Berseria</i> are narratively connected
Zhang He	Zhang He was a male historical figure that was given more feminine quality when adapted into game	<i>Dynasty Warriors 6</i> is one-vs-one thousand action game inspired from Romance of the Three Kingdoms

The data acquired from the characters were analyzed by employing the analysis technique by Spradley (2016). The technique involved four phases namely domain, taxonomy, componential and finding cultural theme. The first was domain analysis, where the theory of textual pluralities by Klein and Palmer (2016) was implemented to reveal what changes the characters had undergone when textual pluralities were applied. The changes were observed in the formats of the remaster,

remake, sequel, prequel, adaptation, reboot, spin-off, and spiritual successor. Changes in the characters might appear in gameplays, game narratives, and physical appearances. These were investigated through the lens of resexualization theory by Gill (2003) in the taxonomy phase. After resexualizations and where resexualizations were implemented were revealed, the theory of narrative negotiation by Kraus (2006) was applied in componential analysis phase, to reveal how resexualization and the narratives of the characters are negotiated, if they end up in a loss or gain for the resexualized characters. To address this issue, the theory of intertextual losses by Purnomo, Purnama, and Untari (2019) was implemented in the cultural theme analysis phase. Through this investigation, disconnected parts between the original games and the textually pluralized games were investigated in regard to resexualization and its roles in the intertextual losses. The combination of results as acquired from domain, taxonomy, componential, and cultural theme analysis were connected to construct a typology of resexualization, intertextual losses, and strategies to prevent the losses.

Results

A Typology of Resexualization in the Context of Textual Pluralities of Video Games

We classified resexualization into resexualization type 1 (RT1) and resexualization type 2 (RT2). The former circumnavigates around what popular culture fans call as gender-bending and the latter around sexual objectification and sexual de-objectification.

Resexualization Type 1 (RT1)

Drawing on Gill (2003), we define RT1 as gender alteration that comprises alteration from male to female, female to male, binary to non-binary, and non-binary to binary. The changes are often found in crossover games with emphasis over fan service functions. One of the examples is SNK's fighting game entitled *SNK Heroines Tag Team Frenzy*, a crossover of games from SNK and the other publishers. RT1 in this game is visible and perceptible from Terry Bogard, the poster boy of SNK's *Fatal Fury*. Terry Bogard's iconicity made him draw interest not only from SNK but also the other publishers to reimagine him in various fashions. He has appeared in a crossover fighting game *SNK vs Capcom*, appeared as a guest character in various fighting games, and gender-bent into a female character. He was resexualized from male to

female to adjust to the girly fighting game theme that SNK attempts to bring.

Figure 2

RT 1 of male Terry Bogard into his female version



Note: Images taken from Fatal Fury Special (Nishiyama, 1991; Yamashita, 2018).

The resexualization of Terry Bogard is followed by changes on the textual and visual elements of the character. Visual changes of Terry Bogard are seen from the writing on her cap. The male Terry Bogard has 'Fatal Fury' on his cap while the female version has 'Fatal Cutie' to emphasize the girliness of the fighting game. In her introduction, female Terry Bogard was introduced as Terry along with Fatal Cutie and thus, it can be read into Fatal Cutie Terry. The visual elements of Terry Bogard that are changed could be perceived from the outfits and the fighting moves. Terry Bogard's iconic red and white attire along with a picture of a star on his back is preserved with jeans hot pants and red vest and white midriff as the alterations. Terry Bogard's iconic move *Buster Wolf*, for example, is adjusted to appear feminine. The battle cry *are you okay?* said before launching *Buster Wolf* is altered into feminine voice and the visual is altered from fire visual effect into glittering flashy fire effects.

RT1 also involves the evolution of character's gender status that changes due to narrative negotiation between the game narratives and the narratives in the real life. Arc System Works' *Guilty Gear*'s Testament, for instance, in the first entry of the franchises tends to be more manly. Then, as the franchises progress, Testament tends to be more feminine. In the latest installment *Guilty Gear Strive*, Testament's feminine attributes become explicit as seen from the visualization of the body and face and his movement. It can be said that Testament evolves from 'he' into 's/he' and finally into 'them'.

Resexualization Type 2 (RT2)

RT2 involves sexual objectification and sexual de-objectification of video game characters with female characters as the main targets. RT2 tends to occur when textual pluralities of video games take the forms of remasters, reboots, remakes, or reimaginings in which generational gaps in the context of gaming technologies and gamers take place.

Female characters tend to be the primary object in RT2. Square Enix's Jessie Rasberry of *Final Fantasy VII*, for instance, is narratively presented in a more major role in the *Final Fantasy VII* remake. Besides visual enhancement from polygonal fashion into motion capture that allows for a more human-like depiction, Jessie in the remake tends to be re-narrated to be more flirtatious toward Cloud Strife, the main character. This flirtatious character is seen from her hugs, kisses, and flirtatious dialogues with Cloud. She also has a pathway or branching dialogue that teases the gamers to select choices that may end up in a flirtatious outcome.

Figure 3

Younger version of Dante



Note: Image of Dante (Devil May Cry) (Yoshikawa, 2005).

The sexual objectification in the textual pluralities of video games is not only intended for female characters. Male characters have also been the target of objectification. Dante of Capcom's *Devil May Cry* series, for instance, tends to be objectified when the franchise reaches the third entry through resexualizing the physical appearances and game

narratives. The objectification was plausibly designed and aligned to the late teens narratives of Dante. Dante's rebellious sides are vividly depicted through the narratives and stylistic swordplay and gunplay mechanics. These sides are symbolized through the exposure of his chest and belly. In the previous entries where Dante tends to be depicted as a middle-aged man, he was donned in a full covering garb. The textual plurality of the third entry has to be made in a prequel to depict the sensual shirtless younger version of Dante. Due to its popularity, this late teens narrative appears in a crossover version of *Marvel vs Capcom* where he is put as a counterpart of Deadpool, Marvel's character identical to trash talks and dirty jokes. Dante is more resexualized when the reboot version of *Devil May Cry* entitled *DmC* was made. Dante tends to look like a Hollywood delinquent drug addict that engages more in sex and drugs.

RT2 also involves changes in game mechanics. One of the game mechanics that are commonly sexually objectified revolves around vestimentary codes in the forms of costume or clothing customization. In Square Enix's *Lightning Returns: Final Fantasy XIII*, for instance, players are able to change the outfits of Lightning ranging from fully covered to revealing. Players could cosmeticize Lightning with the garbs to suit their battle styles since the garbs are not intended only to offer alternate visuals but also to offer different play styles for the players. The objectification of clothing not only revolves around its visualization but also their functions. In some fighting games like SNK's *The Art of Fighting* and *King of Fighters* series, game mechanics called clothing damage, clothing destruction, or armor break are introduced. Through certain mechanical requirements, players can damage, destroy, or break the attires of their opponents resulting in revealing some skins of the opponents. Since these game mechanics tend to define the series, they are preserved in their textual pluralities especially in the forms of sequels or prequels.

RT2 also deals with sexual de-objectification. Through this de-objectification, the visualization of the resexualized characters tends to be less revealing. Localization plays a significant part in the process of sexual de-objectification with cultural and legal issues as the stance to take. The outfits of female characters in NCSOFT's *Blade and Soul*, for example, were down-toned or de-objectified when localized in China to adhere to the cultural and legal rules in the country. Salire of Square Enix's *War of the Visions: Final Fantasy Brave Exvius* is another example how de-objectification is applied in relation to the localization. To de-

objectify the sexualization of these characters, vestimentary codes become the concerns – meaning putting on some clothes becomes the localization strategies in dealing with the sexualization issues.

Figure 4

Sexual de-objectification of Zaveid



Note: Images taken from *Tales of Berseria* and *Zestiria* (Iwamoto, 2015; 2016).

RT2 in sexual de-objectification is also applied to male characters. One of the examples is Zaveid of Bandai Namco's *Tales of Zestiria* and *Tales of Berseria*. The former came first than the latter with the latter taking the form of prequel. In *Tales of Zestiria*, Zaveid was portrayed as a shirtless womanizing rogue with white stripe tattoos in black pants wielding a pair of guns. This image was de-objectified in *Tales of Berseria*. In the prequel, Zaveid was visualized as wearing a coat and his hair shortened and tied up. Narratively, what is applied to Zaveid is unique since the desexualization flows along with the change of personality of Zaveid. In *Tales of Berseria*, Zaveid's soft sides like his initiative to protect orphans, his loyalty to his girlfriend Theodora, and his avoidance of claiming the lives of others are more vividly depicted and narrated than in *Tales of Zestiria*. These soft sides are symbolized

through his black coat that tends to signify gentleness compared to his upper body exposure that might symbolize free will and wild life.

A Typology of Intertextual Losses of Resexualized Characters in the Textual Pluralities of Video Games

Intertextual losses, as implied by Purnomo et al. (2019), occur when the new textual pluralities fail to address their intertextuality with the source or original titles. In resexualization, intertextual losses as impacts are classifiable into losses on identity and belonging. The following subsection will describe the findings of losses of identity and belonging as impacts of resexualization across games' textual pluralities.

Losses on Identity

Identity, as suggested by Kraus (2006), revolves around the narratives of performativity – implying the necessity to investigate a person or a character through multiple set of angles and complexities. In the context of games, this performativity deals with how characters are narrated and played – indicating the needs to see their game story and game mechanics. When characters are resexualized, identity might change, shift, or alter. These losses on identity are clearly visible when resexualization is the result of modding, or modifications over textual, visual, and mechanical elements of games by fans.

Famous games like Rockstar's *GTA* series, Netherrealm's *Mortal Kombat* series, Bethesda's *Elder Scrolls V: Skyrim*, CD Projekt's *The Witcher III: Wild Hunt* and other blockbuster games become objects of the creativity from modders. Their characters, dialogues, and mechanics are often resexualized with female characters becoming the most sexually objectified characters. The objectification ranges from their gender, body, costume, and sexual related activity modifications e.g. nudity. Male characters are also sometimes resexualized by modders. Ryu of Capcom's *Street Fighter* series, for instance, was modded to bare his upper body. A beard was also added on him to evoke the sense of being more macho with his model on *Street Fighter V* as the modding basis. If baring and revealing upper body of which the source visual is covered is considered to be a depiction of resexualization, then, Ryu has undergone a loss on identity. This identity loss is visually seen in relation to the chronological sequence of his life that has not yet indicated the aging process of Ryu. In *Street Fighter V*, Capcom as the developer and publisher of the series has not officially introduced the bearded Ryu but the beard mod has been in online circulation. When

Street Fighter VI hit the market, the fans were surprised to learn that Ryu has aged. This was indicated through his beard and monk-styled garb. From the perspectives of resexualization, the new image of Ryu strengthens further his wisdom in fighting, a trait he inherited from his master Gouken. That Gouken was a monk foreshadows how Ryu might walk his path as a fighter. This might be further indicating the presence of foreshadowing about his fate. Gouken died in the hands of his friend Gouki, who learnt from the same master, Goutetsu. The same fate might descend upon Ryu with his best friend Ken who studied martial arts under Gouken.

Figure 5

Bearded Ryu in Capcom's *Street Fighter VI*



Note: Image taken from *Street Fighter 6* (Fujioka, 2023).

Modding is not the only way that causes losses on identity of resexualized characters. Textual pluralities like remakes might imply losses on identity also. Capcom's *Resident Evil 4*, a remake of the same title launched in 2005, has a character named Ashley Graham. In the

original title, she was more like damsel-in-distress type that Leon Kennedy, the protagonist, had to save and protect. In the original title, this damsel-in-distress incites stress for the players due to her intense cry 'Leon, help' and seemingly weak and annoying nature. Through resexualization, Ashley appears more mature in positive demeanors. This maturity is not only perceptible from her visual appearances but also her narratives and mechanics. Ashley in the original game tends to be designed as tension maker for the players. This is perceptible from her shouts that constantly appear when she faced dangers. These shouts add challenges to the players to stay focused on shooting the zombies while paying attention to the safety of Ashley. These changes make Ashley more identifiable as a partner for Leon than as a burden in the remake.

Losses on Belonging

Belonging, according to Kraus (2006), might deal with self-positioning and positioning by others amidst certain society. In the context of video games, belonging might refer to the roles of the characters that might experience a shift of roles when textually pluralized. Unknown of Bandai Namco's *Tekken Tag Tournament*, for example, is the resexualization of Jun Kazama. The resexualization turns Jun evil, as indicated by an almost entirely naked appearance. This transformation from innocent protagonist into uncontrollable primary antagonist signifies a loss of belonging.

Loss of belonging might also emerge from the crossovers of one title with the other titles through downloadable contents (DLC) or in-game unlockables. Bandai Namco's *Tales* series, for instance, consistently offers DLC costumes from the previous *Tales* series. The belongingness of the characters that wear costumes of the other characters might shift and blur of the belonging. Shifts on belonging occur when thematic costumes like school uniforms, beach outfits, or hot spring wears are put on the characters. On the other hand, blurs on belonging occur when characters with the same tropes, archetypes, or roles wear the costumes from the previous titles of *Tales* series. The shift or blur on belongingness might occur also in a game tradition conventionally called in the game industry as summer or swimsuit party or edition aimed at fan service. Due to this fan service, the narratives of the games might be shifted. *Tales of* series traditionally and consistently have these revealing costume DLCs that the characters can wear anytime. The belongingness is shifted when swimsuits or the other revealing attires

are worn for battle or they have positive battle attributes e.g. a rise on defensive points.

A Typology of Strategies to Prevent the Intertextual Distortion of Resexualized Characters in the Textual Pluralities of Video Games

The reasons behind the emergence of intertextual losses within game series might involve cultural concerns, legal considerations, gaming trends and technologies, fan reactions, and attempts to garner new audiences. In the context of resexualization, the findings indicate that three strategies of preventing intertextual losses could be formulated. They are signaturization, alternation, and intratextualization.

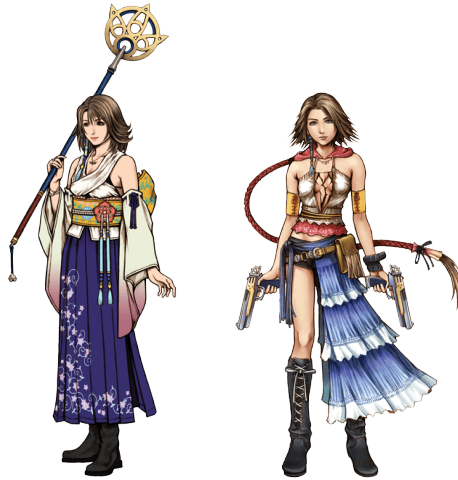
Signaturization

Signaturization deals with preserving signature elements of the resexualized game characters. The signature elements might encompass visual aspects like costumes, textual aspects like catchphrases, and mechanical aspects like moves. These signature elements define the game characters and from which fans recognize and identify the characters. Through the preservation of these elements, intertextual losses could be prevented. Arika's *Street Fighter EX* and *Fighting Layer EX* have a character called Skullomania. He has a signature tight costume with the motif of skeleton and red scarf, has a signature catchphrase 'skullo' that he suffixed it with the names of the attack, and has signature acrobatic move-based attacks. All of these signature elements are preserved when Skullomania was resexualized into a female in SNK's *SNK Heroines Tag Team Frenzy*.

Signature elements that are preserved through signaturization might also take an iconic symbol that functions as a motif and leitmotif for the games. The narratives of Square Enix's *Final Fantasy X* and its sequel *Final Fantasy X-2* could be symbolically summed up through the icon of Zanarkand Abes, a *blitzball* club in the game. The icon with three points is vividly perceivable from the pants of Tidus, the main protagonist of *Final Fantasy X*, the tattoo of Jeht, the father of Tidus, and an accessory on the chest of Yuna, who was Tidus' love interest, in *Final Fantasy X-2*. That Yuna wears this icon in the sequel points to an attempt to preserve narrative intertextuality between the original and the sequel of the game. Uniquely, the icon of Zanarkand Abes that Yuna wears in *Final Fantasy X-2* tends to function also as a narrative device that indicates a change of personality from a gloomy Yuna into

Figure 6

Yuna of Final Fantasy X and Yuna of Final Fantasy X-2



Note: Images taken from Final Fantasy X and X-2 (Nomura, 2001; 2003).

a cheerful Yuna. These cheerful personalities to some extent are what define the icon wearers, as seen from Tidus and his father.

Signaturization poses problems when the icons of the game characters tend to be overlapping. Square Enix's *ActRaiser Renaissance*, a remake of Enix's *ActRaiser*, has a character that goes by the name Angel. As the name implies, she is stereotypically portrayed with wings and a halo. The problem lies in the fact that the original *ActRaiser*'s Angel is portrayed to resemble a baby that might signify purity. When Angel was brought into the remake, she was portrayed as a girl with a revealing outfit. The wings and halo were preserved to signify the status of an angel but the baby portrayal was altered and resexualized. An angel with the physics of a baby might be categorized as a cherub to which religious nuances are embedded. Thus, the status of being an angel in the original *ActRaiser* tends to be more holistic since it has a religious reference. Due to the presence of this religious reference, all the icons of wings, halo, and the physics of a baby play a significant and completing role in iconizing angel.

Alternation

Another strategy to prevent intertextual losses is to create an alternative narrative for the resexualized game characters. This

alternate narrative might serve the main narrative in the form of a spin-off or reimagination. Namco's *Tekken Tag Tournament's* Unknown, for example, is the resexualized form of Jun Kazama, one of pivotal characters in the mythpoetic world of *Tekken*, the main installment and the source reference for *Tekken Tag Tournament*. Jun Kazama's modest appearance is completely altered when she turns into a creature called Unknown. The creature's attire has ripped-cloth style that reveals some parts of her body. To preserve the intertextuality of the narratives, a background narrative was made – Unknown was an evil that takes Jun's body. This evil possession narrative is common in the narratives of *Tekken* since the story centers around devil genes and the curse of Mishima family, to which Jun becomes a part of.

Figure 7

Jun into Unknown.



Note: Images taken from *Tekken Tag Tournament* (Ishii, 1999; 1999).

The added narrative background, as seen from the case of Unknown, comprises micro and macro scales of narratives. Micro scales tend to revolve around the narratives of the characters while macro scales around the narratives of the fictional world. This can be seen from SNK's *SNK Heroines: Tag Team Frenzy*. The gender bending of Terry Bogard into Cutie Terry is rationalized through the narratives of drifting into another world or famously called as *isekai*. It was told that Kukri brought

the male Terry into the world of girl fighters and thus, he underwent a transformation into a girl to allow Terry to engage in a fight against the other girl fighters.

Alternation for intertextual continuity of resexualized characters in games might also take the form of side quests. These types of quests aim at providing different perspectives in viewing the narratives of the games primarily from the eyes of non-playable characters (NPC). In some cases, resexualization is added into a side quest. One of the examples is Bandai Namco's *Tales* series. This can be seen on the presence of taking bath in spa in almost all of the series. When the spa bathing side quests are unlocked, all of the characters, male and female alike, will wrap their bodies only with towels. That the characters have walked through hardships and trodden tumultuous terrains due to which they needed a means to freshen themselves is the logic behind the spa bathing side quest. Through spa, wearing a towel is plausibly justified and through this justification, intertextual losses might be prevented.

Another strategy of applying alternation is also visible from the use of *henshin* or transformation formula. Through this formula, characters undergo a significant transformation that alters their appearances and boosts their power. Interestingly this transformation formula is also utilized to resexualize certain characters. Koei Tecmo's *Dynasty Warriors: Strikeforce* has a flamboyant character by the name Zhang He. The claw users will completely go without uppers, leaving only shoulder pads to protect, when transforming through a mode called Fury. A tattoo in the shape of purple butterfly adorns the nude parts of his upper body.

One visible problem of alternation is the problem of canonization. *Tekken Tag Tournament*, *SNK Heroines: Tag Team Frenzy*, and *Dynasty Warriors: Strikeforce* tend to fall into the category of spin-offs and thus, the narratives that take place in the games tend to not be canon. Due to this status of being non-canon, the attempts to prevent intertextual losses might have the impression of being trivial. Due to this trivial impression, any resexualization in the spin-off games tends to have less strength in rationalizing the ideas of behind the resexualization except only for fan service.

Intratextualization

Intratextualization roots from intratextuality. The term, as discussed by Sharrock (2000), revolves around the relation between parts of a text from which part-to-part and part-to-whole relations surface as

opposed to intertextuality, investigated by Still and Worton (1993), that claims the impossibility for a text to be hermetic. This strategy deals with rationalizing intrinsic elements of game narratives to ensure that the resexualized characters are not intertextually lost. When intertextual losses could be prevented, game developers or publishers might not suffer backlash from the fans for being not faithful to the source materials.

Through this strategy, a particular resexualized character is made plausible through a narrative revelation that the intrinsic elements that surround the sexualized characters are logical and plausible. Noel Vermillion of Arc System Works' *Blazblue* series, for instance, underwent a transformation into her resexualized cyborg form going by the name Mu-12. In *Blazblue: Calamity Trigger*, she still retained her human form. When a sequel was made, *Blazblue: Continuum Shift*, Noel was revealed to have a true form, Mu-12. To justify the narrative plausability of the resexualization, Mu-12 is visualized to have cybernetic parts and revealing skin. Through this combination, narrative plausability that Mu-12 has a human side is preserved.

In some cases, intratextualization might be influenced by intertextuality. This intratextualization-intertextuality relationship, in the context of video games, occurs in games that have become a franchise or an icon. When the game franchises were purchased by game publishers that had their own icons, the purchased franchises would be intertextually influenced by the new owner's icons. This influence is embedded through the intrinsic elements of the purchased game franchises and their intratextual relations. One of the examples is Lara Croft. Lara Croft is resexualized through sexual de-objectification when Square Enix bought the rights of *Tomb Rider*. Since the focus shifts to survival, Lara's iconic short pants were replaced with the long ones. Her chests were also downtoned to align her appearance with the theme of survival along with time and place settings that logically would have triggered a disruption of narrative if the iconic pants and unnatural chest size had still been applied. The shift from sexualized Lara Croft into "desexualized" one, as studied by Miller and Summers (2007), sparked a debate among fans from which it can be understood that Square Enix has its own branding in making a game that intertextually influences the intratextual elements of *Tomb Rider* and Lara Croft. Square Enix is iconic with Japanese role-playing games (JRPG) and these JRPG elements were embedded on the intrinsic elements of Lara Croft. This

decision results in a hybrid mechanics of action RPG from which Lara Croft is identical to and JRPG from which Square Enix is well-known of.

Figure 8

Lara Croft before and after being acquired by Square Enix.



Note: Images taken from Tomb Raider (Gard, 2001; 2013).

Intratextualization that addresses the intertextuality of certain games also often appears in the context of the universe or in mythopoesis fashion. In this fashion, certain resexualized characters are narratively connected with the world created by the same developer or publisher. Poison, for example, was first designed by Capcom for the narrative world of a beat 'em up game called *Mighty Final Fight*. There she lived with a gang called Mad Gear in Metro City. When she was resexualized – graphically enhanced to align with newest game platforms, she was presented in Capcom's other mythopoesis – the world of *Street Fighter*. Her appearance along with the other characters from *Mighty Final Fight* like the trio protagonists Haggar, Cody, and Guy and also her Mad Gear gang mates like Hugo, Sodom, Abigail, and Rolento indicates that Metro City is a part of Street Fighter world. This mythopoetic share is strengthened also by the presence of stages taken from Metro City.

The problem with intertextuality adhered intratextualization might appear when the worlds are not shared but the characters are.

This can be seen, as an example, from Cid, a recurring character in the mythopoesis of the *Final Fantasy* series. Since the second installment, a character by the name “Cid” always appears in each of the entries. Each Cid has different visual images and narratives for each *Final Fantasy* but those Cids share similar narrative backgrounds and motifs – being a scientist and into the technology of airships. Problems occur when *Final Fantasy XV* came out with seemingly two Cids. The first Cid was Cid Sophiar, a technophile and vehicle related expert, and Cidney Aurum, Cid Sophiar’s granddaughter who shares similar archetype with her grandfather. In the Japanese version Cidney Aurum was the official name. If this official name is taken as a basis of character canonization of Cid, then, it implies that Cidney is resexualized through RT1. When the game was localized for North American market, the name Cidney was replaced by Cindy and that left with only one Cid – her grandfather.

Discussion

The Impacts of Resexualization on the Coherence of the Narratives in the Textual Pluralities of Video Games

Textual pluralities are in the same wavelength with what Genette (1997) calls as literature at the second degree. Adaptations, remasters, remakes, reboots, reimaginings, and the other texts that could be traced back of having a source text embrace this label of being literary work at second degree. This label or status might evoke the problems of coherence. Coherence, as studied by West and Turner (2010), revolves around internal consistency in a narrative.

In the context of resexualization, the internal consistency might be disrupted. The disruptions could be seen from three elements of narrative coherence. These elements, as implied by Hyvärinen et al. (2010), encompass linearity, chronological order, and thematic closure. Resexualized characters might influence these three elements. The influences might root from different technological advancement of gaming platforms. The example of Jessie Rasberry of *Final Fantasy VII: Remake*, as discussed on the introduction part, points out how the advancement of gaming technology discloses opportunities to expand the narratives to rationalize the resexualization. This expansion triggers the problems of narrative linearity, chronological order of the story, and the theme that Jessie brings between the source story and the remake. This condition further implies that disruptions of internal consistency

might also disrupt the intertextuality between the textual pluralities and the source games.

The relation between intratextuality and intertextuality in literary works, as implied by Fabre-Serris (2018), might help comprehend the genesis and the ingenuity of the works. Why certain games decide to resexualize or desexualize their characters and how they prevent intertextual losses from emerging could be investigated from the how intratextual elements of the pluralized games interact with the source materials intertextually. Thus, textual, visual, and mechanical coherences of the pluralized and the source games could be designed. These coherences in the context of video games revolve around the game characters. Through the game characters, the narrative coherence of video games, according to de Mul (2015), contributes to the contingency of events. Departing from this perspective, we can say that resexualized characters do not play a significant role only to the characters themselves but also to everything surrounding the characters.

Conclusion

Textual pluralities of video games influence the narratives of the games including their intrinsic elements, among them characters. These characters, due to considerations over current generations of gaming platforms and players, might undergo a resexualization. Two types of resexualization might take place when games are textually pluralized namely resexualization type 1 (RT1) and resexualization type 2 (RT2). The former deals with gender-bending and the latter with sexual objectification and de-objectification.

The consequences of resexualization are intertextual losses. These losses disrupt the intertextual connection between the original and remade games. The disruption might occur since the resexualized characters might have their narratives expanded. Through narrative expansion, the resexualized characters might possess a bigger and plausible role. On the other hand, narrative expansion might indicate unfaithfulness to the original game symbolically or thematically.

To prevent or minimize these losses, three strategies are constructed. They are signaturization that emphasizes on the preservation of iconic elements of the source characters, alternation that focuses on providing logical and rational narrative background through the introduction of new narratives, and intratextualization that rationalizes the intrinsic elements surrounding the resexualized characters.

Game developers could benefit from the results of this study especially the strategies of preventing intertextual losses when game characters are resexualized in the context of textual pluralities. By paying attention to the possibilities of having intertextual losses, game developers could strengthen the connection between the original or source games or materials with the textual pluralities of the games. Game developers could implement the most befitting strategies that are in line with their purposes of in resexualizing their characters.

Future studies could address the influences of textual pluralities on the canonical status of the resexualized characters in video games. The studies could construct what could be called as narrative or text vulnerability of the textually pluralized texts to indicate whether vulnerability levels are reciprocally connected to the losses of canonical status of the resexualized characters. Future studies could also further investigate how game developers or publishers attempt to canonize the resexualized characters through different lenses of canonization (Cawelti, 1997; Emmerich, 2013).

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