

THE PSYCHGEIST OF POP CULTURE:

THE LEGEND OF
ZELDA



EDITED BY ANNAYAH M.B. PROSSER, PHD

THE PSYCHGEIST OF POP
CULTURE

THE PSYCHGEIST OF POP CULTURE

THE LEGEND OF ZELDA

ANNAYAH M.B. PROSSER, PHD.



PLAY STORY PRESS
An Open Community Publishing Consortium



Psychgeist of Pop Culture Copyright © 2025 by Play Story Press is licensed under a Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial-NoDerivatives 4.0 International License, except where otherwise noted.

Copyright © by Psychgeist & Play Story Press™ 2025

Pittsburgh, PA

<https://playstorypress.org/>

ISBN: 978-1-257-75769-5 (Print)

ISBN: 978-1-257-69698-7 (Digital)

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.17613/tz6sv-p4z31>

No part of this text may be used to train artificial intelligence systems without the written permission of Psychgeist, the editors, and Play Story Press.

TEXT: The text of this work is licensed under a Creative Commons BY-NC-ND 4.0 (<https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-nd/4.0/>)

IMAGES: All images appearing in this work are property of the respective copyright owners, and are **not** released into the Creative Commons. The respective owners reserve all rights.

CC Signal: CC Credit Direct Contribution 0.1

<https://github.com/creativecommons/cc-signals>

COVER image courtesy of Omar Prestwich on Unsplash (https://unsplash.com/photos/brown-rock-formation-during-daytime-x_GX30LcR-c). Unsplash grants you an irrevocable, nonexclusive, worldwide copyright license to download, copy, modify, distribute, perform, and use photos from Unsplash for free, including for commercial purposes, without permission from or attributing the photographer or Unsplash. This license does not include the right to compile photos from Unsplash to replicate a similar or competing service.

Psychgeist® is a registered trademark of Rachel Kowert.

Nintendo is not involved in any way in this publication

All submissions and questions should be sent to:

editors@playstorypress.org

For formatting guidelines, see:

<https://playstorypress.org/play-story-press-style-guide/>

✿ Formatted with Vellum

EDITOR'S NOTE

Many chapters discuss plot points from different games in the series, and may contain spoilers for the game's main story. Almost all chapters discuss the *Breath of the Wild* and *Tears of the Kingdom* story and characters in detail. Continue with caution if you want to avoid spoilers!

CONTENTS

Psychgeist of Pop Culture Series	xiii
List of Games and In-Text Abbreviations	xv
INTRODUCTION	I
Annayah M.B. Prosser, PhD.	
COURAGE	
ORACLE OF MOTIVATIONS	7
<i>Exploring the Psychology of Link's Quest</i>	
George Farmer & Danielle Kelly, PhD.	
GROWING INTO THE HERO OF HYRULE	25
<i>The Legend of Zelda Series Through a Growth Mindset</i>	
Charalambos "Harry" Loizides	
THE LONELY SWORDSMAN?	40
<i>Link's Path from Loneliness to Friendship</i>	
Rowan Daneels, PhD. & Anisha Chintoe, MSc.	
POWER	
TRIFORCE'S DARK AND LIGHT	59
<i>The Personality Psychology of Link and Ganondorf</i>	
Alexander MacLellan, PhD.	
MORAL IDENTITIES IN HYRULE	76
<i>Heroes or villains? Beneficiaries or victims?</i>	
Kathryn B. Francis, PhD.	
"HEY, LISTEN!"	90
<i>How music and sound emotionally connects players to the world, gameplay and story of The Legend of Zelda</i>	
Niall McLoughlin, PhD.	

WISDOM

YOUR PRINCESS IS IN ANOTHER BODY	107
<i>Zelda, Fluidity and Transformation</i>	
Celeste Sangiorgio, PhD.	
SMASH THE POT, BREAK THE BINARY	123
<i>LGBTQ+ Psychology and Hyrule</i>	
Anthony J. Gifford, MSc.	
SURVIVING (CLIMATE) CALAMITY AND UPHEAVAL	140
<i>Real-World Lessons from Hyrule</i>	
Annayah M.B. Prosser, PhD.	
Notes	155
About the Editor	191
About the Authors	193
About Play Story Press	199



PSYCHGEIST OF POP CULTURE SERIES

Play Story Press

Pittsburgh, PA

Series Editor: Rachel Kowert, PhD

Over the last few decades, interest in pop psychology has grown faster than our Netflix backlogs. This series highlights iconic pop culture content from television, film, literature, and video games through an examination of the psychological mechanisms that endear us to these stories for a lifetime.

SERIES TITLES

The Witcher (2023), edited by Rachel Kowert, PhD

The Mandalorian (2024), edited by Jessica E. Tompkins, PhD

The Umbrella Academy (2024), edited by Arienne Ferchaud, PhD

Bluey (2024), edited by Kelli Dunlap, PsyD

Stranger Things (2024), edited by Anton Roberts

Taylor Swift (2024), edited by Rachel Kowert, PhD

Destiny (2025), edited by Jared Kilmer, PhD

Dragon Age (2025), edited by Christine Tomlinson, PhD

Warhammer (2025), edited by Ioannis Costas Battle, PhD

The Last of Us (2025), edited by Adrienne Domasin, PhD

The Elder Scrolls (2025), edited by Amelia Herbst, PsyD

Legend of Zelda (2025), edited by Annayah M.B. Prosser, PhD

LIST OF GAMES AND IN-TEXT ABBREVIATIONS

All games published and licensed by Nintendo.

Games referenced according to the system they were first released on.

The Legend of Zelda series: LoZ

Mainline Series Entries

The Legend of Zelda (1986): TLoZ¹
Zelda II: The Adventure of Link (1987)- Z2²: AoL
The Legend of Zelda: A Link to the Past (1991)³: ALttP
The Legend of Zelda: Link's Awakening (1993)⁴: LA
The Legend of Zelda: Ocarina of Time (1998)⁵: OoT
The Legend of Zelda: Majora's Mask (2000)⁶: MM
The Legend of Zelda: Oracle of Seasons (2001)⁷: OoS
The Legend of Zelda: Oracle of Ages (2001)⁸: OoA
The Legend of Zelda: A Link to the Past (2002)⁹: ALttP
The Legend of Zelda: Four Swords (2002)¹⁰: FS
The Legend of Zelda: The Wind Waker (2002)¹¹: WW
The Legend of Zelda: Four Swords Adventures (2004)¹²: FSA
The Legend of Zelda: The Minish Cap (2004)¹³: TMC
The Legend of Zelda: Twilight Princess (2006)¹⁴: TP
The Legend of Zelda: Phantom Hourglass (2007)¹⁵: PH
The Legend of Zelda: Spirit Tracks (2009)¹⁶: ST
The Legend of Zelda: Skyward Sword (2011)¹⁷: SS
The Legend of Zelda: A Link Between Worlds (2013)¹⁸: ALBW
The Legend of Zelda: Tri Force Heroes (2015): TFH
The Legend of Zelda: Breath of the Wild (2017)¹⁹: BotW
The Legend of Zelda: Tears of the Kingdom (2023)²⁰: TotK
The Legend of Zelda: Echoes of Wisdom²¹ (2024): EoW

Spin-offs mentioned:

Hyrule Warriors (2014)²²: HW
Hyrule Warriors: Age of Calamity (2020)²³: HW: AoC

INTRODUCTION

ANNAYAH M.B. PROSSER, PHD.

“Courage need not be remembered, for it is never forgotten.”

-Princess Zelda, Breath of the Wild¹

Since its humble beginnings on the Famicom system in 1986, The Legend of Zelda series has captivated millions of players worldwide. The series reshaped the action-adventure genre internationally, bridging between traditional action and puzzle genres and captivating the imagination of players old and young. The games have been a staple of Nintendo’s brand for almost four decades: at time of writing, a Legend of Zelda game has been playable on every single Nintendo console released. The franchise is also one of Nintendo’s most profitable series, with over 150 million copies sold since its inception².

The series has evolved over the years, experimenting with new approaches to gameplay, puzzle design, story and character. The addition of two open-world entries to the series: Breath of the Wild (BotW) in 2017 and Tears of the Kingdom³ (TotK) in 2023 has shaken up our player experience and the games industry. These recent additions to the series have been enormous successes, each selling over

20 million copies within their first two years on the market. These games also introduced many new players to the series, and reignited the love many older fans had for the games.

Numbers alone cannot explain why the series has been so successful. There is so much more to the series than the game mechanics and commercial success. These games resonate with us for so many reasons. They have much to teach us about our psychology, the natural environment, and the many challenges we face today. As we approach the fortieth anniversary of the series, this collection of chapters illuminates the psychological and social science behind the series. With a particular focus on the first two open-world entries in the series (BotW and TotK), this book explores just what makes this series so special for so many of us around the world.

In classic Zelda tradition, we have grouped our entries around the different pieces of the iconic Triforce. Starting with our chapters on *'Courage'*, we begin our journey focussing on the heroes of the series- exploring what their trials, tribulations and growth can teach us about our own lives. George Farmer and Danielle Kelly start by teaching us about the psychology of Link's quest- using self-determination theory to help us understand motivation. Next, Harry Loizides teaches us about the value of growth mindset- exploring how the series helps players to develop both confidence and competence in their gameplay. Finally, Anisha Chintoe and Rowan Daneels use the open-world entries to discuss how both friendship and loneliness impacts our lives and our gameplay.

Next, we move into the chapters on *'Power'*, exploring the darker side of the series and how the game design empowers us to take particular actions. Alexander MacLellan begins by investigating the personality psychology behind the 'dark' and 'light' characters at the centre of the series: Link and Ganon. Next, Kathryn Francis uses moral psychology to help us better understand the moral and immoral choices players make throughout the games. Finally, Niall McLoughlin sheds light on the music theory and psychology behind

the game's evocative soundtrack- showing us how very subtle cues can help us to navigate the world.

We conclude with our chapters on '*Wisdom*', further exploring what the characters and stories in the game can teach us about real-world social issues, and how to address them. Celeste Sangiorgio interrogates representations of gender within Princess Zelda's story and character arcs throughout the series. Anthony Gifford uses LGBTQ+ psychology to interrogate queer representation throughout the games. Finally, I (Annayah Prosser) conclude by sharing five lessons that Hyrule can teach us about reckoning with real-world climate calamity and upheaval.

Our authors all come from a variety of different backgrounds across psychology and the social sciences. Some of us are research faculty, others early career scholars, and others work as educators, in practice and in the games industry. But despite our diverse perspectives, we are all united in our love for the Zelda series and for teaching others. This book has been a labour of love, and we can't wait for you all to learn more about what the Legend of Zelda can teach us.

COURAGE

ORACLE OF MOTIVATIONS

EXPLORING THE PSYCHOLOGY OF LINK'S QUEST

GEORGE FARMER &
DANIELLE KELLY, PHD.

*The Legend of Zelda (LoZ)*¹ features Link in all his 8-bit glory: a blocky-looking green tunic with a matching hat, tanned elven features with a shock of brown hair, and dark brown accessories, including a sword and shield. Since 1986, there have been many iterations of Link. Some look mature and older² and some are portrayed in a younger-looking cartoon style³, but all have one thing in common: the ineffable promise of a call to adventure. Much to Link's chagrin, he is destined to restore balance as the Hero of Time by removing the existential threat to the land, prophesized to restore the Triforce or wield the iconic Master Sword and defeat the all-encompassing evil, usually the warlord Ganon.

This is evident from the start of *A Link to the Past (ALttP)*. Link emerges from his slumber due to a telepathic plea from Princess Zelda for her rescue in the depths of Hyrule Castle's dungeons. Link ignores his uncle's pleas to remain within the safety of his home to trek through the relentless rain lashing down onto a desolate Hyrule Castle, lightning crawling across the skies of Hyrule and illuminating the towering architecture to find his uncle, who had himself journeyed to the castle to find the captured Princess Zelda, grievously

wounded. Link's uncle entrusts Link with his sword and shield and, ultimately, the Hero's mission: rescue the Princess who lies deeper within the Castle and defeat the evil wizard Agahnim.

Across Link's many adventures, Link's journey is a testament to the power of determination as he solves dungeon puzzles, gathers vital resources such as weapons and armour, and manifests the power of friendship from his allies in the battle against evil. Through Link's plight, we experience firsthand his growth from undisciplined boy to fierce warrior of Hyrule worthy of saving Princess Zelda. The land of Hyrule has many working parts, including the diversity of its geography and people. Link is one large cog in an otherwise monolithic machine. However, how Link navigates his place in this fictional world as the Hero of Time can teach us valuable insights into our psychological potential.

In this chapter, we explore the psychological factors involved in Link's quest and how Link's behaviour can be explained through a popular psychological theory of motivation known as Self-determination Theory⁴. We begin this chapter with a brief review of this theory, followed by a breakdown of its principles and their presence within the Legend of Zelda (LoZ) series. This will be followed by a more in-depth exploration of each principle of Self-determination Theory and their relevance to Link's Quest. Finally, we close the chapter by summarising our thoughts on Link's Quest and how we, the players, grow alongside our Hero.

PART ONE: A BRIEF REVIEW OF SELF-DETERMINATION THEORY

Self-determination Theory (SDT)⁵ is a theory of human motivation that allows us to explain why we engage in specific behaviours. I'm sure that you, dear reader, have often wondered why you have engaged in activities such as sports, coffee with a friend, or even picking up a dust-covered *Nintendo DS* and playing *Phantom Hourglass (PH)*. Such behaviours can also be explained by a theory known

as basic psychological needs theory⁶, which suggests that we have inherent psychological needs fundamental to our psychological well-being.

These needs are broken down into three core principles: autonomy – the psychological need for independence when acting; competence – the psychological need for mastery over our actions; and relatedness – the psychological need to engage in activities with others. By the end of this chapter, we hope that you will understand how the *Zelda* series helps you to fulfil your own psychological needs through the experience of Link's Quest.

The language of SDT is all about how we can fulfil our basic needs through engaging in different kinds of activities. We can also choose an activity that helps us fulfil multiple needs simultaneously. Video Games are an enjoyable entertainment medium because they allow us to fulfil many kinds of psychological needs at once (for example, the need for improved mood and reduced stress, or the need for social interaction)⁷.

Generally speaking, it is not the video game itself, but the mechanisms and feedback loops that the game has within it that allow us to fulfil psychological needs⁸. For instance, games that encourage exploration of vast swathes of digital land can facilitate autonomy experiences within players because they are provided with the agency to decide how to play the game that best suits their preferences⁹. Game design features that encourage the player to obtain and wield powerful weapons or slay colossal monsters help to facilitate feelings of competence because they allow players to feel powerful as characters in the digital world, and that their actions have meaning in the world around them. Meanwhile, mechanics such as competitive play or encouraging cooperation between other players or non-playable characters (NPCs) promote relatedness-based experiences by engaging in actions with other individuals.

Think about the different ways in which you have played a *Zelda* game, perhaps about the opportunities the games have provided you to fulfil your own psychological needs. Imagine that you are back on

the open ocean of *The Great Sea* from *Wind Waker (WW)*, aboard the talking sailboat The King of Red Lions and ready to search for treasure. Perhaps you have just climbed the Dueling Peaks from *Breath of the Wild (BotW)* for the first time, wondering which way to travel to begin your mammoth task of completing the shrines. Or maybe you have reached the forest grove in *ALttP* where the mythical weapon of the Hero of Time lies, the fabled Master Sword. You are encouraged by the accomplishment of pulling the sword from the stone, akin to Arthurian legend, which clears the mysterious fog; you hear the music swell, and you know that you are prepared to face the challenge that lies before you. Why are these experiences so significant to us? Why do we remember them so well? The answer may lie in the autonomy the *Zelda* games offer us.

PART TWO: AUTONOMY – BECOMING YOUR OWN HERO

“If I was a seagull, I would fly as far as I could! I could fly to faraway places and sing for many people!”

– Marin, *Link’s Awakening*

The development of Link from a young boy to a Hylian warrior is not an easy one. A common theme between the games in the *Zelda* series is that Link sets off on his adventures unskilled. Starting as the plucky hero, Link does not have access to the requisite levels, items, or abilities that make the game easier or make you feel more heroic. Link merely holds a trusty sword in hand, discovering powerful items like the *Ocarina of Time (OoT)* along the way. While Link has a purpose, that purpose is often complex or difficult to visualise. Indeed, the mere scale of the mission that lies before them can be overwhelming, and playing as a low-level iteration of Link can feel harsh or difficult without access to greater armour, items, or weapons. However, this *frustration* of needs provides a challenge to

be met¹⁰. Playing as a weaker character motivates the player to find resources and train their in-game skills to become stronger, and in doing so, helps the player to feel more autonomous in their gameplay and competent in their ability to defeat enemies that may have once represented a significant challenge in the early stages of gameplay¹¹.

The open-world game design within the *Zelda* series, more synonymous with the recent *Zelda* titles, reflects this non-linear trajectory. Link aims to get from beginning to end, with the player left to investigate the world on their own terms, gaining experience, skills, and weaponry as they explore. The perception of choosing Link's journey and direction within *LoZ* provides some initial representation of implementing player autonomy in gameplay.

Autonomy in this form is well-aligned with Self-determination Theory (SDT). The basic psychological need for independence in this context is satisfied by the agency of choices that the player makes to help Link progress in his journey. Throughout the series, Link's journey, on average, requires completing eight dungeons, each containing a vital puzzle piece needed to proceed. While the player needs to make their way through all of them to complete the quest, they can choose Link's path to obtain each piece.

This overarching mechanic reflects how autonomy is created at the macro level within the game. The ability for players to make their own choices about how, why, and where they engage with the game supports feelings of player agency, granting independence to the player and making the game their own to a certain extent. However, this is not embedded within the game's design equally amongst all titles; *BotW*, for example, puts the focus on the player to travel the realm of Hyrule and complete the game in the way they prefers, whereas *Twilight Princess (TP)* can restrict the player's ability to travel to specific areas locked by the player's place in the overall story of the game.

This structured approach may contribute to feelings of autonomy frustration, that our autonomy-based needs are purpose-

fully not being met¹², which can contribute to poorer psychological well-being¹³. Autonomy Frustration refers to a feeling that external factors are directing our behaviour, limiting choice and creating feelings of pressure or a lack of control. If we consider this experience across the entire series, the ability to enjoy a *Zelda* game with full autonomy is sometimes hindered when it is necessary to complete all dungeons to reach the end of the game. In dungeon seven of *TLoZ*, for example, a key is required to access the rooms. However, if the key has been used previously, the player can get stuck, creating a clear sense of autonomy and frustration from the hindrance to progression, which has been associated with more ‘problematic’ video game behaviours, such as continuing to play despite negative consequences in the offline world¹⁴.

Conceptually, this hinders player agency in both theoretical terms, in that player choice only influences their experience to an extent, and subjective terms, in that players are aware that their choices will only influence their experience to an extent¹⁵. This is hindered even more so by areas of the game that cannot be accessed without reaching a certain level or threshold, meaning that participants still have some constraints on the narrative they choose to explore. Of course, this may vary depending on your experience of *Zelda* as a series, such as whether you are familiar with the areas that need certain items for the player to access (i.e., bombs to access hidden caves), or the inability to understand that some areas may need you to find stronger armour or weapons to make it easier to survive.

Therefore, fulfilling autonomy needs may be easier for those with greater experience of the game environment and mechanics. However, the original title in the *Zelda* series, *TLoZ*, became the foundation for developing games without these constraints. *Tears of the Kingdom (TotK)*, for example, features a non-linear open-world design, allowing players free rein over three unique worlds (the surface, the depths, and the skies) and the completion of 152 shrines that contain puzzle-based tasks. This game offers the greatest

opportunity to satisfy the autonomy needs of the player because their entire experience within the game is completely reliant on their choices.

Furthermore, the level of autonomy for players extends beyond the ability to choose their path, which creates the theoretical and subjective agency missing in *TLoZ*. We cannot deny that these changes are, in part, due to advancements in technology and game design. While the truly open world we see in *TotK* increases the opportunity for autonomy satisfaction, we do have to recognise that a truly open world would have been next to impossible on devices such as the *Game Boy Advance*, due to limitations in graphical power and memory.

We also must acknowledge that autonomy in gaming often refers not only to the path taken but also to the effects of choice on the game state¹⁶. For example, in *TotK*, player decisions dictate the route and the interactions experienced by players; the choices made can affect Link's conversations with other NPCs. When Link discovers Dondons, for example, he can inform the NPCs of what they truly are in his future interactions. Providing autonomy-satisfying experiences in a video game does not simply give a player complete freedom to explore all aspects of the game in their own way. It also requires players to feel that their choices independently influence their own experience, which fundamentally impacts the players' enjoyment of the game¹⁷.

These choices do not have to be purely related to the narrative. In fact, the player's feelings of autonomy can grow alongside Link's development as a hero. When Link initially starts his journey, he tends to start with a signature weapon, including his trusty wooden sword that he receives at the beginning of the original game. Unfortunately, with the implementation of the weapon stamina mechanic in modern iterations of the series (i.e. *BotW* & *TotK*), Link's trusty wooden sword is not so trusty, and it has limited survivability.

However, Link can trade the wooden sword for more powerful weapons as the game progresses. Link's options for additional

weaponry depend on the player's progress, with swords and shields hidden in various dungeons. For example, within *TLoZ*, the magical sword (the precursor to the Master Sword in later instalments of the game), can only be found in the graveyard, while the boomerang can be found in the first level and can help the player implement a different style of play. Here, autonomy is at the forefront of the player's choice. They choose the path Link takes, but also choose how he develops as a hero, changing his combat style depending on the type of weaponry they decide to arm him with.

However, as with the dungeon layout, there is likely to be an element of autonomy frustration for players when they encounter higher levels of weaponry. The magical sword, the strongest sword in *TLoZ*, will not be given to Link until he has accumulated 12 heart containers, which adds a heart to the player's total health bar. The options for Link's weaponry in the original game are stifled slightly by this approach. By preventing access to more powerful weapons or armour until the player has reached a suitable level of skill or exploration within the game, *TLoZ* limits player agency and, therefore, the player's enjoyment of the game. This seems to be a deliberate gameplay choice by the developers. While misguided in terms of agency, the prevention of access to more powerful weapons seems to be aimed more specifically at expanding gameplay. This mechanic encourages players to 'grind' through certain areas of the game until they reach a skill level high enough to wield these weapons. This process, while enjoyable for some players, reduces the enjoyment for others by removing their agency to enjoy the game as they please.

Despite this, we've come a long way from *TLoZ*. The modern iterations of *Zelda* games emphasise the player's freedom to explore Hyrule and adventure in their own way more than ever. *TotK* provides the perfect example of player autonomy and agency in choosing Link's journey, especially through its unique stance on Link's weaponry. Not only do you have the option to fuse weapons together, creating novel fusions with unique powers, but you can

also fuse normally inane objects together to create your own version of a weapon, something unique to the player and Link.

The Fuse ability integrates strategy, exploration and customisation elements that provide a unique experience for every player, cashing in on the vast expanse of an open-world game. This mechanic fosters autonomy above and beyond, supporting changes in combat. The system also encourages exploration and discovery as players scour the game world for rare and exotic materials to enhance their weapons. Weapon fusion is not purely a creative endeavour, though. Using the mechanic fosters strategic thinking, as players must carefully consider which combinations of armour and weaponry will best suit their challenges.

Developing autonomy can have significant impacts on player experiences. Generally, individuals will engage in activities that are likely to develop higher levels of autonomy and contexts that encourage personal choice and self-direction¹⁸. However, regardless of the setting, the development of autonomy can dramatically improve our lives; people who are highly autonomous are likely to show greater engagement and creativity in their physical lives (e.g. their relationships, work and general activities)¹⁹. *TotK*'s immersion provides ample opportunity for unique creations with their own skill set and reinforces the player's role as the driving force behind the adventure, making each triumph feel uniquely earned and deeply satisfying, perhaps in ways that are hard to come by in the offline world. By experiencing agentic play (i.e., moments in the *Zelda* series that fulfil our need for autonomy), this may help you to develop the ability to make choices and exert control over your decision-making throughout life²⁰. The satisfaction of overcoming challenges is also relative to the psychological need for competence, which we will discuss shortly.

However, it should be noted that the player's feelings of autonomy are not enough to facilitate self-determination. For a person to develop eudaimonic wellbeing (i.e. experiencing self-realisation, meaning and functioning optimally)²¹, all of our basic

psychological needs should be met. Each of these psychological needs has a separate direct impact on our overall psychological health²².

The weaponry throughout Link's journey within *TLoZ* and *TotK* shares a common feature that is key to our journey of self-realisation within the game. No matter whether the weapon is borne of the fuse skill or found within a more traditional item chest, the onus lies on the player to use what they find and create successful strategies for the challenges before them. This helps players fulfil another important psychological need: competence.

PART THREE: COMPETENCE – DEMONSTRATING YOUR SKILL AS A CHAMPION

“A sword wields no strength unless the hand that holds it has courage... you must use your courage to seek power...only then will you become the hero for whom this world despairs.”

– Hero's Shade, Twilight Princess.

Few achievements in life make us feel truly accomplished or challenge us in a way that is neither too easy nor too difficult. However, video games hold a unique capacity to engage players in a digital environment, also known as immersion²³, and provide an opportunity to practice or learn new skills in an engaging digital space²⁴ that makes us feel good about taking part²⁵. By playing video games such as the *Zelda* series, players have an accessible platform to be comfortably challenged and handed the reins on how they want to engage with puzzles or dungeons, as covered in the previous section on autonomy, which is especially noticeable in titles such as *BotW* and *TotK*. Despite the obstacles, the player must take inspiration from Link's courageous stand against evil, forging ahead and rising to the challenge when all hope appears lost to emerge victorious. The satisfaction of succeeding at a diffi-

cult task helps to facilitate a basic psychological need known as competence.

Competence satisfaction refers to the emotional experience associated with effectively completing a task, eventually considering yourself a ‘master’ of completing this task²⁶. Ultimately, the goal of the player is to achieve mastery in the game; to be extremely proficient and succeed at beating the final boss. Competence, however, is the foundation for this mastery. Players must feel that they are effectively progressing and working towards mastery if they are to remain motivated to engage with the game²⁷. This focus on development and progression towards mastery can be an important part of what makes video gaming entertaining in the first place²⁸.

Several design mechanics and findable items within the *Zelda* series help the player feel powerful, ultimately rewarding them for exploring the dense expanse of Hyrule. This can range from the use of special items that allow Link to solve puzzles in new ways, such as the use of bombs to blow up entryways into hidden cavern-like rooms, or the use of in-game music to signal that the player has found something important, such as a room key needed to progress to the next area of a dungeon.

If you have ever played *OoT*, you would likely be familiar with the infamous Water Temple, full of tricky puzzles and ways to confuse the player into losing their way through the labyrinthine waterworks, which is generally a harder challenge for those new to the *Zelda* series. Compared to other dungeon-delving experiences in the series, the intricacy of the temple’s design and the higher difficulty of the challenge it represents deliver a much more satisfying feeling of competence when beating the dungeon boss, the villain lying in wait to be defeated by our hero, marking the end of the dungeon.

The game further rewards the player by providing a ‘heart container’ or other rare treasure, such as Triforce Shards from *WW*, or special champion abilities in *BotW* and *TotK*. Players can then use these abilities and upgrades to increase their chances of success in

future combat scenarios, increasing feelings of competence and enjoyment that contribute to the gameplay and enjoyment feedback loop²⁹. This is a simple fact of behavioural psychology: we love to be rewarded for completing a task but often come up against what is known as the effort/reward imbalance³⁰. Video games, particularly the *Zelda* series, are very effective in providing suitable rewards relative to the effort we put in as a player, which is sometimes in stark contrast to the imbalance between effort and reward in the offline world. This is why playing video games can be so satisfying³¹.

In *TotK*, players are encouraged to combine their weapons and collectable monster parts to create powerful combination weapons using the Fuse ability, allowing players to be creative in their monster-slaying and gain new advantages in fighting or solving puzzles, which undoubtedly encourages feelings of competence within players. While the Fuse ability can create powerful weapons with unique abilities, no weapon quite compares to the *Master Sword*, Link's ultimate weapon. The weapon is often seen as the key to defeating *Ganon* and, in turn, is the crescendo to Link's growth as a hero. However, wielding the Master Sword is no easy feat; within the series lore, wielding the sword represents Link's development. The Master Sword can only be held by someone "true of heart and strong of body" (*ALttP* manual). As a result, Link (and consequently, the player) must demonstrate their worthiness before they can wield it.

Within *ALttP*, Link must first explore the lands in search of three pendants of virtue before having the power necessary to gain the sword. They must collect spiritual stones throughout their journey within the *OoT*. None of these items are found easily and require Link to develop their skills and health as he progresses through each game in search of these items. The Master Sword, as a result, feels like a true milestone for both the player and Link; all the effort that has gone into acquiring esoteric artefacts around Hyrule culminates in this one moment - lifting the sword from its stone. Therefore, the sword provides evidence of progression and is in many ways the ulti-

mate symbol of competence in the Zelda universe. Cognitive Evaluation Theory, a sub-theory within SDT, suggests that providing someone with opportunities to gain new skills or abilities creates feelings of competence and, in turn, intrinsic motivations³². The Master Sword provides an indication that both factors have been developed, creating motivation for the player to continue their journey³³.

This tangible evidence provides the foundation for the ultimate sign of Link's competence as a hero – defeating Ganon and saving Hyrule. Although wielding the Master Sword makes Ganon's defeat easier, the weapon alone is not enough. Upgrading abilities (by finding Sage's Will in TotK to upgrade attack strength, finding heart containers to increase health, or stocking up on Sundelions to heal from Gloom damage during battle becomes key to winning. The exploration required to reach Ganon with these intact already leads to a sense of achievement, only strengthened by the battle itself.

However, some may argue that Link's, and therefore the player's, reliance on items to fulfil a need for competence highlights how little competence Link, and the player, has to begin with. Yet, the use of these items demonstrates elements of both competence and autonomy. The inclusion of healing items provides the player with greater agency in deciding how to play, while the process of evaluating one's skill level compared to the challenge of a task demonstrates clear competence. Competence, whilst often related to feelings of progression and mastery, could be hindered by the repetitive defeat at the hands of a boss. Using healing items can often provide additional support to help with progression, preventing the player from losing motivation to continue due to a lack of progress.

Battling Ganon can also take various forms, and so competence also refers to the understanding of how to approach each form. Within *TLoZ*, for example, Ganon presents as invisible for most of the fight, only turning visible for a moment if hit with Link's sword. In comparison, Ganon has various forms in *BotW*, transforming from Calamity Ganon to Dark Beast Ganon. Ganon has different abilities

within each form, meaning Link must use all the skills and items collected on their quest, with different forms requiring different strategies.

For example, Calamity Ganon uses a laser as his primary method of attack, which can best be dealt with by using Link's shield to guard against it, while the phase of the fight against Beast Ganon takes place on a horse, requiring the use of precise aim from the battle-exclusive Light bow and arrow. When the use of Link's acquired skills leads to Ganon's downfall, Link's journey is complete, and his growth as a hero is evident. As the player engages with all the skills and items Link has collected over the course of their journey to defeat Ganon, they can feel confident in their own competence, not just Link's.

PART FOUR: RELATEDNESS – THE TRIFORCE OF FRIENDSHIP

“Yes, we are humans. We have neither the power of spirits nor demons. But when we combine our strength... No one can defeat us!”
– Princess Zelda, *Spirit Tracks*.

Managing and constructing social relationships is an essential and fundamental part of human existence. It is often said that individual success, especially in occupational contexts, is down to who we know rather than what we know³⁴. Perhaps you're familiar with the popular adage, 'If you scratch my back, I'll scratch yours'. It's a way of expressing an offer of a mutually beneficial social contract that appeals to both parties and provides a pathway to success where none previously existed. The last basic psychological need in the tripartite theoretical construct is relatedness, which is the need to perform actions with others³⁵. In this section of our chapter, we aim to show you that the *Zelda* series helps to fulfil this psychological need by encouraging social relationships, such as engaging in trans-

actional quests between Link and non-playable characters (NPCs), examining Link's relationships with what we refer to as 'mentor-type' characters, and exploring the different multiplayer *Zelda* games available.

Throughout Link's quest, we often encounter individuals who need help. From a typical fetch-quest, or an NPC that requires Link to demonstrate his heroism or skill. These types of interactions allow the player to learn more about the world they are playing in and are rewarded for engaging with characters in that world. This helps to provide a sense of belonging for the player³⁶, and can help encourage third-order parasocial interactions. This is in comparison to first-order interactions, which refer to relationships between an individual and media personalities (e.g., talk show hosts); third-order parasocial interactions refer to interactions with NPCs. These interactions can encourage emotional engagement, making the interactions feel more social³⁷. These parasocial interactions, which players assign meaning to³⁸, can additionally satisfy other psychological needs, such as competence, by providing in-game rewards³⁹.

Such relationships can be seen in Link's interactions with NPCs and characters integral to Link's journey, such as Impa, Ravio, and Princess Zelda in *A Link Between Worlds* (ALBW). For example, Ravio enters the game by saving Link after they are defeated in the opening sequence by Yuga, using the power of his magical bracelet to prevent Link from being trapped as a two-dimensional painting. Shortly after, Ravio organises a small shop in Link's house, providing useful items that Link could rent and use in his quest, such as the Ice Rod or the Gale Boomerang. At the start of the game, Ravio appears to be the opposite of Link: a coward who was too self-centred to intervene at a critical moment. However, as the game progresses and Link interacts with him more often, Ravio becomes more friendly towards Link (once the Master Sword has been gathered, Ravio allows Link to purchase instead of rent key items) and breaks through their hesitance in intervening with world events to convince Hilda (the Lorulian equivalent of Princess

Zelda) not to steal the Hyrulian Triforce towards the end of the game.

Furthermore, Link's success would not be possible without the intervention of his trusty allies. Many integral characters support Link, which can be in the form of emotional support, such as *Linebeck's* sea-faring knowledge from *PH*, or tangible support, such as providing weapons or armour, like the Old Man from *TLoZ*, who gifts Link his first sword. Moments like this provide the player with both an emotional connection to particular characters and create iconic moments in video gaming history ("*It's dangerous to go alone, take this!*"), which, for many, can encourage feelings of nostalgia and positive emotional states such as connectedness⁴⁰. These two concepts are not independent of one another. Nostalgia is often argued to be fundamentally social, with many memories or experiences of nostalgia being related to time spent with friends or family⁴¹. As a result, it has also been linked to the development of eudaimonic well-being, helping people develop self-actualisation and personal growth⁴². These feelings of nostalgia and connectedness are further implemented by the importance of characters such as Fi (*Skyward Sword; SS*) or Navi (*OoT*), considered iconic within the *Zelda* lore and featured in several titles in the series.

Another way to encourage feelings of relatedness can be through playing video games with another person, such as multiplayer games. The *Zelda* series features a limited number of multiplayer games, as the core titles often focus on Link's quest as a singular experience but have, from time to time, forayed into a more cooperative video game experience. For example, in *Four Swords/Four Swords Adventures*, you and three friends are tasked with teaming up to complete various stages associated with the *Zelda* games and completing puzzles requiring teamwork. Each player in the game independently controls a version of Link, or the group can align to form different kinds of tactical formations, such as the diamond formation (one Link facing each cardinal direction).

The multiplayer titles in the series allow for the completion of a

shared goal, usually the completion of a puzzle, a level, or the defeat of an imposing boss at the end of a stage. Even in games such as *TotK*, the player cannot proceed to specific areas of the game without the support of Link's companions. By providing a platform to work together, these games encourage players to feel that they are a part of a shared experience and encourage an environment of social support. This shared experience and increased social support facilitate the satisfaction of relatedness needs, which has a positive psychological impact on players' mental health⁴³. While the multi-player games in the *Zelda* series are not the most popular, they are important artefacts of video gaming, nonetheless. Engaging in healthy play behaviours, such as cooperative puzzle-solving, increases the likelihood of feeling more self-determined and can encourage psychological empowerment⁴⁴.

CONCLUSION

Self-determination is essential to a gamer's motivation. Without feelings of competence, autonomy, and relatedness, gamers are likely to lack connection to their protagonist counterpart, creating a lack of motivation and resilience. Creating self-determination within the *Zelda* series stems from various gameplay design approaches. Some of these approaches have been ingrained in the original game; *TLoZ*'s use of multiple dungeons and non-linear pathways creates a perception of player agency, encouraging players to choose their own path, but not without restriction. These restrictions are lifted in future games such as *TotK*, incorporating a much broader open-world design in which elements of exploration and investigation are rewarded. These elements create a sense of adventure and encourage player autonomy through choice and independent exploration.

Feelings of independence in an open-world game, while important for player autonomy, can be counterproductive without feelings of progression. Players require that their endless exploration and investigation provide tangible evidence of improvement. In the case

of Link, this evidence can take various forms. The ability to wield powerful weapons offered as a reward for exploration provides clear evidence that Link is growing as a hero, whilst defeating *Ganon* provides the ultimate reward, finishing the game, and Link's journey.

Link's journey is not completed in isolation, however. Characters such as *Ravio* provide much-needed support for Link throughout his journey (although this relationship is often transactional in nature). The support Link receives from characters throughout the *LoZ* series reflects the need for relatedness in the physical world. For people to develop meaning in their lives, they often need to feel that they are developing mutual relationships with others that result in deep bonds. While Link's relationships with characters such as *Ravio* are initially more superficial, his relationships with other characters, such as *Fi*, reflect much deeper ties. These third-order parasocial interactions reflect the social engagement we need in the physical world. It is difficult to have a meaningful life without meaningful relationships to share it with⁴⁵.

Link's journey to becoming a hero is not always linear, and the characters within the series often provide a backdrop for the complexity of Link's development. Sometimes, gaps in Link's competence require the assistance of another character, such as The Old Man or Linebeck. These relationships help support the development of competence and define Link's experience, creating an emotional connection on an otherwise isolated journey. These emotional connections create feelings of relatedness, completing the trifold, if you will, of psychological needs for self-determination. Completing this psychological trifold ultimately provides a path for the player to increase their enjoyment of the game⁴⁶, which is associated with greater psychological well-being⁴⁷.

Through our brief journey to explore Link's quest, we hope that you now understand the psychology behind the *Zelda* series a little better than before, discovering how you, the player, can find inspiration from Link's motivation and become more self-determined as a result.

GROWING INTO THE
HERO OF HYRULE
THE LEGEND OF ZELDA SERIES
THROUGH A GROWTH MINDSET
CHARALAMBOS “HARRY” LOIZIDES

“You and I must now ride into battle without the luxury of training. Then again... experience is the best teacher.”

-Urbosa, Hyrule Warriors: Age of Calamity¹

When we play games, we often come across challenges that, at first glance, seem insurmountable. A difficult button combination on the latest Tekken game, a tough legendary Pokémon constantly escaping capture, or a difficult Souls-born boss that you can't quite overcome - we have all been there and we have all come to the same diverging crossroad. We can either choose to give up and walk away from the challenge, or we can face the situation as a problem that has not been solved, yet.

The Legend of Zelda series is not an exception to this rule, as players have faced similar crossroads: walking in circles to find the old man in the cave with the sword in the original game, not fully understanding a cryptic hint in *Majora's Mask* (MM), or even the dreaded water temple in *Ocarina of Time*. However, the last two games in the franchise (*Breath of the Wild* [BotW] and *Tears of the Kingdom* [TotK]) have given players a new approach, or rather, a new

beginning. While players are still faced with seemingly unstoppable forces, the series does not stray away from issuing a "Game Over" splash screen with Link's imminent demise. While it can be easy to shrug it off and just accept the outcome of this failure, what if that ending ends up becoming a moment in your story instead of its conclusion.

In this chapter, I will provide an analysis of how the latest Legend of Zelda games in the series help cultivate a growth mindset in players through experimental play, gradually shaping them into the hero Hyrule deserves.

PERCEPTIONS OF A HERO

"Hey! Listen!"

-Navi, Ocarina of Time²

For decades, psychologists have challenged each other to examine the relationships between human behavior, brain function, and environment to best understand the human condition and improve the world we all live in³. This sort of analysis requires scores of research, excess of experiments, and a theory worth exploring. More recently, some psychologists have made a focused approach on how humans perceive themselves and how these perceptions can affect one's self^{4,5}.

Research has shown that the "*view you adopt for yourself profoundly affects the way you lead your life*"⁶. If you view your accomplishments in a diminished fashion, then your efforts afterwards can be subdued. If you view yourself as a nurturing caretaker, then your actions will continue to instill that perspective to yourself and reflect towards others. In both these cases, the person in question internalizes their viewpoint and proceeds to perpetuate that point of view towards others. Their actions become their defining characteristics

and not only is viewed within themselves, but also viewed towards others in society.

Take, for example, the opening sequences in *Twilight Princess (TP)*. The Link in this iteration starts off as a ranch worker in Ordon Village. There, he teaches the village children how to use a slingshot and sword. At that time, these were merely for protection and the betterment of the village. Link's perception of himself is not one of heroism, but as a person who is diligent with his work duties and purposeful for the simple tasks at hand. Eventually, Link is faced with a Shadow Beast, turns into a wolf, and is challenged to restore the light of Hyrule back to its original glory. In those moments, Link must now acknowledge that his self-identity as a simple ranch worker is no longer valid. Instead, he must face the notion that he is now the only hope for Hyrule. His actions are now reflections of his task, and ultimately, an indication of how successful he will be along this journey towards heroism.

LEARNING THE BASICS: FIXED AND GROWTH MINDSETS

"Dawn of a new day."

-Majora's Mask⁷

Like Link, many are forced to look within themselves and identify their own aspects of self-identity. How do I view myself? How am I gauging success? What qualifies failure for me? All these questions, layered one on top of another, begins the process of building one's mindset. This mindset becomes the foundation of each person's psyche and determines not only how they perceive themselves, but how they push forward towards the future.

Though many of the terminologies that will be mentioned in this chapter focus on a more modern approach, some of the earliest notions can be found during the Renaissance⁸. During this time, key

philosophers challenged the idea of what it meant to be a human and what attributes define humanity⁹. One key philosopher, Giovanni Pico della Mirandola, entertained the notion that humans have the innate ability to transform themselves through their free will¹⁰. It wasn't until the early 1900's when the notion of a mindset was first introduced in a more psychology-focused direction^{11,12}.

For the purposes of this chapter, we will be focusing on a duality of mindsets. A fixed mindset is the notion that intelligence and abilities are static traits that cannot be substantially changed¹³. One's abilities towards successes are already predefined and leave little room for any significant adjustments. As such, effort proves to be futile since their capacity to accomplish the goal at hand is purely determined by their current and natural state. If the person is not able to do something, then it's because of their static abilities, despite any action, learning, or grit on their part.

For this, let's look at Koloktos from *Skyward Sword (SS)*. Koloktos, a striking golden statue with six arms - two of which are holding large curved axes, can be a challenging dilemma.

With a fixed mindset, a player would just run up to the boss and attack it non-stop in hopes of completing the challenge. From their perspective, this brute-force approach has worked with other enemies in the game, so it should work in this instance. However, that may not be the case at this moment. With this mindset, since the player didn't defeat Koloktos, then it simply means that they'll always be unable to defeat said boss.

Conversely, a growth mindset is rooted in the idea that people are able to develop their abilities and intelligence through effort, learning, and persistence¹⁴. A person's current abilities is not their only course, but rather a starting point for what they can become and what they can accomplish. Instead of accepting the first outcome, people with a growth mindset are able to view these challenges as opportunities for improvement and development^{15,16}.

Continuing from the example above with a fixed mindset, instead of being content with losing against Koloktos, a change

needs to occur. With a growth mindset, the gamer needs to put in some effort, build up their resilience, and learn new strategies to improve and evolve their understanding of the enemy¹⁷. Rather than walking away from the problem, the player can reflect and adjust their journey towards success and eventually, victory against Koloktos.

THE OLD WAY OF LEARNING

“It’s dangerous to go alone! Take this.”

-*The Old Man, The Legend of Zelda*¹⁸

In previous games within the Zelda franchise, Link is often drip fed a very contrite and limited skillset. He is only given just enough abilities and weapons that are needed in the immediate moment for the specific challenges at hand and for the scripted moments. Though there may be moments of flexibility, a very intentional and deliberate strategy is necessary to advance the plot and gameplay.

For example, we can look at Arrghus in *A Link to the Past (ALttP)*¹⁹. This boss in the Dark World is a large one-eyed floating jellyfish creature that is protected by smaller creatures to prevent damage. The only way to optimally defeat this boss is with the Hookshot, which is conveniently located in the same palace as this boss. Players then learn that the weapon found in an area will have a direct impact on their success. This explicit loop of finding a new weapon then immediately using the weapon on the boss is effective, but predictable. Most Legend of Zelda games follow this procedure, and it can provide a wonderful experience for gamers. With that said, if players are only expected to use the weapon that they find immediately, then they are less likely to utilize a full breath of weaponry if they are only meant to be used in specific moments of the game.

With the newer games, like *BotW*²⁰ and *TotK*²¹, they present the

new features upfront in an introductory section. Players then aren't stuck in a viewpoint that each gameplay mechanic can only be used in focused locations. Instead, players are encouraged to dynamically adjust and create moments for each situation, without the expectation of one action or another solely being used.

THE GREAT PLATEAU FOR GROWTH

"Everyone can change and grow through application and experience."

-Carol Dweck, Mindset: The New Psychology of Success²²

For many games, the opening sequence serves a vital role for players. The first few moments are paramount to hook the player into the world, enchant them with the visuals, and engage them with game mechanics that could be used for hundreds of hours. Sometimes games flourish in the introduction, while others stumble to get their footing. In either case, allowing players to understand the rules of the world, while also allowing them to parse their understanding through various challenges can provide the satisfying experience any gamer would want to have.

With this in mind, let's take the opening area of *BotW*. Within seconds from starting this adventure, the game thrusts players into a new world with characters, mechanics, and abilities that Link has never previously possessed. Players are now excited to explore all these features, but are understandably cautious. This is a stark difference to most of the other previous games of the franchise. The unknown can be a very intimidating concept, so having a relatively safe space to try out these features and abilities can be imperative for players to fully understand the scope of possibilities that the game can deliver and ultimately have a more enjoyable experience²³.

As such, *BotW* delivers us The Great Plateau. This confined region serves as the tutorial area where players are encouraged to grow the possibilities of what they can achieve within the game²⁴. As Link,

you are able to explore the large, yet confined space, where you can uncover mysteries at every corner. You see strange looking shrines, mushrooms and herbs sprinkled around for cooking, and an ancient temple that all harken your attention. Any direction you go towards will provide opportunities for discovery and intrigue.

However, as you're on your merry way to discover what The Great Plateau has in store, you get instantly eviscerated by a powerful centaur-like monster known as a Lynel. This heavily muscled and imposing creature was a stark surprise to anything you've previously encountered within this game. The flash of the "Game Over" screen washes over your Nintendo Switch as you've fallen prey to this enemy.

In that quiet reflection you are forced to see the outcome of your actions. That moment, for better or worse, demonstrates an impasse. This impasse now challenges you to think "how is someone meant to defeat these potent enemies?"

FIXED TO LOSE OR GROW BEYOND EXPECTATIONS

"I'm sure an answer will come to you. Wisdom takes time."

-Queen Sonia, Tears of the Kingdom²⁵

One type of player could utilize a standard strategy - constantly attacking this Lynel with the same weapons and the same approach each and every time. This course of action, to them, would be the most logical and direct approach. Sheer strength, determination, and consistency with the enemy's counter moves is the only way to progress forward.

Unfortunately, this perspective is completely fixed towards their goal of defeating the Lynel. There is no regard to what has transpired in previous attempts. Instead, time and time again over those defeats yield the same outcome. This sort of fixed mindset can stifle a player's enjoyment of the game. Instead of persevering through their

struggle, they could get overly frustrated. That intense frustration could then force the player to walk away from the challenge of this game once and for all²⁶. Like someone struggling with a tough class in school, using the same study strategy hasn't been yielding better grades. So if your outcome hasn't changed, then your gameplan towards improving your grades needs to change.

However, what if the player learned from these defeats from the Lynel? With those lessons learned, they could craft new and meaningful strategies towards this goal. The opportunity for growth and newer strategies because of a loss or defeat is imperative for the player's journey. This moment allows players to take a pause, reflect on what has transpired, and formulate a newer strategy. Ideally, these strategies could build on what went wrong, what went right, and what can be done slightly better during that encounter.

One such opportunity of growth can occur with parrying an attack. To parry an attack, players need precision timing in hopes of deflecting an enemy's frontal attack and potentially stunning the enemy, leaving them exposed. Since this requires great timing, players can focus this skill on weaker enemies throughout the Great Plateau. Through that practice, players can grow their understanding of this strategy and employ it in a low-stakes encounter with less aggressive and less powerful enemies²⁷. Once they are confident in the technique, then they can replicate it towards larger and more powerful enemies, like the Lynel.

Continuing on this line of thinking, players can now formulate a meaningful long-term strategy to defeat this rival. One such strategy can be to master the Lynel's attacks and find new weapons to aid in clever counters to best the creature. Perhaps through some experimentation, you discover that range-based attacks with a bow and arrow can prove effective. You're able to attack the Lynel from a distance, while also allowing yourself time to conceal yourself from retribution. A mental note is taken from this new discovery and you continue to develop your depth of knowledge.

Another strategy could place the focus elsewhere, for the time

being. Instead of attacking the Lynel over and over again, redirecting your attention towards exploring The Great Plateau can prove fruitful in the player's growth. Through a side quest or two, players can find various new armors that are stronger than the initial tunic you were originally given. The improved apparel, though indirectly, grants you a better chance of survival with a direct attack from the beast²⁸.

Players could even hone in their skills through other enemies in preparation for the Lynel encounter. The goblin-like creatures, Bokoblins, can provide amicable practice on timing your attacks and perfecting those shield blocks. The variety of their weapons, paired with the ample availability, can allow players to experiment and adjust strategies for optimal success and growth.

In all these instances, the player has gained new abilities, either within the game or within their skill set. With these newfound abilities, the player not only progressed themselves towards the goal of defeating the Lynel, but also in taking ownership of their ability to grow and achieve said goal²⁹. Now, with all the might and knowledge bestowed upon them through their previous defeats, the player can now masterfully achieve their goal in defeating the Lynel in earnest and quickly find a new challenge to overcome within the game³⁰.

GROWTH THROUGH EXPERIMENTATION

"Get creative with what you've got!"

-Darston, Echoes of Wisdom³¹

Not only are players pushing themselves towards growth, the development team for The Legend of Zelda games pursued similar goals. As the development team transitioned from *BotW* to *TotK*, they quickly decided that the focus of the sequel should be on creating new gameplay. With an already fleshed out version of

Hyrule, the possibilities for new discoveries were immediately striking.

Within *TotK*, players are able to pursue even more creativity and opportunities for experimentation. *BotW* offered various Rune abilities with the Sheikah Slate that players could use to maneuver and interact within the world. Stasis, for example, can stop the flow of time for an object and allow you to find creative ways to manipulate this ability to your best advantage. *TotK* evolved this entire premise into entirely new features and abilities. For this portion of the chapter, we will focus on Fuse and Ultrahand.

The Fuse ability allows Link to attach items from your inventory or environment to your currently equipped shield or weapon. When completed, this ability creates a new hybrid piece of gear that can be used in combat, as well as other interesting ways. Ultrahand, though similar, grants players the ability to move and attach objects to each other within the world environment. Both of these mind bending abilities grants players not only the breadth to experiment with numerous permutations within the item sets, but allows for full creative liberty to solve complex problems in a myriad of different strategies. These abilities *“enable players to do exactly what they think they can do, rather than how [the developers] want them to play the game.”*³²

With Fuse, players are able to synthesize new weapons and strategies on the fly with the ability to connect two items together. For many, the ability to craft more powerful weapons can elicit small growth in their knowledge and strategies within Hyrule through a trial-and-error approach³³. The low stakes environment for experiment allows for plenty of “try again” moments and never a complete “end” to the game. However, this can just be the starting point of even more growth and creativity.

What if you fused a rocket with a shield? Or maybe a shield with another shield? Or what about a bomb to a sword? Though the latter may prove to be self-destructive for the player holding the weapon (literally), the development team didn’t try to stop players from self-

inflicted mistakes. Instead, players are encouraged to do any and all possible options. Players can get a chuckle from an unintended outcome. They not only grow from the endeavor, but gain an intrinsic strategy that can be documented, stored, reinforced, and even utilized in future moments within the game³⁴.

These experiments within the game continue to offer players these low stakes opportunities in order to expand their mastery of growth beyond the controller. Transferring these experimental skills to other forms of engagement within the player's life can continue to build moments and encourage new experiences to be seen and enjoyed.

GROWTH THROUGH EXPLORATION

"The wind...it is blowing"

-Ganondorf, The Wind Waker³⁵

Moments of growth are further developed and explored, not only within the main storyline of both games, but with so many unscripted moments within these open-world games. These points of interest are sprinkled across Hyrule and allow players to craft their own unique and tailored experience towards their growth. Regardless of the route any player decides to take, each of them will have their own trajectory to reflect on and share. Each turn of the corner is another exploration point waiting to be woven into the tapestry of the experience³⁶.

One corner that can be explored further are the mysteries around Akkala Sea. While traversing in *TotK*, Link stumbles across a large swatch of several pirate ships docked near the coastline. On those ships are various Bokoblins and Moblins with a whiff of shadiness and maleficency. The pirate portrayal is very reminiscent of *Wind Waker* (*WW*) with its sea-faring nature and vibe.

With all this, it's up to Link to defeat these pirates and calm the

seas (if only temporarily). What turned into a simple exploration of Hyrule, ended up becoming a test bed for all the knowledge and skills that Link has learned up until this moment. For some, this can be an incredible opportunity to demonstrate their mastery. All the trials, tribulations, and tragedies of the past have formed into a formidable foe. For others, this can prove to be a larger challenge than they originally planned. In either case, opportunities to grow and learn are still at the forefront.

With this challenge, players must utilize all that they have learned throughout their journey. Suppose you've learned through your exploration of the world that electrical currents flow through the water; using electrical arrows can be a powerful strategy. Or maybe you've successfully fused a shield with a topaz, allowing for the ability to stun enemies, and creating a moment of reprieve to counterattack. Perhaps you've learned neither of these tricks, but experiment and eventually discover something new. If the hero did not defeat the pirates, it's not the end. Instead, the mindset should shift to, "the hero did not defeat the pirates, yet, so it's not the end". That one word, yet, can help propel the story forward and continue the player towards their growth, and eventually their success. The player expands their mastery of themselves and the world through exploration and experimentation. Once this challenge is overcome, then an exciting new challenge can emerge and begin.

GROWTH THROUGH COLLABORATION

"Then we're agreed. And when you and I work together, we're a strong tide that lifts all!"

-Kushara, Echoes of Wisdom³⁷

With all this exploration and investigation within Hyrule, Link can sometimes feel a bit isolated. Ruins of civilization's past, along with the looming destruction of the world can elicit some strong feelings

of quarantine and a deficit of comradery³⁸. Luckily, within *TotK*, Link is able to collaborate with a slew of dynamic characters. One quest, in particular, not only provides some levity, but creates a meaningful collaboration where Link and other characters can all mutually grow from the experience.

As players explore the world, they may stumble onto some musicians near Eldin Canyon. They explain that The Great Fairy Tera, who resides nearby, vanished into her fountain, refusing to reappear. Her reappearance will only occur once she hears the sound of the musician's passionate violin musings. Link agrees to help the troupe on the journey and with the use of his various tools, successfully escorts them to the Fountain that hosts the fairy. After the musical rendition, Tera appears and is willing to upgrade Link's equipment. Even moreso, Tera shows the location of the other fairy fountains on the map, all of whom will also offer various upgrades.

In this moment, Link not only grows from helping the musicians, but was given the additional benefit of upgrading his weapons. The growth of the power of the weapons would not have been feasible, if it wasn't for the purposeful decision to help the other people in the world. In that moment, a mutual opportunity arose and everyone was able to grow in some way thanks to cooperation with each other³⁹. The emphasis of helping each other, whether intentionally or inadvertently, provided opportunities that were not otherwise possible⁴⁰. The collaboration for communal growth illustrates the notion that rising tides raises all ships (and in this case, raises all of Link's game stats).

THE DEPTHS: AN ULTIMATE SHOWCASE OF ONE'S GROWTH

"May the light of blessing grant you the strength you seek."

-Various Shrines, Tears of the Kingdom⁴¹

Perhaps the largest surprise within *TotK* is The Depths. This underground segment is a vast region hidden beneath the surface of Hyrule. The Depths is in near-total darkness, where the only illumination is what you bring and what you find within the mysterious underground. While venturing into this unknown, it's incumbent for the player to prepare all they've learned and apply it to this underground world.

Even though The Depths is visually a stark difference from the light-focused Hyrule, players can still apply the lessons learned above to the situation at hand. The growth and evolution of Link has become the perfect bed of practice for the player. Through each trial and challenge, the player has continued to expand their breadth of knowledge and slew of skills.

As the exploration continues within The Depths. Players gradually reveal the unknown terrain. Little by little, the shadows are pulled away and players are able to see what lays ahead of them. Each Lightroot discovered then becomes a moment of reflection and progress. The Lightroots not only literally allow Link to see the small area around him, but symbolically illuminates all that came before and all that will come after. Once you activate all 120 Lightroots, the lower region of the world, previously devoid of light, now becomes fully engulfed with light. All the corners of the once unknown Depths have been revealed. This visual showcase then becomes a symbolic reminder of all the progress that was once thought of as impossible, but through a growth mindset has instead been conquered.

The Depths even offers players an opportunity to revisit many of the previous major bosses that were defeated in Hyrule. Queen Gibdo from the Lightning Temple, for example, reemerges in The Depths and becomes a new foe for Link to challenge. Now, as the player, this becomes a true indicator of what you've learned throughout your gameplay.

This challenge is not a simple copy and paste situation. Link is not regurgitating the same outcome when seeing the same input. In

the same vein, Queen Gibdo is not reproducing the same strategies, but rather used her first encounter with the hero as a basis for this new scrimmage. All the experimentations and exploration moments are the driving force for each decision in this segment for the hero. After all the experimentations, explorations, and obstacles, you are able to showcase the new version of yourself. Something that was once nearly insurmountable has become a simple stepping stone towards the journey of becoming a true hero.

Translating these skills, experiments, and moments within Hyrule to player's lives beyond Hyrule equips them with the abilities that they need to grow and succeed. Once seemingly unobtainable goals can be possible for players. Allowing themselves moments to fail, struggle, and regroup within these games will allow them to understand that failure is not the end, but just a precursor towards their successes.

LOOKING FORWARD WITH A LINK

“Do not think that this ends here...”

-Ganondorf, Twilight Princess⁴²

Throughout this journey and throughout this chapter, we have explored all the possible ways that Link and the player could learn and grow throughout Hyrule. Leaving the fixed perspective behind and finding a slew of ways to not only better the hero, but improve on the process of bettering one's self. The ability to grow through exploration, collaboration, and experimentation have permeated and transcended theory into action. Link is no longer fixed in his strategies, but instead, capable of making purposeful decisions that will eventually make him triumphant in the outcomes.

THE LONELY SWORDSMAN?

LINK'S PATH FROM LONELINESS TO FRIENDSHIP

ROWAN DANEELS, PHD. &
ANISHA CHINTOE, MSC.

*“It’s dangerous to go alone! Take this!”*¹

Spoken by the Old Man before giving Link his sword in the original *The Legend of Zelda* game², these words highlight a fundamental message about the human experience: the importance of friendship (and its counterpart, loneliness). Almost 40 years and 20 game releases later, the themes of friendship and loneliness are still important in *Breath of The Wild (BotW)*³ and *Tears of the Kingdom (TotK)*⁴, the latest two installments of the franchise this chapter will discuss more in detail.

BotW starts off with the master swordsman waking up in the Shrine of Resurrection after one hundred years. Although physically restored from unknown injuries, he has fallen into an amnesiac state, not knowing where he is, what has happened or even who he is. Without anyone being around to inform him, a sense of loneliness—a human experience commonly understood as an uncomfortable feeling that stems from a lack of social interactions and deeper relationships⁵—can overtake players at the start of the game. Loneliness seems to be a recurring theme in this game: Link is seemingly alone

in a ruin-filled, post-apocalyptic Hyrule that has been taken over by the wilderness of nature. He lacks social interactions at the start of the game, he does not recognize the characters he once knew, and has to traverse Hyrule without a consistent companion character; all elements that reflect loneliness⁶.

While *BotW* is often critiqued for being too empty⁷, its successor in *TotK* introduces a new storyline and characters that allow players to feel an increased sense of friendship. Here, friendship can be seen as an experience that includes, among other things, affection, support, intimacy, and trust between people⁸. Link meets several young warriors during his *TotK* adventure, such as Tulin of the Rito clan, who join him in his moment-to-moment fighting. This companionship is more in line with traditional *Zelda* games, where Link is typically accompanied by helpful characters such as Navi from *Ocarina of Time (OoT)*⁹ or Midna from *Twilight Princess (TP)*¹⁰. *BotW* is contradictory in the sense that, while Link gains certain abilities from companion characters after saving them, these characters almost completely disappear from the game until the final fight (questioning whether these characters are truly ‘companion’ characters). This discrepancy in companion characters demonstrates how *TotK* focuses more on friendship than *BotW*.

This chapter addresses how both games compare on themes of loneliness and friendship, by examining their narrative, aesthetics, and mechanics—inspired by two game studies-related frameworks. First, the Integrated Model of Player Experience (IMP)¹¹ explains that game experiences result from interactions between a game’s *narrative* (i.e., plot and characters), *mechanics* (i.e., aspects that determine players’ interaction options; for example how Link walks, runs, swims and even glides in the air, but also the different resources, weapons, and clothing you can gather), and *play context* (e.g., presence of other players). Second, the agency-narrative-social-aesthetics or ANSA model¹² shows that, besides agency (cf. mechanics), narrative, and sociality (cf. play context), the aesthetics (i.e., the style and form of a game, reflected in both visual and audio-related

characteristics of a game) is also a relevant game layer when assessing game experiences. This chapter will examine loneliness and friendship in these games through their narrative and characters, aesthetics, and game mechanics (leaving out sociality, as both games are singleplayer games with no opportunities for social play).

LONELINESS AND FRIENDSHIP: TWO EXPERIENCES ON THE SAME CONTINUUM

Loneliness is a subjective experience, commonly defined by scholars as an uncomfortable feeling that stems from a lack of social interaction and relationships¹³. For instance, the UCLA Loneliness scale¹⁴ is a validated method to measure people's feelings of loneliness, including questions like whether people lack companionship, feel left out or feel whether there are people they can turn to. People can also experience loneliness when the relationships they currently have, do not match with the relationships they want to have¹⁵. Loneliness is not always related to the amount of time spent alone, as being alone differs from feeling alone: a person can have many friends and still feel alone because they have a higher personal need for social interaction, while another person with less friends and lower social needs may not experience loneliness¹⁶.

On the other hand, individuals have an inherent need for social connectedness¹⁷, or friendship. Friendship is often described as a relationship between two individuals that frequently engage in connection-seeking interactions¹⁸. These social interactions include activities such as spending time together, working together, conversing, sharing meals, and forming alliances. What separates 'friends' from 'non-friends' is the consistency and frequency in which these activities occur. More importantly, these interactions are part of a reciprocal relationship: friendship is a symmetric relation where individuals are equal (i.e., have the same amount of power or authority; no hierarchy between individuals), have a desire for shared experiences, can self-disclose in a safe environment and

receive the same amount of (emotional) support, intimacy, trust, respect, and affection from one another^{19,20}.

Based on these definitions, both experiences can be situated as opposite ends of the same continuum: loneliness is an uncomfortable experience caused by the absence of social interactions, while friendship assumes frequent, affective, and intense social interactions. In the following sections, we will first examine loneliness in *BotW*'s narrative, aesthetics, and mechanics. Then, we explore representations of friendship in *TotK* to shed light on what these games can teach us about the psychology of loneliness and friendship.

BREATH OF THE WILD: A BEACON OF LONELINESS

Loneliness through Narrative: Memory, Grief, Failure and Flashbacks

Link's memory loss is, without a doubt, one of the most important story elements representing loneliness in *BotW*²¹. The game starts in the Shrine of Resurrection, with Link being awakened by a sad and mysterious disembodied voice. After a long recovery process for his mortal wounds inflicted 100 years ago by Calamity Ganon, he does not remember who he is, where he is or how he got there. Link's amnesiac state creates a strong sense of loneliness: losing your memories of your (past) life also includes not knowing your family, friends, and close ones. He has little to no social interactions at the start of the game, no one to turn to for help²². Link does meet a mysterious old man early on, who reveals himself as the spirit of King Rhoam. Despite being the first character that Link interacts with and who informs him about what happened in the past, diminishing some of that persistent loneliness, the character ultimately remains a spirit: when his task of informing Link is completed, he disappears, reinforcing this feeling of loneliness.

During his quests, Link encounters many different characters across Hyrule. Most of them do not recognize him, as he's been absent for some time. This is a secondary narrative theme linked to

loneliness: Link is a time traveler of sorts, for many of the characters in *BotW* a legend from a forgotten past and a heroic protagonist in a lot of their (grand)parents' stories. This also applies to Link himself. Originating from a Hyrule 100 years in the past, he feels like an outsider and a 'hero out of time', which makes it difficult to connect with its current inhabitants. Only a handful of characters know Link from before Ganon's attack, such as the elderly woman Impa in Kakariko village. They have an awkward first interaction, with Impa wondering why Link doesn't remember her. Impa attempts to decrease his loneliness by informing him further, for instance, about the four Divine Beasts and the Champions that controlled them, and gives him the quest to free these Beasts (and the Champions' spirits) from Ganon's control. Furthermore, Impa instructs Link to seek out several locations where princess Zelda took pictures. This should help Link (and the player) to regain some of his memories tied to the princess, attempting to lower his sense of loneliness in the process. Research on this topic has shown that reconnecting with past memories, for instance, through reminiscence therapy—an intervention technique for people to recall past (pleasant) experiences²³—and experiencing nostalgia that involves reflecting on fond memories, can decrease loneliness^{24,25}.

Other narrative themes in *BotW* that instill feelings of loneliness are grief and failure. Hyrule is filled with grief: the inhabitants mourn the world how it was before Calamity Ganon's attack and the people they lost in the process. Many characters speak about a time before the Great Calamity. This grief is also key to Link's journey, as feeling loneliness is often a consequential experience when losing loved ones and experiencing grief^{26,27}. He only starts to remember the Champions—friends and loved ones he has a lot of history with—when realizing he already lost them 100 years ago to Ganon. A clear example here is Mipha, Champion of the Zora and Link's childhood friend, who was secretly in love with Link. In a recovered memory, she promises to heal him with her water magic and expresses her desire to spend time with him after defeating Ganon—

an emotional flashback, knowing she later died by Ganon's forces. When Link frees her spirit, she thanks him and gives him her healing ability (i.e., Mipha's Grace). Though Mipha's wish to see Link again is fulfilled, her spirit is released from Hyrule (until the final battle) once freed—similar to the other Champions' spirits. This adds to the bittersweet loneliness of reclaiming each Divine Beast.

Failure is another central theme in BotW. Digital games are notable for including failure processes to motivate players to progress and persist in the face of failure²⁸. Link faces failure too, especially when slowly regaining his memories of the Great Calamity. He failed to save Hyrule from Ganon in the past and failed to protect Zelda as well as the Champions. However, the game does not allow players to have an impact on those events: they are shown as flashbacks, where players cannot learn from this particular failure in Link's story and are unable to alter these events. The inability to change these events, the accompanying sense of failure and powerlessness, as well as knowing the task of saving Hyrule and Zelda now relies solely on Link's shoulders; all of this is a big burden to bear alone, leading to reinforced feelings of loneliness.

A key storytelling device in the abovementioned narrative themes to recount past events, but which also enhances experiences of loneliness²⁹, are flashbacks of past memories. Having lost all memories as Link, these flashbacks are the only (visual) source, next to the tales of some of the Great Calamity's survivors and legends passed down through generations, to find out what really occurred and reconstruct Link's past³⁰. An example of this is the first flashback at the start of the game: Ganon taking over the Divine Beasts, killing the Champions as well as mortally wounding Link whilst protecting Zelda. These flashbacks confront both Link and the player with an unchangeable past which you already know the outcome of. This creates a sense of somberness and loneliness, as you long for better times before the Great Calamity and desire to live in the comfort of the past. In other words, the friendship witnessed in these flashbacks between Link and Zelda or between Link and the different

Champions leads to loneliness, as Link has lost his friends, the people he could turn to³¹. The relationships he wants to have (i.e., his past friends) do not match with the (lack of) interactions he has during BotW, which is a classic characteristic of loneliness³².

Loneliness through Aesthetics: Wide Shots, Cool Colors and Silence

Next to the narrative, the aesthetics or audiovisual characteristics of games can represent or evoke a sense of loneliness (and friendship), often in support of main narrative themes and characters. For one, visual media such as films, TV series or games use wide shots as a specific type of camera framing to create a sense of awe, smallness, and feelings of insignificance³³. The vast environment, a small character, and a lot of empty space on the screen can create feelings of loneliness. *BotW*³⁴ uses a wide shot almost immediately, when Link awakens from his restorative sleep and looks over Hyrule. The camera zooms out and the game's title appears on-screen, making players feel small and alone in this world. Furthermore, the default camera angle while playing, although changeable in the game's settings, puts Link in the center of the screen with a lot of empty space around him which, especially when exploring the wilderness, strengthens feelings of loneliness among players. Beyond camera positioning, the aesthetics of the game world itself can contribute to loneliness. Hyrule is depicted as a post-apocalyptic landscape, with ruins everywhere and nature that has taken over houses and entire settlements. The emptiness of the post-apocalyptic landscape reminds players of the people who used to live there, representing the memories of a society destroyed by Ganon's attacks (similar to other games with post-apocalyptic worlds like *The Last of Us*^{35,36}).

Lighting and colors are another instrument to visually portray emotions such as loneliness (and friendship). Rooted in color psychology, or how colors elicit different responses among individuals, cinema often uses different coloring and lighting to subtly convey certain messages³⁷. For example, cool colors like blue and

green, which are often associated with calmness and peacefulness, can also evoke feelings of sadness and isolation. These colors are very prominent in *BotW*, such as the green wilderness of nature that elicits a sense of serenity but also emptiness and Link's standard attire being a cool blue shade. Furthermore, roaming around Hyrule in *BotW* is often (but not always) paired with darker lighting, foggy atmospheres and rainy weather, which has the potential to enhance players' loneliness by making them moody and setting an overall somber tone.

Focusing on the musical representation of loneliness, the sound design in *BotW* can be a strong contributor to somberness and feeling alone. While the *Zelda* game series is known for its bombastic orchestral music with adventurous soundtrack themes, these are less prevalent in *BotW*³⁸, except in towns or during boss fights. The slow piano melodies and lack of other instrumentation cause players to feel lonely. This is especially the case when you are wandering in the wild: there is an abundance of silence as well as ambient nature sounds. The blowing wind, rivers running wild, and birds flying in the sky; all these echoes of Hyrule's wilderness take over traditional *Zelda*-like soundtrack scores. These ambient nature sounds, along with the absence of music altogether, enhances feelings of being alone in a vast space such as Hyrule³⁹.

Loneliness through Mechanics: Hyrule's Weather System, Open World and Enemies

Besides representational elements (i.e., narratives, characters, and aesthetics), mechanics also have the potential to evoke loneliness (and friendship)—similar to the aesthetics, as a support element of main narrative themes and characters. One of the more noticeable mechanics that inspires loneliness is the dynamic weather system, which is present in both *BotW*⁴⁰ and *TotK*⁴¹. While exploring the plains of Hyrule, the weather can suddenly change, oftentimes making it rain or getting dark. Being stuck in a lightning storm on a ledge that gets slippery when it rains makes it hard for Link to climb up and get around certain obstacles. Not only does this

poor weather worsen players' mood; feeling like there is no way of getting up a hill or mountain can be a pretty frustrating and lonely experience.

Another mechanical element is the open world in both games, including the vastness of areas to explore and the ways to traverse this game world. While there are some towns and stables across *BotW*'s game world, most of it is exploring the green fields and forests—the wilderness of nature—all by yourself. This freedom of an open world might feel refreshing at times as it can invoke a sense of solitude⁴², a positive state of being alone (compared to the negative state of feeling alone, or loneliness) that has the ability to lower people's stress levels⁴³. However, it can also leave players with a lack of direction, wandering around aimlessly and alone without any social interaction; thus experiencing loneliness. In terms of travelling, there are little ways to explore the vast game world beyond fast travelling or riding a horse. Link is often facing the vastness of Hyrule walking or gliding from one area to the next, which can feel lonely. Moreover, there are also hidden elements on the game's world map (in both *BotW* and *TotK*) that contribute to loneliness representation. Many open world games require players to unlock areas on the map through certain points of interest, or towers.⁴⁴ Navigating the world of Hyrule can be tricky because of this: players can have a hard time knowing where they are or where to go next without clearing more of the game map, potentially leaving players feeling lost and disoriented.

A final mechanical element to discuss are the enemies Link fights during his adventures. *BotW* is largely about exploring a hostile post-apocalyptic world: when alone or in isolated stretches, players can get nervous by enemies that unexpectedly attack Link. For example, a cluster of boulders can assemble into a Stone Talus—a large golem-like enemy made of rocks. Furthermore, while there are many characters travelling on the roads who give players tips or offer side quests and resources, at some point during the game players start to encounter members of the Yiga clan disguised as regular Hylians. For

players trying to avoid fights as much as possible, fighting Yiga assassins is not only quite difficult but also leads to avoiding interacting with characters in the wilderness altogether. As trust is one of the key elements of friendships⁴⁵, distrusting characters in the game could make players avoid social interactions, in turn leading to an isolated and lonely game experience.

TEARS OF THE KINGDOM: AN ILLUSTRATION OF FRIENDSHIP

Friendship through Narrative: Community, Teamwork, and ‘Hands’ Metaphor

Memory loss and Link’s absence for the past 100 years has made elements of friendship in *BotW*⁴⁶ less prevalent. In *TotK*⁴⁷, however, an increased sense of belonging and hope throughout Hyrule is palpable. Characters you encounter actually know Link or have heard of his triumph over Ganon in *BotW*, and are happy to see him. The player also knows some of these characters, often familiar faces from the previous game. Although not being a part of strong individual friendships, this narrative element creates a sense of belonging and feelings of being part of a community, connecting to elements of support as well⁴⁸.

There is a lot of collaboration and teamwork in *TotK*, strongly representing friendship in the game. These friendships mainly come in the form of the Sages, companion characters who represent different clans (similar to the Champions of *BotW*) and who each control different elements like fire, wind, and time. These young warriors accompany Link in dealing with the strange weather-related phenomena caused by the emergence of the antagonist, Ganondorf. In their quests, Link forms friendships with them by spending time and working together as well as sharing experiences^{49,50}. These characters also offer Link abilities to progress in the game. For instance, Tulin’s ‘Power of Wind’ creates a small burst of wind in any direction that allows Link to paraglide further, reaching

places he could not reach before. Link already met some of these characters during *BotW*, like the Sage of Water, Sidon. Disabling the Divine Beast ‘Vah Ruta’ and freeing Mipha’s spirit in the first game required a great deal of teamwork⁵¹ between Link and Mipha’s brother Sidon. For example, Link rode Sidon’s back through the water to reach the Divine Beast in the first place. Although having a new life and role as king of the Zora community in *TotK*, Sidon extends his prior friendship with Link into this game by becoming a Sage. Forming a new alliance with him—a key aspect of friendships⁵²—and seeing a familiar face from *BotW* might make players both rejoice and reflect on the fact that, perhaps, *BotW* wasn’t such a lonely experience after all. There were signs of early friendships in the first game, albeit limited to a few, such as the one with Sidon.

Possibly the biggest difference between both games in terms of loneliness and friendship is how the Champions (and their descendants) and the Sages help out Link after their own story missions. In *BotW*, after their respective story quests are finished, the Champions’ spirits only appear shortly for the final battle against Ganon, while their descendants remain in their home locations altogether. Although you can visit these latter characters at any given moment, they stay there, meaning that players are mainly alone throughout other quests. In *TotK*, after becoming Sages and finishing their respective local missions, these companion characters can stay with Link during most other quests. In this way, he engages more in social interactions with these characters, increasing friendship bonds by working together and sharing experiences⁵³, but also allowing players of *TotK* to experience positive relationships through the game. Such positive relationships are an important element people should pursue in order to increase their personal well-being, happiness, health, and overall quality of life^{54,55}. As such, these friendships in *TotK* might have a lasting positive impact on players themselves.

The difference between both games in terms of loneliness and friendship is even mentioned by the game’s developers⁵⁶. While *BotW* emphasized loneliness as players mostly traverse the game

world alone, *TotK* centers on ‘hands’ as a major theme. Link receives the Zonai Rauru’s hand when recovering from his wounds at the game’s start, utilizing this to manipulate objects and solve puzzles with his newfound abilities. The hands metaphor also expresses the idea of characters joining hands, connecting and working together to overcome the forces of darkness. As such, Link and his friends collaborating to stop Ganondorf is a strong symbolic representation of friendship in *TotK*⁵⁷.

One important caveat to mention is that these companion characters are not entirely themselves: after becoming Sages, they provide Link with their vow. This is an object that casts a shadow-like avatar of themselves to accompany the player everywhere. Despite being able to engage in basic social interactions, such as working together and sharing experiences⁵⁸, an argument can be made that these shadows lack other elements of more profound friendship building, like self-disclosing to each other (these avatars do not talk that much) or provide emotional support and affection. This relates to the notion of what qualitative or strong friendships are: while aspects such as similarity⁵⁹ (i.e. liking people that are similar to someone) or physical proximity⁶⁰ are often mentioned as indicators of friendships, research showed that people rather look for qualities such as trust, honesty, and supportiveness to build strong relationships⁶¹. Applying this to *TotK*’s Sages, while these shadow-like avatars do provide some companionship when exploring Hyrule (i.e., proximity and, to some extent, similarity), they might hinder deeper connections. However, before the final battle with Ganondorf, the Sages reappear in the flesh to help out Link. It is here that Tulin says “You don’t have to fight all by yourself, you know! When we fight together, we’re unstoppable.”⁶², signifying their friendship by helping Link out and supporting him when he needs it⁶³.

Friendship through Aesthetics: Warm Colors, Cozy Lighting, and Embracing Music

Contrary to using wide shots and framing a character alone in

the center of the screen as a representation of loneliness, showing multiple characters in a frame together shows off their connection and friendship⁶⁴. In *BotW*⁶⁵, this type of shot framing is mostly preserved for flashbacks of Link's memories, which can lead to a feeling of longing to those past relationships. In *TotK*⁶⁶, framing multiple characters alongside Link is often used when interacting with the Sages. For example, when Link reaches the depths beneath Hyrule Castle to face the demon king's army, the five Sages arrive to help Link out. In the final moments of that cutscene, Link is shown in the center of the screen surrounded by his Sage friends.

In terms of color grading, warmer colors like red, orange, and yellow are usually associated with warmth, comfort, and friendship^{67,68}. Link's heartfelt memories in *BotW* (through flashbacks) of him and Zelda playing with a frog, or when Zelda thanks Link for his enduring loyalty by knighting him, include a color palette of bright, warm colors to reflect their strong and intimate relationship. These scenes are bathed in a warm golden light, the warm colors reflecting the emotional warmth of such moments. Similar, the cities of Hyrule and the Sky Islands area above Hyrule in *TotK* portray a sense of openness, warmth, and light, especially at daytime. Despite the vastness of the floating islands scattered across the sky having the potential to create a sense of isolation and loneliness, this area also feels more welcoming as Link explores them in solitude—the positive side of being alone that can lower, for example, players' stress levels^{69,70}. Not only does this area provide a lot of warm colors by being physically closer to the sky and the sun. The presence of the ancient Zonai machinery and friendly 'Steward Constructs' provide a subtle reminder of life and companionship, as these constructs communicate with Link and help him out on various occasions. Furthermore, the cozy lighting in towns during nighttime also contribute to an overall sense of warmth and friendship in *TotK*. Who doesn't want to live in a town like Hateno Village with such welcoming mushroom-shaped lighting?

Finally, the games' music design is an important indicator of

friendship. While *BotW* includes a lot of ambient nature sounds to represent loneliness, there are also soundtrack themes in the towns spread across Hyrule that offer more lightness and wholesome moments. These soundtrack themes are continued in *TotK*, but often with richer, more layered compositions: many of the nature-based soundtrack themes from *BotW* are being used with additional instruments to lessen the experience of loneliness. For instance, the Hyrule Fields theme now includes uplifting flute sounds to accompany and strengthen the piano sounds, being a metaphor for the more hopeful atmosphere of rebuilding Hyrule in *TotK*⁷¹. A personal favorite is ‘Zora’s Domain’, which includes lighthearted and embracing harp and synth sounds based on the Zora theme in prior *Zelda* games⁷². All of these themes encourage a sense of safety and intimacy that can help players feel connected to the inhabitants of these villages in *TotK*.

Friendship through Mechanics: Sages’ vs. Champions’ Abilities and Settlements

One of the key friendship mechanics in *BotW*⁷³ and *TotK*⁷⁴ are the special abilities related to the Champions and Sages. In *BotW*, these abilities—or Champion’s gifts, including ‘Daruk’s Protection’ (a defensive red shield) and ‘Mipha’s Grace’ (health revival and enhancement)—are unlocked after freeing each Champion’s spirit. They serve as powerful symbols of friendship, allowing Link to call upon his friends even after their deaths. Connecting this to theories of friendship, these abilities support Link in his adventures⁷⁵, identifying them as metaphorical extensions of Link’s friendship with each Champion. They are prime examples of strong friendships: despite them not being around anymore (lack of physical proximity), the Champions provide support beyond the grave^{76,77}.

TotK has similar, yet slightly different, companion characters’ abilities, including Yunobo’s cannon attack that launches him towards enemies and Tulin’s gust of wind ability, which creates a big speed boost when gliding. The main mechanical difference between both games lies in how the characters and their abilities are inte-

grated into Link's journey. In *TotK*, the Sages (and their abilities) actively accompany Link during his quests, fighting alongside him and effectively dealing damage to enemies. This contrasts with *BotW*, where the Champion's gifts are used by Link alone, without the Champions being physically present. Fighting side by side, supporting each other in real time, and sharing these experiences creates a more tangible and vivid expression of friendship⁷⁸ in *TotK* than in *BotW*. However, players can also choose not to have these companion characters around, by switching off each Sage's vow individually, which also means not having access to their abilities. This could be useful, for instance, if players want to be alone to explore Hyrule in solitude⁷⁹.

Beyond these abilities, there are some smaller mechanics that can instigate a sense of friendship, such as the towns and stables throughout the game world. In *BotW*, encountering a town or stable often felt like a breath of fresh air: they provided interactions with other characters, which led to gaining helpful information or starting smaller quests to help side characters; all fulfilling players' inherent need for social connectedness⁸⁰ in a game world that felt lonely at times⁸¹. *TotK* provided even more places to stay, with Hyrule including an abundance of settlements, tent camps, and towns. Players can basically never go too far without running into someone. For instance, you come across Addison 'the sign guy' almost everywhere, even in the most secluded places, where you can help him hold up an advertising sign related to rebuilding Hyrule⁸².

CONCLUSION

Loneliness and friendship are two prevalent experiences that are represented throughout the narrative, aesthetics, and mechanics of *BotW*⁸³ and *TotK*⁸⁴. Loneliness, or the unpleasant feeling of lacking social interactions⁸⁵, was very tangible in *BotW*. Narrative themes such as Link's memory loss or feelings of grief and failure; audiovisual elements like wide camera shots or ambient nature sounds; and

mechanics like an open game world all portrayed a sense of loneliness. On the other hand, friendship—reciprocal social interactions that include sharing experiences, working together, and portraying a sense of support, intimacy, and trust^{86,87}—is quite common in both games, but especially in *TotK*. Friendship is represented in the game's narrative, via elements such as community feelings in Hyrule and working together with Sages as companion characters; the aesthetics, including warm colors, cozy town lighting, and musically rich soundtrack scores; and the mechanics, mainly via the Sages' abilities and the social hubs inside Hyrule's towns.

There is a lot of continuity between both games regarding loneliness and friendship representation, especially in the aesthetics and mechanics. As such, the main difference resides in the games' narrative elements, such as *TotK* featuring companion characters during quests, whereas *BotW* conveys friendship mainly through flashbacks to Link's past relationships. The premise that *BotW* feels more lonely at times and *TotK* focuses more on friendship⁸⁸ is true, to some extent. However, it's not entirely a black-and-white comparison: loneliness can also occur when playing *TotK*—for instance, having to search for the missing Zelda again, right after getting her back at the end of *BotW*—and friendship is also present in *BotW*, for example, through Link's reclaimed memories of close relationships (i.e., the many flashbacks with Zelda, or with other Champions like Mipha) or musical side quests such as Tarrey Town⁸⁹.

In the end, we can conclude that the Old Man from the original *Zelda* game was right: it is dangerous to go alone on an adventure. Friendship is an essential element, not just for Link to persist in the face of loneliness in his quest to save the kingdom of Hyrule and its citizens. It's also important for players, given that positive relationships are critical for people's well-being, health, and happiness⁹⁰.

POWER

TRIFORCE'S
DARK AND LIGHT
THE PERSONALITY PSYCHOLOGY
OF LINK AND GANONDORF
ALEXANDER MACLELLAN, PHD.

A man lies in the ruins of a castle, destruction all around his body. A younger man in a green tunic and a woman in a pink dress stand across from him and, through a TV screen, a young child heaves a sigh of relief and puts a controller down. Ganondorf, the King of Thieves has been defeated, and the main quest of *Ocarina of Time* (*OoT*) is ended. Hours sunk into exploring temples and gathering items are at an end. Victory is short-lived though. Back through the screen, the body leaps into the air and a transformation begins. Giant horns and pig-like features erupt from the man's body, swelling in size until only a beast remains. Even on the low-resolution polygons of the first 3D *Zelda* game, the menace and danger are palpable as a title appears on the lower third of the screen: Ganon. The child swears for the first time and grabs their controller. Link grabs his sword, leaping into action.

The conflict between Link and Ganondorf anchors many of the games in the *Legend of Zelda* (*LoZ*) series. While Link, the holder of the Triforce of Courage fighting against the monsters and minions of Ganondorf and his Triforce of Power makes for a classic good vs evil

narrative, their contrasting personalities make them truly iconic characters.

To understand this psychological contrast, we can examine these characters through the lens of personality psychology. Specifically, the concepts of the ‘Dark’ and the ‘Light’ triad. The Dark Triad, consisting of Machiavellianism (manipulative behavior), narcissism (excessive self-focus) and psychopathy (lack of empathy)¹ describes individuals who exploit others for personal gain. In response to this focus on negative traits, researchers have started discussing the “Light” triad - consisting of compassion, empathy, and altruism² (or alternatively, Kantianism, Humanism, and Faith in Humanity³). The Light Triad describes individuals who help others without expecting personal benefit, build trusting relationships, and respect human dignity.

Ganondorf exemplifies the Dark Triad through his manipulative schemes, narcissistic pursuit of power, and callous disregard for others’ suffering. Link embodies the Light Triad by selflessly protecting others, showing compassion for all beings, and maintaining faith in people’s inherent goodness. This chapter explores how these psychological frameworks provide deeper meaning into Link and Ganondorf’s eternal conflict and what it says about the moral choices we face in our lives.

GANONDORF

In Ganon, Link confronts a beast driven by hatred, greed, and an insatiable hunger for power. This villain's dark motivations serve as a mirror that reveals the story's central themes. By opposing Ganon's destructive ambitions, Link's heroic qualities become more pronounced and meaningful. The clash between their opposing values allows players to fully engage with both characters and the world they inhabit. Ultimately, the greater Ganon's threat and malevolence, the more Link must rise to embody the heroic virtues necessary to defeat him.

Ganondorf, the human form introduced in *OoT*⁴ offers the player a more complex enemy to engage with than the bestial Ganon. The games show him to be intelligent, dominant, and utterly ruthless. This was a conscious decision by the game designers, with Toru Osawa, script director for *OoT*, reworking Ganondorf away from the pig monster he had been in the earlier games:

“I started by thinking to myself, “What kind of guy is worth defeating?... The enemies you feel the best about defeating are the ones that outclass you in every way, from abilities to experience. He also had to be an appealing character, even though he was the enemy. He initially looked like a brute who had nothing but raw strength. I wanted him to have clever eyes so you knew he was a man of high caliber.”

- Character Designer Satoru Takizawa⁵

Ganondorf is interesting not just because he is an evil for our hero to overcome, but because his character is thoroughly dislikeable. His design is meant to be slightly off-putting, being a tall, powerfully built man with a slight hunch and bird like features⁶. Rarely enough for a villain, Ganondorf does not kill a character on screen until *Tears of the Kingdom (TotK)*⁷, and it is perhaps this which makes him an interesting character. Nintendo manages to create animosity towards Ganondorf through dialogue and character development across the story, and it is these we will examine. As with all iconic video game villains, Ganondorf is more than a pantomime character who bullies his way to the top. He is an intelligent operator who poses real challenges to the player-controlled Link.

LINK

Every great villain needs a great hero to face them. As a series, Zelda games have an established language for introducing us to our avatar in Hyrule. We often meet Link as he wakes up, usually on the outskirts of a civilisation. He is also young, frequently a boy or a

very young adult, and this youth allows many gamers to either connect with the character, or to allow themselves to return to a more positive state. Themes of nostalgia, time passing and maturity are part of all *Legend of Zelda* games, and so it is unsurprising the protagonist is the vehicle for this. Though he never speaks in the games, this is so the player can immerse themselves in the character. Link's name is chosen for a purpose, to link us to the world of Hyrule:

We named the protagonist Link because he connects people together”

-Shigeru Miyamoto⁸

Whilst Ganondorf is overt and loud, Link quietly is the story-telling device for Nintendo to communicate their themes to us, and in doing so we play out a modern parable about good and evil. The games are rarely simple tales with Link, and by extension us, having to learn to trust others, help characters in need and find courage to do the right thing, even when it is difficult. As a character, Link defines the term ‘actions speak louder than words’ and it is through his actions we can understand those things that make Link who he is.

Link and Ganondorf then are two sides of the same coin, and by exploring their actions in the games, we can better understand what shapes both good and bad characters in the real world.

THE MAN WITH THE EVIL EYES VS THE LIGHT BETWEEN THE CLOUDS: MACHIAVELLIANISM VS ALTRUISM

“Can you see the man with the evil eyes?...Though he swears allegiance to my father, I’m sure he is not sincere”

-Princess Zelda, Ocarina of Time⁹

Machiavellianism refers to a manipulative personality trait that uses other people, often against their own interest, for the benefit of oneself. They often have a cynical worldview and are generally distrusting¹⁰. Ganondorf, who seeks the power of the Triforce above all else, exemplifies Machiavellianism most notably in the *OoT* and *TotK* (perhaps unsurprising given the overlap in story beats between the two). In the *OoT*, we first meet Ganondorf proper in Hyrule castle. Having heard the details of Zelda's prophetic dream, we are invited to look through a window to see Ganondorf kneeling before the king of Hyrule.

The plot of the childhood portion of *OoT* is centered around Ganondorf's Machiavellian traits. Away from the spotlight, he moves to influence the other major races in Hyrule. In pursuit of the spiritual stones, he blocks the Gorons' source of food, and he destroys the guardian deities of the Kokiri and the Zora in retaliation for the races not surrendering their Stones to him. In other games, such as *Wind Waker (WW)*, *Twilight Princess (TP)* and *Tears of the Kingdom (TotK)*, Ganondorf primarily acts from the fringes and or through proxies, such as Zant, never exposing himself until he feels his position- and power- is assured.

Away from a console, Machiavellianism is the focus of much academic research, where it has been linked with reduced team commitment, abusive behaviour and manipulation¹¹. Machiavellians do not crave the spotlight and can operate from the fringes of an organisation, hoarding knowledge, and spreading misinformation when it serves them. In *A Link to the Past (ALtP)*¹², Ganondorf disguises himself as Aganhim and positions himself as an influential wizard in the King of Hyrule's court, from where he could control the guards, put a bounty on Link and gather everything he needs to take over.

Machiavellians are supremely self-focused and often choose not to engage in overly aggressive or risky behaviour unless they feel their position has been secured¹³. In *Wind Waker (WW)*¹⁴, Ganondorf chooses not to reveal himself until Link has drawn the Master

Sword, removing the last seal on his power. Unthreatened by the weakened sword and unknown boy, Ganondorf begins to act more directly, setting up the game's final act. In *TotK*, Ganondorf remains weakened from his imprisonment by Rauru and acts indirectly – using a puppet in the form of Princess Zelda to deceive the leaders of Hyrule's citizens, exploiting their care for the princess to weaken them later- a classic Machiavellian strategy. One might wonder why they are not found out, however research suggests that Machiavellianism is hard to identify in other people¹⁵- unsurprising given their manipulative and clandestine nature.

In comparison to Ganondorf, who works from the shadows to manipulate and exploit people for his own interests, Link works openly to help those around him, even at his own cost. Kantianism, taking the name from the 18th century German philosopher Immanuel Kant, describes patterns of behaviour that show the individual does not seek a benefit when interacting with someone else. For example, someone high in Kantianism would enter a conversation with another person without thought of a personal benefit. Those who score highly on Kantianism are also likely to act in morally 'correct' ways, even if it comes with a personal cost¹⁶. Where Ganondorf is solitary, Machiavellian figure, using people for his own ends only and abandoning them when they have no more worth to him, Link is a highly altruistic figure, who often does the right thing at great personal cost.

This altruism is perhaps best displayed through the range of side quests Link can complete in any adventure. From a gameplay standpoint, side quests offer refreshing diversions from the main story, a way to earn extra Rupees and an opportunity to use a variety of gameplay mechanics the player might otherwise ignore. Though they are incentivized with power-ups in the form of Pieces of Heart, bottles, or rarer crafting materials in the latest games on offer, their completion is often hinted at as being part of Link's canonical journey. For example, over the end credits of *OoT* see glimpses of people together at a Lon Lon Ranch liberated from Ingo's control. In *Majo-*

*ra's Mask (MM)*¹⁷ we see the wedding of Anju and Kafei. Though examining every side quest across all the games would be a chapter of itself, two spring to mind as cases demonstrating Link's altruism. Anju and Kafei's questline in *MM* is a long, complicated affair that can only be completed after most of the game has been finished and time rewound repeatedly. A core part of psychological altruism is the desire to improve the welfare of another without expectation of a reward¹⁸. Link receives the advertised reward from Kafei's mother early in the questline; the continuation is, from a story perspective, entirely driven by Link's desire to help the young couple.

The Tarrey Town questline from *BotW*¹⁹ exhibits perhaps the best example of Link's altruism. After purchasing his house in Hateno village, the straightforward Hudson begins a new project to create a new town in northern Akkala. There is no obvious immediate reward for finding the people Hudson needs to see the settlement grow: they don't give you anything upon learning about Tarrey Town and Hudson doesn't pay you for your efforts collecting wood or tradesmen. Link seemingly does this simply because he wants to, and it seems we complete this quest for no other reason than the satisfaction of seeing the place grow. The final part sees Link travel to find a priest for the wedding of Hudson and Rhondson, the tailor we found in the Gerudo desert. Given matchmaking is related to wellbeing and altruistic motivations²⁰ it is perhaps unsurprising that two side-quests with similar outcomes occur in two Zelda games released almost 20 years apart.

It is a tragedy of most Zelda games that at the end of his journey Link is separated from those he has connected with. For example, at the end of *OoT* Link is sent back to a time where nobody will know of his heroism and is abandoned by his constant companion, Navi. *Twilight Princess (TP)* sees Link and Midna, close companions, permanently separated in their worlds of Light and Twilight, whilst in *Skyward Sword (SS)* Fi fades into a long sleep in the Master Sword, never fully waking to share an adventure with Link again. Though each Link is different, the soul of the hero endures across each incar-

nation. This soul continues to drive him to make new connections, and keep helping others, even after he is left with no thanks for it. This is all but confirmed in *TP*, where the Hero's shade- now known to be the hero from *OoT*- guides this new incarnation of Link in the way of the sword. He speaks of his regret that nobody knew of his deeds, yet he continues to fight against Ganondorf, even in death. To know that your efforts may not be rewarded, and that you may lose those you love but continue to strive for the benefit of others is perhaps all the proof we need of Link's inherent altruism.

Link and Ganondorf differ hugely in how they treat other people, not just in outcome, but intention. Where Ganondorf is often a Machiavellian schemer who only views people by what they can do for him; Link is an altruistic agent, who seeks to improve the lives of others with no care for what they can do for him.

THE EVIL KING VS THE HUMBLE SOLDIER: NARCISSISM VS HUMANISM

Your people had some skill, to be sure...but they lacked true power. The kind of absolute power that those chosen by the gods wield. He who wields such power would make a suitable king for this world; don't you think?"

-Ganondorf, *Twilight Princess*²¹

Those with high levels of narcissism are largely defined by their grandiose beliefs. A narcissist believes they are special, or superior to others in some way. They demand attention and admiration, though they are unwilling to offer either to others²². A narcissist's motivations are therefore frequently centered on the pursuit of status, and the privileges that status affords. Those high in narcissism are often assertive, arrogant, willing to brag about their accomplishments, and often are preoccupied with thoughts of glory, power, and heroism²³. Ganondorf's dialogue, or dialogue about him typifies many of these traits. He is frequently referred to as 'the Great Ganondorf' in

the *OoT* and is quick to remind Link of his status as a king in both *OoT* and *TotK*. He also belittles Link and his achievements: a common strategy narcissists use to protect their own ego and self-esteem²⁴. For example, when he states in *OoT*, “*My only mistake was to slightly underestimate the power of this kid... No... it was not the kid’s power I misjudged, it was the power of the Triforce of Courage!*”²⁵

Ganondorf’s hunger for power is his defining characteristic. In *OoT*, upon entering the sacred realm and touching the Triforce, it shatters, leaving him only with the part of it which he most believes in: power. Through wielding the Triforce of Power, he can fulfill his narcissistic desire for dominance over those who threaten his own self-importance. In the real-world, narcissists often possess positions of power in companies, and research indicates that narcissists are likely to behave unethically once in that position²⁶. The absolute confidence a narcissist has in their abilities is also linked with poor leadership decisions²⁷ and is suggestive of Ganondorf’s own tendency to overestimate his abilities, and ultimately fall to Link and Zelda’s efforts. As Ganondorf states in *TP*, “*Your people had some skill, to be sure...but they lacked true power. The kind of absolute power that those chosen by the gods wield. He who wields such power would make a suitable king for this world; don't you think?*”²⁸

However, this power-hungry, arrogant characterisation is not the only way Ganondorf displays narcissism. In every iteration, Ganondorf comes from the Gerudo desert outside of Hyrule, and is bent on subjugating Hyrule to his will. The motivations for this are arguably rooted in envy, with *WW*’s Ganondorf admitting to Link during a reflective moment: “*I...coveted that wind, I suppose*”²⁹. Narcissism is closely linked with envy, being one of the key assessment criteria of the trait. When experienced, envy can either be expressed in a benign manner concerned with improving oneself, or malicious which is largely concerned undermining or engaging in a rivalry with the envied person³⁰. Those high in narcissistic traits are likely to experience greater negative emotions and feel hostility when facing a comparison with one in a higher social standing than themselves.

The vulnerable ego of the narcissist is threatened when compared to a comparable individual, creating the negative emotion. The hostility is an attempt to regulate this negative emotional state, and an act to change the hierarchy to suit their needs.

This is most apparent in *TotK*, where Ganondorf explicitly cannot accept the sovereignty of Rauru and the Zonai, whose peaceful rule is so opposite to his own warlike tendencies. As a king by birth his grandiosity is perhaps understandable. In both *TotK* and *OoT* he has been told, as the only male Gerudo, that he has a divine right to rule his tribe, which feeds his narcissistic personality. In the English localisation he is also described by Rauru as a ‘hero’ to his people, further fueling his belief in his superiority. When faced with the power of Rauru and his sacred stones however, he falls short. During the cutscene where he steals the Secret Stone, the original Japanese dialogue makes Ganondorf’s envy explicit as he lectures Rauru: “*From those heights, you looked down on me... with this power you monopolized as though it was the natural order.*”³¹.

Ganondorf’s envy then, may be the underlying motivation that makes his later characterizations feel more grounded, though his narcissism prevents him from seeing anyone else as an equal, nor forge any true connections. His strength is absolute, and solitary. In contrast to this, Link is a character who has great personal strength, which is amplified by those he meets along the way.

Humanism describes an attitude of treating people with dignity valuing the worth of each individual³². Link’s adventures are defined by the memorable characters he meets along the way, such as Navi in *OoT*, Tatl in *MM*, The King of the Red Lions in *WW*, Midna in *TP* and Fi in *SS*. Most of these companions meet Link at a moment where they are vulnerable and in need. Tatl wants to find her brother, Midna wants her throne back and is outright antagonistic towards Link when they first meet. Those with high levels of narcissism, like Ganondorf, would be unlikely to form alliances with others in those situations, especially with characters such as Midna from *TP*, or Groose from *SS*. Both these characters have an antagonistic relation-

ship with Link early on in each game, often belittling him. For example, in *TP* Midna says *"You humans are obedient to a fault, aren't you? But you're not a human anymore, are you? You're a beast!...Hmph! I guess you're not completely stupid after all!"*³³ Similarly, Goose says in *Skyward Sword*, *"You're almost a man, and yet you still can't seem to go anywhere without Zelda. I bet you can't even decide what to have for lunch on your own, huh?"*³⁴

Whereas the narcissistic Ganondorf wouldn't be able to work with either, Link is able to let the insult to his ego go, and move forward to help them all achieve their goals. He recognizes the value of each person he comes across, and rather than look to exploit their worth, or limit their effectiveness, he empowers them to grow alongside him.

This nature influences those around him for the better. For example, towards the end of *TP*, after assembling the shards of the mirror of Twilight, Midna acknowledges the influence of Link's (and Zelda's) selflessness, helping her grow to care about more than just her own ends: *"But after witnessing the selfless lengths that you and Princess Zelda have gone to...your sacrifices...I know now from the bottom of my heart that I must save this world too"*³⁵. Goose, who for much of the game has been condescending towards Link, now sees his value and forms an active part of the fight against Demise when he says, *"Someone's gotta watch that big, ugly monster, and someone's gotta make sure Grannie's doing all right. It ain't as action packed as what you're doing, but maybe this is my destiny. Know what I mean?"*³⁶

This humanistic and empathetic drive reaps rewards, as his comrades help Link reach further heights and develop his own power. The second half of *OoT* is a prime example of this, as Link gains the power of the sages as he frees their spirit and cleanses their temples. Where Ganondorf keeps others down so his own power is never challenged, Link unshackles others and gains strength from doing so. This is mirrored in research in the real world, with those scoring highly on humanistic measures found to both have increased job and life satisfaction³⁷ and also is related to increased willingness

to invest time and effort into helping a partner in relationships³⁸. Where the narcissist doesn't want anyone else to reach their level, the humanist wants to bring people up and help them be the best versions of themselves.

So, Ganondorf's narcissistic and Link's humanistic traits build on the Machiavellian and altruistic traits previously discussed. With his narcissistic drive for power and status supported by Ganondorf's physical competence and Machiavellian nature he is a formidable foe for most games. This is always met and countered by Link, who has a selfless will to help others, and build them up to be strong in their own right. Each game reinforces this message: we are stronger working together than alone. *BotW* makes this a significant part of the story and final fight - though you can go straight to Ganondorf and challenge him without freeing the Champions, the final fight becomes much easier if you do.

THE CURSE OF DEMISE VS THE HOLDER OF COURAGE: PSYCHOPATHY VS STABILITY

"My mind...my body...I will sacrifice all of it to destroy you"

-Ganondorf, Tears of the Kingdom

Ultimately, Ganondorf is never faced as just the man- he always emerges in his bestial form. The dark beast Ganon from *BotW* is a fearsome, gigantic boar- a personification of his unbridled rage and aggression. His Machiavellian schemes are found out and undone, and his ego is challenged by a rival on his level, his self-control vanishes. Psychopathy is characterised by a lack of empathy, reduced emotional responses, and high levels of impulsivity. It is this impulsivity that sets psychopathy apart from Machiavellianism and narcissism: those high in Machiavellianism are rarely impulsive and highly self-controlled whilst those high in narcissism are mainly impulsive in situations when it benefits them. Those high in psycho-

pathic traits however are largely dysfunctionally impulsive: they are more likely to speak or act in a socially unacceptable way³⁹. As with the other dark triad traits, higher levels of psychopathic traits are often found in those at the top of corporate organizations, perhaps because their boldness, known as 'Fearless Dominance', when measured as part of a psychopathic trait, allows them to take risks which pay off or communicate effectively⁴⁰.

High levels of psychopathy are also related to different types of aggression. Machiavellians are largely hostile to everyone (even if they hide it), and narcissists can be hostile if there is a threat to their own self-image. Psychopaths on the other hand are far more likely to be aggressive without reason, and that aggression is also more likely to be physical than for the other Dark Triad traits⁴¹. Those high in psychopathic traits can act boldly and decisively when well-adjusted in society, and act rashly and with extreme aggression and violence when not. Ganondorf moves between those states as a *Zelda* game progresses, starting as a safe, centralised figure of power and authority to one who is under threat at the end of the game.

In *OoT*, Ganondorf's transformation into Ganon occurs after his human form has been defeated. The cunning, manipulative and intelligent man has lost his protection in the form of the temple bosses and even the castle around him. Vulnerable, and yet still confident in his superiority he is defeated by a boy he believed below him, leaving nothing but aggression and rage. Ganon is psychopathic aggression and impulsivity taken to the extreme. This is echoed in *TotK*, where after his defeat, he sacrifices his humanity to unleash his rage in one impulsive move: swallowing his secret stone to gain the power to become a demonic dragon of power. We can see this transition to a focus on psychopathic behavior through the gameplay with Ganondorf too. Whilst Ganondorf's boss fights are themed around skillful swordplay or precise rallies of magic energy, Ganon fights are often physical affairs, with the emphasis on Link's clever maneuvering around the incredibly powerful but mindlessly aggressive monster. As with all boss fights in the games, Link seems

hopelessly outmatched against the power of Ganondorf, and has to draw on his considerable courage, and his relationships with other characters to win.

Courage is Link's defining characteristic. He often finds himself in highly stressful and fear inducing situations: think of the Gloom hands racing towards you out of some dark corner in the Depths in *TotK*. Those who are psychologically 'hardy', must be committed to a cause, want to exert some control over the situation and believe challenges are a part of a normal experience⁴². Given Link is frequently an outsider, he is often no stranger to stress. In *OoT* there are signs of him being bullied by the leader of the Kokiri, Mido: "Well, even with all that stuff, a wimp is still a wimp, huh?", in *TP* he seems to have been self-sufficient since childhood, living in a tree house on the edge of Ordon village, and in *BotW* Link's father was a knight. The challenging environment is not enough however and may be damaging on its own, but when combined with support from other figures, such as Saria in *OoT* and Russell in *TP*, positive coping styles to see challenges as something to be overcome can be learned⁴³. These coping styles provide Link with the part of his ability to continue when faced with a challenge, however Courage requires a catalyst, not just to act initially, but also to continue to act when one is afraid. Link's compassion may be that catalyst.

Compassion refers to the processes of noticing another's emotional distress, feeling that state in sympathy with them, and a desire to alleviate it⁴⁴. A key part of compassion is the ability to regulate one's own internal state whilst faced with another's emotions. This does not suggest a compassionate individual is not moved by the plight of another person, but rather they must be able to *tolerate* these negative emotions to be able to help the other person. When a compassionate person no longer has that ability, they can be overwhelmed by the shared distress, and perhaps experience what is known as 'empathetic erosion' or 'compassionate burnout' where the person no longer is able to experience compassion or empathy. This is a problem in healthcare settings where professionals who

experience a loss of compassion may not be as effective or satisfied in their work. This has led to the development of new interventions to help protect healthcare professionals' emotional stability and so protect their capacity for compassion⁴⁵.

This stability is a core part of Link's character, both in terms of how he handles his own challenges, but also in how he bears the weight of the problems of others. In *MM* Link is overtly caught up in the tragedy of others, and in the cases of his masks, literally wears their distress. When Link finds the frozen Goron village on Snowhead mountain, he speaks with the ghost of the hero Darmani and takes his form after promising to heal his regrets. The same is true of his Zora form, where he takes on the responsibility of recovering a clutch of Zora eggs after the guitar playing hero Mikau met his end. In each of these cases he balances the emotional weight of a personal promise, as well as the suffering of each race. In all cases, Link's emotional stability helps manage the stress of responsibility and his compassion motivates him to keep swinging his sword in the face of fear.

This final comparison highlights a common narrative theme in *The Legend of Zelda* series, that of personal responsibility. What turns Ganondorf from an evil man to a mindless beast is his failure to take responsibility for his own shortcomings, and willingness to act impulsively for his own desires. What grants Link the strength to beat him is his willingness to take responsibility for the world around him, recognizing what he can do and using it for the betterment of others. Link is the chosen one in each game, but has to grow and earn the power each time. He is never gifted his full power straight away, but earns it by continuously showing courage and diligence, and altruistic compassion for the plight of others.

CONCLUDING THOUGHTS

“Whenever there is a meeting, a parting shall follow. But that parting needs not last forever. Whether a parting be forever or merely for a short while... that is up to you”

-Happy Mask Salesman, *Majora's Mask*⁴⁶

We have discussed how Ganondorf shows, at various points across the games, elements of the Dark Triad. Though Ganondorf is not present in *BotW*, Calamity Ganon is said to be the embodiment of ancient hatred, and in both *BotW* and *TotK*, Ganon's malice or gloom is a poison that sickens the land of Hyrule and all in it. This is a common theme in Zelda games, with the temples and dungeons a player must clear are often linked to the natural world. Just as in Hyrule, beyond the game, anger and hatred are contagious. For example, research has shown that angry social media posts and trends spread more rapidly than positive posts, and these angry posts often spread quickly through people who have very little connection to each other picking the post up and sharing it on⁴⁷. Ganondorf's influence on those around him is reflected in the world, as are Link's actions. Each temple cleansed is a natural disaster averted, or a swathe of gloom and malice erased from the land. By defeating Ganondorf's minions, Link also cleanses and heals the world around him. And just as in Hyrule, in the real-world, there is a Light Triad to meet the darkness. Through Link, our actions tell a more nuanced story than the good guys always win. Where Machiavellian Ganondorf is mistrustful and manipulative of others, Link meets them with respect, forging positive, mutually beneficial relationships. Where Ganondorf is egotistical, self-centred and does not allow any others to meet him as an equal, Link attempts to help those achieve their own growth. And where Ganondorf eventually descends into mindless aggression, Link uses his own strength with restraint and consideration. By the end of the game, the many

friends Link has made along the way are shown to us as the credits roll, and the final scenes accompanied (usually) by a hint of melancholy, as you might feel when saying goodbye to an old friend. Because often, when we leave Link, the parting is just one of many, and all are bittersweet. But that's okay. Because of the journey we shared, we know that he, and we, are better for it.

“Our partnership is at end, and even as we speak, I feel my consciousness fading away. Before I enter the sleep that calls me to the sword, I wish to relay to you words that I recorded many times over the course of our journey. Many have said them to you thus far, but I now wish to say them for myself. Thank you, Master Link. May we meet again in another life.”⁴⁸

-Fi – Skyward Sword

MORAL IDENTITIES IN HYRULE

HEROES OR VILLAINS?
BENEFICIARIES OR VICTIMS?

KATHRYN B. FRANCIS, PHD.

The *Zelda* catalogue is, at its core, shaped by a good-and-evil binary. In each game, the story is similar; Link, awakened by Princess Zelda, becomes the ultimate ‘hero’ and the bringer of justice across his adventures. And as with many great moral narratives, his identity and purpose are inextricably linked to his evil nemesis, Ganondorf, who threatens Hyrule and its people: “*He... who obtained the power of the gods, attempted to cover the land in darkness*”¹ (*Wind Waker*; *WW*). The moral landscape of the Kingdom of Hyrule provides a prototypical backdrop for the discord between Link and Ganondorf, or more broadly, good and evil: “*A land blessed...where the powers of light and shadow exist in perfect balance*”². Of course, to create a satisfying and complete moral tale, Link and Zelda *must* defeat Ganondorf and reforge the Triforce to restore balance and light to Hyrule. Fundamentally, both Link and Zelda are moral exemplars; what they want most is what they see as morally right, and they experience unity between their sense of morality and their personal goals³.

Despite the stark contrast between good and evil and the archetypal roles of the hero and villain, the narratives of *Legend of*

Zelda (LoZ) are more morally nuanced than we might initially believe them to be. Throughout *LoZ*, characters and players face moral conflicts in their roles, responsibilities, and actions and this creates tensions that go beyond black-and-white conceptualisations of good versus evil. For example, in *Twilight Princess (TP)*, Zelda teaches Midna, and Link (and thus the player) that “*shadow and light are two sides of the same coin, one cannot exist without the other*”⁴. Princess Zelda herself, is the protected princess with limited choices, conflicted by the obligations and duties brought about by her royal blood; in *Breath of the Wild (BotW)*⁵, Zelda struggles to fulfil the expectations that have been placed on her and in the spin-off prequel, *Hyrule Warriors: Age of Calamity (HW:AoC)*⁶, we see her continuous efforts to reawaken her magic in the face of increasing frustration from those around her amid a mounting pressure to save Hyrule. While both Link and Zelda are fundamentally *meant* to save the world because they are heroes, they each face complex identity and role conflicts along the way.

As visitors to this world, players join Link (and Zelda in *HW:AoC*) on their journeys. We too play the role of the stereotypical hero but at the same time, we experience the same identity conflicts, and we face the same moral dilemmas. The *LoZ* is therefore rife with realisations of identity and opportunities to prove our moral worth as heroes; from the moral narrative that surrounds the fictional domain of Hyrule, to the moral values of the characters that we play as and the creatures that we are determined to defeat. In this chapter, using theories from moral psychology, we consider how the *LoZ* can be seen as a platform to explore, extend, merge, and test our moral identities, both as a character in the moral narrative and as a player immersed in the legend.

DEVELOPING MORAL IDENTITY THROUGH NARRATIVE: GROWING UP WITH ZELDA

Humans have a proclivity for storytelling and it is one of our oldest activities with evidence of spoken storytelling taking place among ancient cultures⁷. In classic fairytales and fables, we tend to find a hero and a villain, a moral dilemma, a significant action, and a set of consequences which create the perfect formula for an entertaining story. But these tales often serve a purpose beyond simply entertaining their readers. These moral tales are thought to support the development of moral character in children^{8,9} as they extract moral lessons about right and wrong actions and the consequences of these. Importantly, seeing kindness in others is believed to cultivate character. For example, classic moral stories can promote honesty in children when they see the positive consequences of being honest¹⁰. Focusing on this virtue development and going beyond childhood, witnessing altruistic acts can motivate virtuous actions in us¹¹.

Importantly, moral tales are not isolated to the pages of books or the mouths of storytellers, but are also woven through game narratives. Many of us played *LoZ* throughout our childhood, adolescence, and continue to play it through adulthood; we have not only witnessed moral and immoral actions but have also been the agents of these actions. Agency is “*the satisfying power to take meaningful action and see the results of our decisions and choices*”¹² and in the game space, agency is delivered through free movement and the perception of options¹³. In *LoZ* (and perhaps *Breath of the Wild [BotW]* and *Tears of the Kingdom [TotK]* most notably) we are given an open- but limited- sandbox to *make* decisions and choices and to *act* on our moral beliefs (or the inferred moral beliefs of our player character). At the same time, we are constrained by a set of moral imperatives—we must defeat the ‘bad guy’. Importantly, in this world, we can experience the consequences of our choices and adopt new identities, making it ideal for moral exploration.¹⁴

The moral lessons at the heart of *LoZ* often serve to remind both Link and the player of their ultimate role, identity, and purpose. In *BotW* when Link awakens to find Hyrule is in a state of despair, Zelda reminds him of his role and his innate virtue: “*You may not yet be at a point where you have recovered...all of your memories...But courage need not be remembered, for it is never forgotten*¹⁵”. There are even traditions and customs within this world that serve to promote this heroic moral identity and reflect the extent to which the residents of Hyrule value it: “*...it became customary to garb boys in green when they came of age...The elders wished only for the youths to know courage like the hero of legend*¹⁶” (*WW*). Of course, in the majority of *LoZ* games, the player takes up Link’s sword and must overcome great evil and is therefore bound to Link’s heroic identity. Link represents the prototypical hero and certainly possesses key features of heroes as identified in empirical research (bravery, moral integrity, courageous, protecting, conviction, honest, altruistic, self-sacrificing, selfless, determined, saves others, inspiring, and helpful)¹⁷. By adopting Link’s identity and stepping into his shoes in the narrative, the player can become the hero, perform moral actions and subsequently, feel good about this.

Alongside these reminders of the importance of morality in player character identities in *LoZ*, the player is also given opportunities to witness other characters developing moral character. For example, we see the inhabitants of Hyrule taking accountability for their actions; in *Ocarina of Time (OoT)*¹⁸, Zelda admits that the tragedy that has befallen Hyrule is fundamentally her doing and that being so young, she did not understand the consequences of trying to control the Sacred Realm. Through this situation, players are exposed to the complex notions of accountability, responsibility, and blame.

Importantly and going beyond the characters’ own moral development, *LoZ* also delivers moral lessons to the player directly. While it is possible to test our moral identities and values in *LoZ* (more on this later), repeated immoral actions are often questioned by NPCs in

the game or directly sanctioned. For example, if the player strikes a chicken multiple times (or a pig in *WW*), all the chickens (or pigs) in the surrounding area then attack the player; a direct punishment for engaging in unnecessary harm.

Through this process of making morality central to the player character identity, exposing the player to the moral development of characters in the narrative, and rewarding and punishing the player's own moral or immoral actions, *LoZ* becomes more than a passive moral tale. Arguably, *LoZ* provides the conditions for direct virtue training whereby we can freely choose to enact, omit, or even refuse morally-relevant actions in a world full of moral imperatives; "*The clear water's surface reflects growth*"¹⁹ (*OoT*)

TWO MORAL COMPASSES: UNACCEPTABLE IN REAL-LIFE BUT ACCEPTABLE IN FICTION?

While we might not steal a car in real-life, many players would certainly do this in *Grand Theft Auto* (*GTA*). And while a vegan might not prepare animal products for consumption in everyday life, they may very well do this in *LoZ*, particularly when a Pepper Steak meal will restore four of your hearts. I certainly would not break into my neighbour's house and smash their pots, but for many players, this feels both normal and natural in *LoZ*; "*Anyway, maybe we can let off some steam by breaking these jars*"²⁰ (*TP*). In fact, the player is often rewarded with a few rupees when they do break jars. How do we decide what actions are morally acceptable in the game world? And perhaps more importantly, how do we approach and defend the decisions that we make in game environments that challenge our moral identities and values in real-life?

When we talk about managing our own moral behaviours, we typically have two ways of doing this. If we are using the first approach, we perform good deeds to improve welfare and lessen the suffering of others (this is called *prescriptive moral regulation*)²¹. *LoZ* is rife with opportunities for prescriptive moral regulation as Link is

regularly tasked with performing good deeds to help or save the community of Hyrule. For example, in both *BotW* and *TotK*, Link searches for a non-player character's missing wife, Mei and in *The Legend of Zelda: A Link Between Worlds (ALBW)*²², Link is tasked with finding all 100 lost baby maiamaais.

The second way that we can manage our own moral behaviours, is to suppress our motivations to commit immoral or harmful actions (this is called *proscriptive moral regulation*)²³. Unsurprisingly, proscriptive behaviours that cause harm tend to be judged as morally unacceptable by the community at large²⁴. For example, for many people, “do not kill” is a universal moral rule that crosses culture, religion, and tradition. Yet, in most video games, a player will kill other entities. In *LoZ*, harm can be enacted in several different ways with the consequences varying widely. For example, through Link, the player can kill monsters invading Hyrule, wolves they encounter in Great Hyrule Forest, and mountain goats we meet along the Hyrule Ridge. For many, these harms can be justified; we're protecting the surrounding community, defending ourselves against a threat, and ensuring that we are strong enough to fulfil our moral duties in the game.

However, there are instances in *LoZ*, where harmful actions (and failure to engage in proscriptive moral regulation) become more interesting. In the *LoZ* series, Koroks are the tiny wooden characters that wear leaf masks and Link is tasked with solving puzzles to make them appear (*BotW* and *TotK*) or by helping them to reach their destination (in the case of the travelling Koroks in *TotK*). When *TotK* was released, a trend emerged whereby players started finding *creative* ways of torturing travelling Koroks rather than returning them to their travelling companions. In one famous TikTok video for example, a player straps a Korok to a rocket and sends it flying over the hills, yelling as it flies into the distance²⁵. This list of ‘Korok torture devices’ has become extensive: from catapults that fling them high into the sky to more extreme “rotisserie machines”²⁶. The trend produced some divided opinion

among *LoZ* players but remained a widespread practice in the game.

How do we explain our engagement in these unspeakable, unethical, or antisocial behaviours in video games despite our aversion to them in real-life? Many people might find this question farcical. After all, it is *only a game* and the events that happen cannot happen in real-life; the deities will not cross into our world and neither will Ganondorf. The world and its characters remain fictional.

However, we can think of many instances where the overlap between moral values in fiction and reality produce discomfort in players and instances where the moral compasses align. If you were to ask a *LoZ* player, what their favourite animal is from *BotW* and *TotK*, many would say the *foxes*. Both the Grassland and Snowcoat species are majestic; often appearing in your peripheral vision as you cross the Tabantha Tundra in *BotW* or whimpering as they dart past you in Lanayru Great Spring in *TotK*. If a player chooses to kill a fox, it will drop meat proving valuable during game play. Yet many players report feeling very uneasy about killing the foxes who let out a distressing sound when attacked²⁷ and players often reproach others who choose to do so: “*You’re evil. The foxes are adorable*”²⁸. Going one step further, some *LoZ* players choose to engage in ‘*vegan runs*’ whereby they only consume (and sometimes even wear) plant-based items in the game with some evidence that in-game vegan decisions do extend to real-world awareness of vegan lifestyles^{29,30}. And so there appear to be cases where immoral or harmful behaviours in the game become proscriptive and cross the fictional boundary to challenge our moral values and identities in real-life.

So how might we explain the blurring of our real and fictional moral standards in the case of some moral actions but not in the case of others? Using the torturing of Koroks in *TotK* as a case study, it is important to consider the mechanisms that might support these apparent harmful actions. Of course, many players can retain the division between their in-game and real-world moral compass and

so they do not perceive the action as harmful at all. For players who do perceive the torturing of Koroks as harmful, they may still justify the practice. Thankfully, being immortal protects the Koroks from actually being killed despite the significant harm inflicted upon them (unlike the foxes). For those of us who are outcome oriented, we perceive no harmful consequences to torturing the Koroks and so we can justify the behaviour. For other players, the thought of simulating a harmful action alone³¹ might be enough to inhibit Korok torture.

Secondly, many supporters of the 'Korok torture trend' have argued that the new mechanics and player actions were justified given how frustrating the Korok seed side quests in *BotW* became (with 900 seeds to gather in total). This love-hate relationship and justification appears to rely on an attribution of blame to the Koroks themselves, allowing players to decouple their internal moral standards from their actions (a mechanism of *moral disengagement*³²). Again, this interpretation relies on the assumption that players see their actions as harmful and/or morally problematic which varies across individuals and relies on the extent to which their own moral values operate in the game space.

Finally, we should also consider the players' perceptions of non-human beings in *LoZ*. It might be the species of the Koroks themselves that justifies or motivates their mistreatment. This connects to a concept known as *speciesism* or the belief that humans are morally superior to other non-human animals³³. Most people do usually value humans more than other animals and we also value some animals more than others³⁴. Consider how much you value your pet compared to say a cow or a fish or a spider. In *LoZ*, the foxes are perceived as innocent and dog-like in their cries and many players might subsequently ascribe the same moral values to their lives as they would their own pets³⁵. However, the Koroks have fewer stereotypical cute or *kindchenschema*³⁶ features and are often perceived based on their utility to the player, perhaps enabling players to dehumanise them³⁷.

What makes *LoZ* particularly interesting in this discussion of moral values and actions in the game world versus the real-world, is both the player character's moral identity and the context of Hyrule. In some cases, immoral and antisocial behaviour in gaming worlds match the context in which they are being undertaken (GTA is a good example of this). But in some cases, particularly in the case of *LoZ*, we can see conflict between our actions and the context along with the character's identity and the destiny that lies before them. Dragging a cart around Hyrule with a Korok strapped to a crucifix on the back³⁸ doesn't particularly align with Link's identity as a hero and bringer of justice. In fact, when witnessing videos of Koroks being tortured, some players have commented on Link's identity, "*Link could be the real supervillain after all*"³⁹, demonstrating the complex bi-directional coupling between the moral actions of the player and their player character.

ME AS LINK, OR LINK AS DISTINCT? FICTIONAL MORAL IDENTITY AND BLEED

Regardless of our game play, our player character remains the hero of the narrative. The actions we can perform in *LoZ* may stretch, question, or nuance this identity (e.g., torturing Koroks) but our mission in the game is to defeat evil and bring balance to Hyrule. This does *not* change as a result of player agency. How well then does the player see their own moral identity and values aligning with those of *their* Link's (or Zelda's in *HW:4AoC* and in *EoW*⁴⁰)?

Perhaps the first thing to consider is the extent to which we see morality as an important part of our identity (or *internalisation*) and the degree to which our moral traits are reflected in our public choices (or *symbolisation*)⁴¹. This moral identity predicts helping, volunteering, and donating⁴²; the prescriptive behaviours that we discussed earlier. Context is important here too as when the environment makes moral identity salient, we are more likely to act in line with that identity⁴³. The environment in *LoZ* makes moral identity

salient for high *internalisers* through explicit character dialogues, such as requests for help and sharing stories of injustice but also through Link's journey as a moral exemplar. There are many instances in *LoZ* where we are forced to consider both our own and Link's moral identity and the actions that we have taken. For example, in *MM*⁴⁴ Link encounters five Moon Children that wear masks to represent characters that Link will need to defeat. Link starts a game of hide-and-go-seek with these children so that he can retrieve each of their masks. One Moon Child says to Link "*I wonder if you do the right thing...does it really make everybody...happy?*"⁴⁵. The profound underlying message here is that it might not be possible for us to save everyone and actually, some of Links (and the player's) actions come at a great cost. The player and character are faced with opportunities to help other characters but also opportunities to fail to help or to cause suffering. The David-and Goliath moral narrative that runs through *LoZ* is also important here as the player witnesses a young and vulnerable character transform into a powerful moral authority. This sense of power is also likely to remind players with high moral internalisation of the moral implications and consequences of their actions⁴⁶.

If we return to the treatment of Koroks in *TotK* as well as other beings in the *LoZ* series, we can use moral identity to interpret the stark divide between players in their views of the treatment of these creatures. For high internalisers, they have a wider circle of moral regard that likely includes all beings in *LoZ* (humans and Koroks alike)⁴⁷. This means that they are more likely to refrain from engaging in antisocial and unfair behaviours against out-group members. However, we also know that cues in our environment that diminish the importance of moral concerns, can also shift attention away from morality to other reasoning that can support or justify engagement in unethical acts⁴⁸. For many, there is no perceived harm in the torturing of Koroks and while they are being transported to their destination in questionable ways, the outcome is not severe, and the player receives more seeds as a result.

The player themselves will have traits (such as internalisation) that effect the extent to which their own moral identity will intrude in the game world. But to what extent does the player's identity overlap with Link's? Of course, players can recognise that events and actions in *LoZ* do not influence the real-world and vice versa; if Link eats a mushroom skewer, I am not likely to feel satiated afterwards. However, despite this, there is evidence that players experience a personal connection with their player-characters⁴⁹. This *cognitive permeation* predicts the degree to which fictional characters influence our own personal identities⁵⁰ and any *bleed-effects*⁵¹ (or transference) between player and character or vice versa. For example, in *WW*, despite Zelda's requests to leave with them, the King of Hyrule decides to stay behind as Hyrule sinks beneath the sea and he subsequently drowns. Many players see this as one of the saddest moments in the *LoZ* series; this experience of grief often bleeds-out to us as the player⁵². This process can also happen in the other direction and the traits or qualities of the player may bleed-in to the player-character instead. For example, if a player is afraid of heights, they may avoid visiting the Sky Islands in *TotK*. This fusion between player identity and player-character identity is more common when experiencing negative emotions⁵³ and so events such as the death of the King of Hyrule in *WW* or Zelda breaking down in Link's memories in *BotW*, are likely to strengthen the player's connection to Link. Importantly and linking back to moral identity, when we see a character's actions as reflecting our own moral values, this increases the degree of fusion between player and player-character and the likelihood of bleed-effects⁵⁴. As such, when defining the boundary between the player and Link, we need to consider the player's own moral identity but also the extent to which they quarantine their own identity from the imaginary world of *LoZ*: "*The face under the mask...Is that...your true face?*" (*MM*).

A SILENT HERO: WHAT MAKES *LoZ* SPECIAL IN THE CONTEXT OF MORAL IDENTITY AND BLEED?

There are several features of *LoZ* that make it particularly important for the development of moral identity and fusion between player and player-character. The first game in the *LoZ* series was released in 1986 and subsequently, over 25 further games have been released. For a millennial *LoZ* player, they will have experienced childhood, adolescence, and adulthood while playing the games in the series. Critically, this growth is mirrored in *LoZ* with Link being under 18 years old in most games and as young as 10 years old in the first game in the series (*The Legend of Zelda [TLoZ]*⁵⁵), tackling numerous moral dilemmas and growing throughout the *LoZ* catalogue. For example, take this quote from *OoT*: “*Link, you have fully matured as an adult. From now on, the future of all the people in Hyrule is on your shoulders*⁵⁶”. This means that for some players, there may be synergy between the development of the player and the development of the player-character.

Link is also unique in that he does not directly speak. In some games, the player can select different responses for Link (such as in *SS* and *BotW*) and non-player characters will respond based on these decisions but there is no explicit dialogue from Link. Surrounded by non-player characters that speak freely and in great details about the moral conflicts in Hyrule and the events that they have witnessed, Link’s silence sits in stark contrast. This silence leaves space for the development of a shared or collective moral identity between player and player-character. Miyamoto, the creator of *LoZ*, has directly spoken about this mechanism and its importance in immersing the player in the game’s universe, “...*the reason I won’t risk having the protagonist speak, even though it would make writing the story much easier*”⁵⁷.

Alongside being an effective game mechanic to tie us to Link, in *BotW*, we see Link’s silence justified within the Kingdom of Hyrule by Princess Zelda herself, “*When I...got around to asking why he’s so*

*quiet all the time...he feels it necessary to stay strong and to silently bear any burden*⁵⁸. Again, this brings the moral conflicts and the moral responsibility that Link bears to the forefront of the narrative; another effective strategy to tie the moral identities of player and player-character. The significance of good versus evil in the world of Hyrule makes this moral narrative even more important to the player: “*Our world is one of balance...just as there is light to drive away darkness, so too, is there benevolence to banish evil*⁵⁹” (TP).

CONCLUSION: NAVIGATING VIRTUES AND VICES IN HYRULE

Throughout *LoZ*, the clear dichotomy between good and evil forms the core of the narrative with Link embodying the role of the hero fighting against his nemesis to protect Hyrule and restore balance. Despite this binary good-versus-evil structure, the series does introduce nuanced moral conflicts, as both Link and Zelda face complex choices and identity dilemmas. These tensions serve to elevate the narrative beyond simplistic dichotomies, presenting players with morally grey areas that challenge their perceptions of right and wrong. The player's journey with Link and Zelda exposes them to opportunities for moral growth and exploration. Through interactions with non-player characters and encounters with moral dilemmas, players navigate a world that tests their values and beliefs. This unique experience encourages players to reflect on their own moral identities as they step into the shoes of the hero.

We have seen that context is important here too; the immersive world of Hyrule offers players a space to engage in moral decision-making and experience the consequences of their actions. Whether embodying Link's altruistic heroism or encountering morally questionable scenarios such as the trend of Korok torture in *TotK*, players must grapple with their own moral compass and how it aligns with Link's actions. Importantly, players' real-world identities can intersect with their in-game identities, allowing for a deeper connection

and bleed between the two. This relationship between the player and Link creates a unique space for moral exploration, as players wrestle with challenging scenarios that can lead to self-discovery and a better understanding of their values.

The *LoZ* series presents a multifaceted moral landscape where players journey alongside Link to face moral dilemmas and engage in virtuous actions. This immersive experience not only shapes players' perceptions of good and evil but also offers a space for personal growth and moral reflection within the captivating world of Hyrule: *"The right thing...What is it? I wonder..."* (MM)⁶⁰.

“HEY, LISTEN!”

HOW MUSIC AND SOUND EMOTIONALLY CONNECTS PLAYERS TO THE WORLD, GAMEPLAY AND STORY OF THE LEGEND OF ZELDA

NIALL MCLOUGHLIN, PHD.

“There is mysterious power in these notes. Now listen carefully¹.”

-Impa, Ocarina of Time

Music and sound have always been an integral part of *The Legend of Zelda (LoZ)* series. From the iconic 8-bit melodies of *LoZ*² to the sophisticated modern-classical scores of *TotK*³, the success of the *Zelda* series has gone hand-in-hand with the popularity of its sonic elements captivating audiences worldwide. The music has had a notable cultural influence - from orchestral performances drawing large crowds across the globe; to myriad covers on social media platforms; to famous musicians noting the music’s influence on their artistry⁴.

Within the games, music and sound have great significance. From advancing the gameplay and narrative to signalling threats and distinguishing locations, what players hear is fundamental to the experience of *Zelda*. The games’ audio enhances immersion in the world of Hyrule, and shapes the player's experience, taking us along a rich emotional journey. Music is elevated to a ‘higher status’ in the game - having magical properties that affect the world, events

and characters’ stories. As one article notes, “*There are few video games where music is as important than in The Legend of Zelda series*”⁵.

But it’s perhaps at the individual player level, where the music and sound’s influences are most profound. As YouTuber Pad Chennington notes, “*the entire soundtrack collectively works together to make you feel a myriad of emotions*”, leading to a deep sense of immersion in the world, story and gameplay⁶. For many of those who grew up with the series (this chapter’s author included), the music has made a lasting imprint, provided a deep sense of escapism, and continues to be a source of rich emotional experience. For some, it inspired them to pick up musical instruments for the first time; for others, the music continues to transport them to places of joy, nostalgia, or empowerment.

So how does the music achieve this depth of emotional connectivity? This chapter breaks this down, exploring how and why the music and sounds have a ‘Triforce’ of effects on players’ experience – enhancing players’ emotional connection with the environment (world & atmosphere), gameplay (challenges & progression), and story (characters & narrative). The role of musical ‘performance’ in the game, it is argued, enhances this Triforce of effects.



Figure 1: A diagram inspired by the Zelda ‘Triforce’, showing three overarching ways that music and sounds enhances players experience of the Zelda series. (Created by the author)

To understand how these effects take place, the chapter draws on psychological research (especially from ‘music psychology’) to introduce how music and sound can impact player experience at the personal level. Experiences from the gaming community will also be drawn upon to evoke the insights, alongside some basic music theory.

Given the richness of the Zelda opus it will not be possible to cover all aspects of Zelda’s music and sounds. There will be a focus on *Ocarina of Time (OoT)*⁷, as this game has a particularly strong emphasis on music, and it has been discussed at length by others⁸. We will also touch on *BotW*⁹ and *TotK*¹⁰ to show how the musical concepts have developed in recent flagship games. There will be an emphasis on music (i.e. the scores, compositions and melodies), while considering how sound effects, and environmental/ambient sound design complement this.

PART 1: ENVIRONMENT (WORLD & ATMOSPHERE)

Music immerses the player in a wide range of emotional environments

One of most notable aspects of the Zelda experience is the diversity of locations, settings and environments that the player experiences. In *Ocarina of Time (OoT)*, *Breath of the Wild (BotW)*¹¹, and *Tears of the Kingdom (TotK)*¹² the player encounters a wide range of environments – from ice-capped peaks to lava-filled volcanic chambers, from stratospheric sky islands to shadowy underworlds, and from bustling village markets to eerie, abandoned castles.

The music enhances a sense of distinctiveness in the world, by drawing on myriad styles, genres and textures. From the N64 era onwards, Zelda games have included a rich variety of instrumentation, timbres, textures and genres from around the world. For *OoT*, lead composer Koji Kondo included the sounds of piano, woodwinds, horns, strings, guitars, voices, and less common instruments such as the harpsichords, cuica drum, glass harmonica and, of course, the ocarina. As Kondo explained, he wanted to “use as many weird, unique instruments” as he could, to help create a realistic and varied atmosphere¹³.

This diversity of musical textures helps to reflect and distinguish the physical environments that players encounter. The audio evokes the shimmering water of *Zora’s Domain*¹⁴ and the *Water Temple*¹⁵, the rising drones of heat of the *Fire Temple*¹⁶, and the glacial echoes of *Ice Cavern*¹⁷. This tradition of sonic reflection has continued in recent games. In *ToTK*, the sparse and wistful woodwinds of *Sky Island*¹⁸ contrast with the dark, bass synths that reverberate throughout the underworld *Depths*¹⁹. This not only helps the player to navigate Hyrule, but it enhances a deep sense of immersion in the world. As YouTuber Pad Chennington notes, “the music is so powerful that you know exactly where you are, without even opening your eyes”²⁰.

Additionally, music and sound help to add distinctiveness and authenticity to places and cultures. For *OoT*, Kondo was inspired by

music from all around the world and uses this to reflect cultural moods across Hyrule²¹ - from flamenco guitars (*Gerudo Valley*²²) to African drumming (*Goron City*²³), Caribbean steel drums (*Zora's Domain*²⁴) and Gregorian chanting (*Temple of Time*²⁵). Repeated musical motifs are also heard across the *LoZ* series in both discrete locations (e.g., *Hyrule Castle Town*²⁶, *Lost Woods*²⁷ and *Kakariko Village*²⁸), as well as reoccurring environments (e.g. *Great Fairy Fountain*²⁹, *Shrines*³⁰, and *Stable*³¹ themes). Again, these motifs help the player know exactly where they are in Hyrule, while helping to build place-based identities.

But further to this, the player also 'feels' the emotional mood of the atmosphere and environments they encounter. Often, at a basic level, music is used to represent places in, broadly speaking, positive or negative emotional terms. This often is to distinguish places that are safe from those that are threatening. For instance, in *OoT*, the *Kokiri Forest* theme³² uses an upbeat, rhythmic melody in the C major key, which indicates a safe, playful, child-like environment. Contrast this with the *Forest Temple*³³ or *Shadow Temple*³⁴ themes, where the surreal soundscapes elicit an immediate sense of fear and tension. Additionally, the use of contrast between melody and dissonance is a key device deployed by Kondo and other *Zelda* composers to distinguish places of safety and danger too, and to help gamers emotionally connect with the different locations they explore. A chilling example is the contrast between *Castle Town's*³⁵ upbeat, positive music during Link's childhood, and the absence of this music during his adulthood³⁶ - replaced by a disharmony of swirling wind, cawing crows and droning ReDeads.

A key psychological mechanism at play here is known as 'evaluative conditioning'³⁷. This refers to a sort of 'Pavlovian' response to sound, whereby the emotions we feel are the conditioned result of repeated pairings of sounds and concepts. Many people, especially in Western cultures, tend to associate music in a major key with happiness and positivity, music in a minor key with sadness and melancholy, and dissonant music with tension or fear. This is why

YouTuber Blipsounds notes, “[the music] really plays with your emotions. It’s like the game classically conditions you to get nervous every time the dissonant piano chords play, and to feel calm when you feel the calm ones”³⁸. This is also why we associate specific musical characteristics with physical properties (like water, fire, and ice)³⁹, and link musical styles and melodies with specific places and cultures. By drawing on a vast range of styles, Zelda music draws on the power of association to ensure the music feels tied to a sense of ‘place’, changing as Link moves between different cultural landscapes.

Yet Zelda’s use of music and sound to convey a sense of place is not simplistic, or clichéd. The music develops dynamically as game-play unfolds. In *BotW*, the *Hyrule Castle*⁴⁰ theme smoothly transitions between full orchestral outfit and intricate organ piece as Link moves from the outside flanks to the inner chambers, and vice versa – seamlessly signalling a change in environment. And sometimes the music can dissociate too. For instance, the *Lost Woods* music (as reimagined in *BotW* and *TotK*)⁴¹, uses repeated piano notes with little harmonic progress to create the feeling of ‘being lost’, of not making progress⁴². Similarly, the *Forest Temple*⁴³ music in *OoT* repeats four dissonant notes with uncommon 5-bar phrases to create an eerie, disorientating atmosphere, which as YouTuber, Save Data notes, “changes itself just enough that it never outstays its welcome”⁴⁴.

The use of ambient sounds complements all this, enhancing emotional immersion. The *Forest Temple* theme blends musical notes with glass harmonica and ambient bone rattling sounds to reinforce the haunted atmosphere⁴⁵. In more recent games, blurred lines between music and ambient sound enhances environmental immersion. Much of the soundtrack for *BotW* was written and performed on a piano, with emphasis on ambient music and sounds, which help add “authenticity” to the environments⁴⁶. The game features a plethora of natural environmental sounds⁴⁷, such as the chatter of birds, tree leaves rustling in the wind, rain, rivers, waves and thunder. Such sounds can increase a sense of connection with nature for

listeners^{48,49}, while conveying the vastness and isolation of *BotW*'s open-world gameplay.

Together the music and sound design immerse the player in the environment of the game. The player feels that the world is layered, living, and complex, and emotionally deep; while ambient sounds add authenticity to environments, suggesting a *whole* world worth exploring.

PART 2: GAMEPLAY (CHALLENGES & PROGRESSION)

Music makes the player feel alerted, rewarded and in sync with gameplay

The role of music and sound is also fundamental to active gameplay experience across the *Zelda* series. As gamers we need to be keenly attuned to unexpected threats from enemies, and spot new and useful resources, to survive and progress. Sound plays a key role here, as they do in the real world. Across the series, audio helps to focus players attention towards potential dangers, rewards and important changes in the environment.

Across *Zelda* games, fast paced, dissonant music is typically activated the moment an enemy threat occurs. Good examples here are the *Middle Boss Battle (OoT)*⁵⁰, *Guardian Battle* music (*BotW*)⁵¹ and *Gloom Spawn Theme (TotK)*⁵² which each employ a sudden rush of notes to indicate the onset of an enemy attack. The shock this makes us feel as players is driven by 'brain stem reflexes'⁵³. This refers to one of the most basic, and immediate forms of arousal that music and sounds can create in humans. Dramatic changes in acoustic characteristics, such as sudden increases in volume, dissonant notes, or fast temporal patterns trigger basic emotions like surprise, and can conjure unpleasant feelings in listeners.

Along with musical rushes, Hyrule is *full* of sounds that stimulate brain stem reflexes, whether it's the slamming of dungeon doors, the smashing and crashing of a boulder rolling towards you, the zapping of lightning strikes, low-health beeping, or enemy roars. A particu-

larly chilling example is the terrifying, sudden screams of the Re-Dead in *OoT* (as with Gibdo shrieks in other games)⁵⁴. In other words, the player navigating Link’s world must process many alerts and stimuli that tap into the most evolutionarily basic parts of the human brain.

The physiological arousal created by these types of sounds has an instinctive, adaptive, evolutionary function. It helps humans to survive by avoiding danger and helps us notice useful cues in the environment. This is useful from both an evolutionary perspective and in terms of a gameplay, as the music and sounds help to activate a ‘fight-or-flight’ response, priming us to either tackle a threat head on or run away and avoid it.

After the initial shock, *Zelda*’s music then utilises tempo and rhythm to sync players emotions with gameplay. Rhythm is used in *Zelda* as a key device to reinforce the pace of battles and challenges across the game. As Koji Kondo discussed, he often wanted to capture “*the feeling of running or rushing through open spaces*”⁵⁵. In this sense, the *Hyrule Field Theme*⁵⁶ (*OoT*) and *Molduga Battle* music⁵⁷ (*BotW*) show how fast-paced, percussive rhythms are used in different contexts to drive a sense of movement, challenge and adventure. The effects of this on gamers can be partly explained by a process known as ‘rhythmic entrainment’ whereby our heart rate and emotions can sync with the rhythm and tempo (i.e. speed) of music⁵⁸. In the case of *Zelda*, this helps sync players’ internal rhythm, attention and mood with the flow of gameplay as it unfolds.

Then, upon the successful completion of an action or challenge, the music and sound then work together to reward players and reinforce positive actions – whether that’s the satisfying chime of a rupee⁵⁹, a rare item⁶⁰, new map location⁶¹, or heart container⁶². In *BotW* and *TotK*, repeated pinging sounds via Link’s *Sheikah Sensor* signals nearby shrines, ingredients and other beneficial resources⁶³, while a rewarding musical motif occurs when Link successfully cooks a recipe⁶⁴. These rewarding jingles are sometimes subtly complex too. A mainstay in the series is the infamous ‘*Puzzle Solved*’

(or ‘*Secret Sound*’⁶⁵) - a short but highly versatile motif, often used to indicate the discovery of a new area. This sound functions beautifully to signify something new and interesting. Melodically, it asks an unresolved question and is not in a fixed key. This makes it musically distinctive and versatile – such that it works seamlessly across different contexts in the games, and stands out above the other music and sounds⁶⁶.

In these ways, the gameplay audio again draws on the power of ‘evaluative conditioning’. Nintendo’s sound design is notable for its use of ‘tuned’ sounds – that is, sounds which are not atonal, and chime like musical notes⁶⁷. This subtle musicality can tap into our conditioned associations – for instance, sound effects that use notes from a major chord can indicate a sense of positivity. Given pleasant sounds are known to activate dopamine (i.e. reward) pathways in the human brain⁶⁸, positive in-game sounds are likely to nurture players motivation to carry out similar tasks again – and move towards more complex and rewarding challenges.

Associations with sounds are crucial to gameplay in other ways too. As with the mood of different locations, the more we play, the more we learn to associate different sounds with positive (e.g. safer) and negative (e.g. more dangerous) gameplay events. As YouTuber Blipsounds notes, “*Oftentimes [in BotW] you’ll be running through a field and hear a dissonant piano chord play, and then shortly after you’ll encounter a fight. [...] It does the same thing when it’s calm. It does an excellent job of setting up the scene for what will be coming soon*”⁶⁹. Away from the action, the music drops in intensity, and ambient nature sounds can be heard more easily again. For players this signals safety, reduces stress and helps increases attention and focus ahead of the next challenge^{70,71}.

In these ways, music and sounds work together to immerse the player in challenges and gameplay progression, while alerting them to notable changes, and reinforcing successes.

PART 3: STORY (CHARACTERS & NARRATIVE)

Music connects players with the emotions of the story & characters

Another strong feature of music and sound across the series is the way it connects players with the characters, overarching narrative and themes of the game.

Firstly, music and sound connect players with the characters, and their stories. Across the *Zelda* games, ‘leitmotifs’ are common. This music theory term refers to the repeated pairing of musical melodies with characters, places and other concepts. Some good examples of character leitmotifs are *Zelda’s Lullaby*⁷², *Epona’s Song*⁷³, *Sheik’s Theme*⁷⁴, and *Mipha’s Theme*⁷⁵. Leitmotifs, like these, are powerful in that they help embody character qualities musically, and remind the player of these traits, even when the characters are not visually present. *Zelda’s Lullaby*, for instance, evokes a sense of Zelda’s memory, her family’s legacy, her power, and her plight. This happens in overt ways (e.g. during cutscenes, or when Link plays *Zelda’s Lullaby* on the ocarina), and in more subtle instances. For instance, in *BotW*, a variation of *Zelda’s Lullaby* plays while Link is cantering through Hyrule’s changing landscapes on horseback⁷⁶; and it forms part of the *Hyrule Castle*⁷⁷ theme as Link approaches Zelda’s location. For the player, this reinforces Zelda’s symbolic and emotional presence, her character’s arc, and the challenges at hand; all while creating a sense of narrative continuity throughout the series.

The music and sounds also connect players with the depth of story – reflecting the overarching narratives of the game. *OoT*, *BotW* and *TotK* each deal with complex thematic tensions, such as good vs. evil; dark vs. light; past vs. future; childhood vs. adulthood; threat vs. safety; destruction vs. restoration. The music reflects these tensions – for instance, by contrasting ancient and modern musical styles of music; and through the ebb and flow of dissonance and harmony (as discussed earlier). And many of the songs in *Zelda* are presented as if

having been ‘passed down’ throughout Hyrule’s history. *Zelda’s lullaby* is again a good example of this, as well as *Kass’ ‘Ancient Songs’*⁷⁸ (*BotW*), and the *Rito’s Song of the Stormwind Ark*⁷⁹ (*TotK*). This helps immerse players in the story, as it gives *Zelda’s* music an ancient, folk-like quality, as if having been retold over and over again.

It’s no surprise then that the *LoZ* music draws on ancient musical traditions. Koji Kondo was inspired by traditional folk music for *OoT*⁸⁰, a form of music known for the act retelling songs across generations. And beyond this, he frequently composed in ancient ‘modes’. Modes are types of musical scales that existed long before the major and minor scales used in most Western music today. The frequent use of modes is arguably one of the most distinctive features of *Zelda* music. A good example of a ‘modal’ *Zelda* composition is the *Temple of Time* theme (*OoT*)⁸¹, which is written in the Dorian mode⁸² (the name ‘Dorian’ is the ancient Greek cultural subgroup the scale is associated with). To modern ears, the *Temple of Time* theme largely sounds as if it were composed in a sombre minor scale, with brief, unexpected switches to a more hopeful major key. For gamers listening on, this modal music subtly reflects story themes of time and sacred power, by evoking a sense of temporal, historic depth and mystical otherworldliness⁸³. It is perhaps further symbolic of the thematic tensions at hand (e.g. past vs. future) that *Zelda’s* composers used modern synthesisers and digital music production techniques to create these ancient sounding pieces.

By using modes and leitmotifs to connect players with the emotional depth of the story, *Zelda* games play with ‘musical expectancy’ – that is, the emotional impact music has when it either confirms and satisfies, or violates and contradicts, listeners’ expectations⁸⁴. In terms of meeting expectations, repetition is a simple way *Zelda’s* music creates an emotional response. Research shows that reoccurring musical phrases, and repeated listening, can increase the enjoyment of music, regardless of its complexity⁸⁵. Leitmotifs, such

as *Zelda's lullaby* therefore draw on the power of repetition to evoke players' emotions and develop a sense of connection to characters.

But *Zelda's* music affects emotion by subverting players' musical expectations too, often through unusual musical patterns. As Koji Kondo explained, “[W]ith *Zelda*, I don't go for conventional chord structures but instead focus more on the atmosphere”⁸⁶. To add drama and colour to his pieces, Kondo frequently utilised a compositional technique known as ‘modal interchange’. This is when chords are borrowed from the parallel ‘mode’ of a piece, adding harmonic colour and variation, without changing the main key around which a piece of music is built. For instance, a piece written in the key of C-major, which temporarily uses chords from the C-minor key before switching back to C-major, would be an example of modal interchange. Using these so-called ‘borrowed chords’ subverts our expectations as listeners, while remaining musically close enough that it all still flows together. Good examples of modal interchange in *OoT* include the *Minuet of Forest*⁸⁷, the *Title Theme*⁸⁸, *Overture of Sages*⁸⁹ and *Prelude of Light*⁹⁰. A particularly nice example is heard in the *Serenade of Water*⁹¹, which uses borrowed chords to help resolve the melody. (For a more detailed explanation of *Zelda's* use of modal interchange, check out YouTuber Gavin Leaper's excellent video in the chapter notes⁹²).

The use of uncommon modal scales and chord progressions is a key reason why *Zelda's* music is so evocative. While this ‘sonic subversion’ may sometimes lead to feelings of anxiety or surprise, often it leads to pleasure. For many listeners, unexpected musical movements give them the ‘chills’. This emotional response is likely to stem from an evolutionary *need* to notice potentially threatening changes in the environment (which is apt given earlier discussion about music's role in helping players to spot changes in the game world). It has been suggested that music elicits pleasant sensations from these types of effects, as it is a safe, non-threatening version of this experience. As neuroscientist Jessica Grahn has explained, “*the nice thing about music is that it's a very safe way to experience these*

[effects] – *you're not actually in danger*"⁹³. And this all matters greatly for our experience as players, because in having these complex emotional impacts, the music deepens our connection to the game, even if we don't notice it happening.

Together, by both reaffirming and contradicting our expectations, the music and sounds seem to reflect Link's journeys from a sense of 'home' or 'safety', into a destabilised world, and back again. And they seem to help tie together apparently conflicting narrative themes, by creating a sense of 'connection', 'transportation' and 'continuity' between places in the game; between childhood and adulthood; between the Hyrule of past and present; and perhaps even between the real and fictional worlds that gamers experience.

PERFORMANCE AS A TRIFORCE AMPLIFIER

Performance enhances connection with the environment, gameplay and story

In this final section, we look at how the role of performance and interaction amplifies the Triforce of effects: connecting players to the *world, gameplay* and *narratives*. Performance is a unique way that music and sound features across the Zelda games, playing multiple roles and requiring interaction⁹⁴. A key innovation of the series is gamer-led music performance, such as in *OoT* where players are required to input musical notes using buttons on their controller.

Performance enhances connection to the world and atmosphere through such interaction. Music, the gamer learns first hand, not only reflects the environment passively, but plays an active role in reshaping the world. Music can *literally* change the environment, through performance. Key examples of this include the *Song of Storms*⁹⁵ which leads to a thundery downpour, or the *Sun's Song*⁹⁶ which brings about day or night. Through songs, the gamer realises their actions have a direct influence on the world around them, changing the time of day, weather conditions, or granting access to new places, amongst many other effects.

On top of this, performance enhances emotional connection to gameplay. Song performances can hinder enemies (e.g. *the Sun's Song* freezes ReDeads); and helps to develop skills and resources (e.g. Hestu the Korok musician plays the maracas to expand Link's inventory⁹⁷). In this way, the power of music performance is fundamental to gameplay and progression. Acts of performance often involve auditory feedback (for correct and incorrect sounds), as well as rewarding motifs to mark a successful performance⁹⁸. It is plausible that together this creates a sense of agency and empowerment for the player. Research shows that experiencing success in a task specific domain – in this case, music performance – can increase a sense of ‘mastery’ and, in turn, enhance our feelings of personal capacity to carry out similar actions again⁹⁹. Perhaps this is why some Zelda gamers have felt inspired to pick up instruments in the real world.

Finally, performance also enhances emotional connection with the story and characters. In many Zelda games, the player learns songs directly from characters (such as Link's childhood friend Saria¹⁰⁰, or the harpist Sheik¹⁰¹) and repeats musical themes that are crucial to the narrative progression. For instance, in *BotW* the bard Kass plays a Bandoneon while searching for ‘ancient songs’ that explore Hyrule's history; while in *OoT*, the player must learn several short musical motifs fundamental to the narrative progression (e.g. *Zelda's Lullaby*¹⁰², *Song of Storms*¹⁰³, and *Song of Time*¹⁰⁴). By repeating the music as a facet of gameplay, our connections to the story and character's journeys are enhanced in ways not typical of gaming or musical experience. As Youtuber Liam Triforce nicely summarises: “*Ocarina of Time's* soundtrack isn't legendary just because it is memorable, catchy or evocative of the games' world - it's also legendary because you get to perform it yourself, and every time you do, you are reminded of what each melody stands for, reinforcing their power”¹⁰⁵.

CONCLUSION

This chapter has explored how music and sound is fundamental to players' emotional connection with the *environment*, *gameplay* and *story* of the Zelda series. And it has shown how this 'Triforce' is further enhanced by the unique role of *performance* across the games. We have focused on *OoT*, *BotW*, and *TotK*, but many of the insights apply to other games across the series. As this chapter has shown, Zelda's sounds and musical scores are powerful because they tap into a wide range of psychological pathways that are known to affect human emotion. The audio activates brain stem reflexes, reward pathways and conditioned associations; it syncs our emotions in with its tempo and rhythms; and it gently subverts our musical expectations. Together, I believe this is why Zelda's music has taken millions of players along deep emotional journeys, why so many people connect with the music beyond the game, and why it has even changed some people's lives – by inspiring them to learn musical instruments. Without the music and sounds, our experience of Zelda's world, gameplay and story would be radically different.

WISDOM

YOUR PRINCESS IS IN ANOTHER BODY

ZELDA, FLUIDITY AND
TRANSFORMATION

CELESTE SANGIORGIO, PHD.

A male child that is born once every 100 years to a tribe of female warriors becomes corrupted by his power as a king, leading to war; a fleeing refugee uses her dying breath to ask an ancient, sentient tree and a group of eternal children to raise her mortal baby boy; a princess born with sacred powers finds herself unable to access them after coming-of-age, despite endless purification rituals, leading to calamity falling upon her kingdom. Stories and fairytales can seem extreme, but they contain a pressure of truth at their core, what the mythologist Joseph Cambell referred to as ‘portions of ourselves... golden seeds [that] do not die.’¹

Transformations in stories like the *Legend of Zelda* series sketch out pathways that are familiar to us: when does our body seem like the one we have always known and when does it seem imbued with new powers, possessed, inaccessible, or even beast-like? The answers to these questions may come from looking at where we have come from, the relationships we form, what we have developed and gained, and evaluating what we have become.

The three characters at the core of the *Zelda* series, Link, Zelda, and Ganondorf, form and retread the same roles as knight, princess,

and demon king throughout multiple iterations, timelines, and cycles. The constant, cyclical nature and minute changes in these characters create a golden opportunity – a light arrow strike – to map mythic structures and mental landscapes of our own minds, and explore what they tell us about our own cultural relationships to gender, identity, and transformation.

COMING OF AGE: IN HYRULE AND OTHER PLACES

Magical objects, legends, abilities, beliefs– these are all examples of things that are passed down to us. Inheritance, the act of receiving items passed down across generations, implies the presence of a person waiting, aware or unaware at the end of a long passage – of tradition, legend, circumstance, or time. Time, events, birth, death, and lineage create a stage with different parts: in social psychology, a *role* refers to the set of experiences, characteristics, and internalized beliefs that is connected to a specific identity.²

Roles involve negotiation: what is typically observed for a role – called the stereotype or prototype of this role – may not be true in a unique instance of the role or even for the role within a specific context or culture.³ What is true of princesses in general may not be true for Princess Zelda; what is true for one princess Zelda may not be true for other Princess Zeldas. A few examples of Zelda can help reveal the characteristics that are typical for princess Zelda. In *Ocarina of Time (OoT)*,⁴ Zelda is frustrated because she has prophetic visions and suspects that Ganondorf, who swore fealty to her father, the King, is not truly loyal. In *Breath of the Wild (BotW)*,⁵ Zelda is frustrated because she is a princess who is destined to use her inherited magical powers to subvert disaster but finds that her magic is not accessible to her. Using these two examples, it may be possible to begin forming a hypothesis: maybe the emotion, frustration, or the idea, unrealized or just-out-of-reach power, are part of the tapestry or set of conditions associated with taking on the title, or role, of Princess Zelda.

There has been considerable study in multiple disciplines on when and how people take on roles in their lives – from commonalities across myths and legends, to depictions in film and media studies, to anthropological studies, and, of course, studies of the mind and psychological experience of roles. In the *Hero with a Thousand Faces*, mythologist Joseph Campbell makes the argument for a **monomyth** – a series of initiation rituals and events that move a person from their traditional, everyday roles into taking on the role, or mask, of the hero.⁶ In *Myth and Reality*, mythologist Mircea Eliade states that myths, folktales, and legends sketch out fantastical versions of the real processes that individuals go through daily.^{7,8} Anthropology has charted a collection of commonalities across coming-of-age rituals: events that signal the end of one role (childhood) and the beginning of the next (adulthood).

Zelda – along with Link and Ganondorf – is a mythic character locked into challenges that run parallel to the initiation rituals that people face at critical junctures in their lives: how does someone become a hero, a paragon of wisdom, or defined by their relationship to power? The answer is found at the intersection of social, personality, and developmental psychology. Ecological Systems Theory (figure 1) sketches out a starting point: individuals are defined by their place in time (called the chronosystem), their place in culture and different settings (called macrosystems), and their internal worlds (called microsystems).⁹ Ecological Systems Theory creates a static image – what someone looks like at one point of time. One way to think of the complex, living process of change over time is to consider that individuals have an internal ecosystem of past, present, and possible identities that they take on, change, and renegotiate over time (Figure 1).¹⁰ Merging these two ideas creates an image of a living sense of self: something that both exists as it presently is and is transforming to a new state (Figure 1).

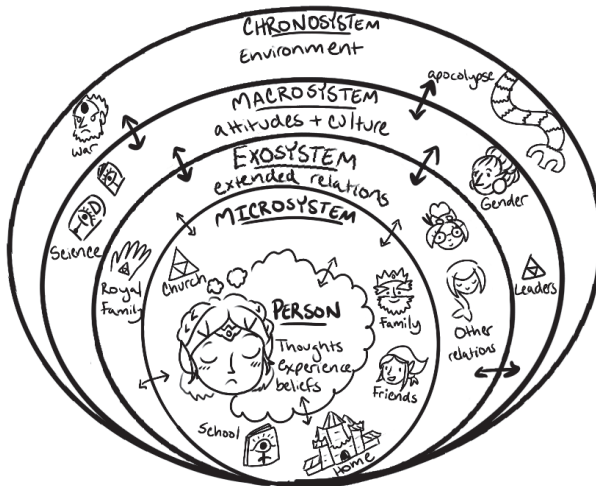


Figure 1. Ecological Systems Theory (Zelda, BotW, Illustrated by the Author)

Coming-of-age is one of the unique culminations of internal and external pressures. It is a timepoint in someone's life when they have to complete a full renegotiation of their entire mental landscape and its roles, what the psychologist Erik Erikson referred to as an identity crisis, one of several psychosocial stages.¹¹ Seemingly passive, time always moves forward – biological processes, or growth, create changes in peoples' awareness and internal conditions (e.g., hormones) that activate the transition from childhood to adulthood. In the words of Sheik in *OoT*,¹² "The flow of time is always cruel... Its speed seems different for each person, but no one can change it..." Increased mental capacity and increasing responsibilities set the stage for recognizing that what has worked in childhood no longer works in adulthood. The goals of childhood include the acquisition of crucial, foundational skills: dexterity (needed for swordsmanship), understanding of the world and relationships (needed for problem solving, or wisdom), basic understanding of morals and group membership (needed for courage, wisdom, and power). In Sheik's case, the frustrated princess status was forced into transition

by chronological events (i.e., the sacking of Hyrule and takeover by Ganondorf), natural increases in ability upon aging (i.e., learning skills with a bow), and changes in life experience – exposure to both Shekiah culture and harsh realities of life and compromise during the seven years that Link was sealed in the Temple of Time.

Achievement of these developmental, external, and internal skills means the removal of these challenges and the opportunity to recognize new ones. In *OoT*,¹³ Link could not pick up the Kokiri sword and purge evil from the Deku Tree while the Kokiri were raising him as an infant, this opportunity only became available to him as a 9-year-old child, signaling the pressure to come-of-age and, eventually, take on a hero and adult role in Hyrule. In *BotW*,¹⁴ the external pressures of the war with Calamity Gannon and her father's expectations mean that the passivity that Princess Zelda has used to smooth over and retain her role as a young princess no longer work – she must negotiate a new identity as an assertive scholar and powerful, protective leader; in doing so she activates her inherited powers and becomes a Philosopher Queen.¹⁵ These examples demonstrate that achievement in developing a new role creates a new identity that is satisfying and authentic to the person who has undergone the trial of role transition. The challenges that Zelda faces in *BotW* force her into a transition, but it is through this challenge that she recognizes, respects, and understands that she has always had the capacity to be an assertive, powerful, and thoughtful queen. Furthermore, these characteristics have always been part of Zelda. Through challenge and conflict, she realizes that the frustration she experienced was partially due to not accepting her ability to be assertive and scholarly; these traits are foundational to the unique experience of Zelda as a queen – unique from other people, queens, leaders, and rulers.

If childhood is the process of obtaining skills and then seeing how these skills and understanding apply to the world, then the transition to adulthood, through the pressures of adolescence, is the process of weaving and personalizing these skills into a personal,

specific web of identities and roles – the successful end to the identity crisis.¹⁶ Another way of thinking about this is that childhood is the framework that identity is built on – or, as Sheik says in *OoT*,¹⁷ “a thing that doesn't change with time is a memory of younger days.” Instead, adulthood can be a lens acquired in adulthood, a lens of truth that is used to make sense and use of the skills and lessons of childhood; a process of recontextualizing and reorganizing the internal and external worlds. Events and objects from childhood may not be usable as they once were but they can be observed – or, stated in *OoT*,¹⁸ “It looks like you won't be able to use some of the weapons you found as a kid anymore” (Navi) and “a childish mind will turn to noble ambition” (Sheik). These quotes speak directly to time and transitions, but all iterations of Zelda, Link, and Ganondorf go through substantial changes. All versions of Zelda include frustration of abilities that ultimately lead to a recognition of internal strengths that always existed: the calculating diplomat Zelda becomes a wartime scholar Queen in *Twilight Princess* (TP)¹⁹; the scholarly and dutiful princess becomes an engineer scientist-practitioner Queen in *BotW*²⁰

Each group that someone is a member of, rejected from, or otherwise aware of creates a patchwork of awareness that then gets woven and tailored into something that fits the unique dimensions of a specific person's identity. Children begin the process of self-socialization as early as three years old; that is, they begin to decide who they want to spend time with and who to develop friendships with (or reject) based on shared personality traits, like assertiveness,²¹ and external qualities, like gender-presentation.^{22,23} In *Tears of the Kingdom* (*TotK*),²⁴ Gerudo children are brought into the Gerudo desert kingdom around the time that children recognize and begin gender-based socialization. Gerudo children are therefore pushed towards a certain pathway of awareness: placing children in single gender environments can encourage building confidence in skills²⁵ (like swordsmanship) and considering roles in society²⁶ (such as being a *voe* or a *vai*, a male or female respectively in gerudo

language), but there is evidence that the skills people go on to develop into adolescence and adulthood are based more on friendships and unique characteristics rather than gender or societal expectations.²⁷ Coming-of-age is the first opportunity – an initiation opportunity – to commit to the roles and identities that individuals want to take with them into adulthood. In other words, children see the world, adolescents interpret it, and teens and adults commit to it through initiation rituals that match their unique culture, identities, and personalities. Zelda, Link, and Ganondorf are all shown in the context of the transitions and commitments of adolescence and adulthood. For Zelda and Link, the conflicts and reconciliation of the transition is shown across the events of each game; for Ganondorf, the results of his choices are represented in the adult role he has chosen to commit to.

Coming-of-age is a neutral description of landscape, a set of circumstances – an individual must walk into that landscape and take on the activities of a specific role to begin a rite of passage or an initiation ritual. Rites of passage can be a quinceañera, a driving test, graduating high school or college, breaking into a scary, abandoned house²⁸ or placing three gemstones onto an altar and activating the portal to the sacred Realm, adulthood (*OoT*).²⁹ Characters in the Legend of Zelda series are often in the process of “answering the call” to adventure, or adulthood, by engaging in initiation rituals for specific, adult roles that they chose to commit to. Examining specific instances of Zelda, Link, and Ganondorf reveals how each individual instance of these characters retain their individuality and express it through both their chosen and inherited roles..

COMING OF AGE: AS ZELDA, LINK, AND GANONDORF

Legends have hallmarks and indicators^{30,31} – a lush, dangerous forest hiding a mythic weapon for a chosen hero, a goddess that bestows gifts and favor, greedy Kings and demon Kings – but a unique quality of the *LoZ* series is that patterns and overlaps can be

examined within the group of Zeldas, Links, and Ganondorfs across games. Ideas about identity and roles are often communicated through stories. Patterns in stories that connect to identity development and adaptation can be referred to as the monomyth but symbols and stories about specific characteristics and responsibilities linked to specific roles are called **archetypes**³². Link, Zelda, and Ganondorf are archetypal because they represent the specific roles of princess, hero, and demon King, but they are unique from tall tales and recurring figures, called culture heroes,³³ in that all the iterations of their archetypes are linked to each other through timelines, legacy, and inheritance. Table 1 details the twelve games that include substantive transformation to the bodies of Link, Zelda, and/or Ganondorf within the franchise.

At time of writing, approximately eighteen titles have been released. This means that over half of all *Legend of Zelda* games (66%) includes substantive changes to the main characters bodies; this number increases to approximately three-quarters (73%) when sequel games (e.g., *Link's Awakening*³⁴) are removed, with the exception of *Majora's Mask* (*MM*). Transformation was established as a main feature of the series since the early title *A Link to the Past* (*ALttP*³⁵) when the onset of the Dark World turned all people into expressions of their souls, transforming Link into a pink bunny. To fuse terminology from religious studies and psychology, the creation of the Dark World disengaged the characteristics that people attached to their roles and identities from their internal worlds and instead connected them to their physical appearances, making them look more like archetypes. What people thought about themselves and others and how they tend to interact created a basis for what they would look like. Therefore, Link in *Link to the Past* may have had some gentle nature, silence, or other quality that caused a pink bunny to manifest.

Transformations attached to roles, identities, and archetypes seem to take place across Hyrule and especially for the main characters in the series. Ganondorf or someone possessed/channeled by

him (e.g., Agahnim, *ALttP*³⁶) often becomes an ogre, boar, or demon, though he is sometimes reincarnated or otherwise manifested through hatred and bad intentions (see table one; see chapter on dark triad, in this volume). Similarly, Link often starts the story as a townsperson and then transforms into other beings, including a pink bunny (*ALttP*), all the roles and archetypes in a doomed town (*MM*), a Picori (small, fae-like being only visible to children and those with a pure heart in *The Minish Cap [TMC]*), a wolf with an earring (*TP*), and a man with a monster arm (*TotK*). Zelda often begins her story in a leadership role in peril: for example, she may lead a pirate crew, but she has to contend with repeated abductions by a giant bird (*Wind Waker [WW]*). While Zelda is frequently encased in stone or crystal (see Table 1) or becomes a puppet (*TP*, *ST*, *TotK*) she has also gone through substantial body transformations, including becoming a male ninja (Sheikah tribe, *OoT*), a Pirate (*WW*), a Goddess (*SS*), a spirit that possesses suits of armor (*ST*), an egg-sac-like container for Calamity Ganon (*BotW*), and a dragon (*TotK*).

Game name (year*)	Zelda gender representation	Zelda transformation	Link gender representation	Link transformation	Ganondorf	Ganon transformation	Notes
Link to the past (1992)	Princess, One of seven maidens descended from Wise Men	Encased in crystal	Nephew, townspeople	Pink Bunny	Royal Court Wizard Agahnim (betrayed)	Ganon, bat/boar-like demon	Maidens, descendants of Wise Men; dark world reveals 'true self'
Ocarina of Time (1998)	Princess with prophetic dreams	Male-presenting Sheikah, encased in crystal	The boy without a fairy, refugee of Hyrule Civil War	The man with a fairy, hero of time	Ganondorf, King of Gerudo	Ganon, ogre, beast-like demon	Kokiri, eternal children; Gerudo, female/adult race; nonhuman representations of gender (Zora, Goron); repeated discussion of marriage; Sages
Majora's Mask* (2000)	Shown in memory, references goddess of time	--	Link, child hero of Hyrule (OOT)	Link transforms into all identities	--	--	More nonhuman representations of gender (deku, fairies); Gender-role identities (bride, groom, father, son, mother)
Wind Walker (2002)	Pirate, leading full crew	Princess of Time, magic coma	Older brother, coming-of-age (of the hero)	Hero of the winds	Ganondorf, escaped from sealed realm	Ganondorf, stone	Many additional transformations, including boat/king
Minish Cap (2004)	Princess, childhood friend of Link	Stone Statue	Blacksmith, grandson, childhood friend of Zelda	Picori Link	--	--	Many transformations, including Picori/Minish and curses
Four Swords (2005)	Princess, childhood friend of Link, shrine maiden	Trapped in crystal, power to seal	Childhood friend of Zelda	Split into four Links (four sword)	Reincarnation of Ganondorf	Dark patch/demon Ganon	Interaction with Shrine Maidens, Dark Link

Twilight Princess (2006)	Imprisoned/war-time queen	Soulless, puppet Zelda	Cowboy, villager	Wolf Link	Deposed ruler	Boar-Gannon	Introduction of Twili, Midna/Twilight Realm
Skyward Sword (2011)	Daughter of the principle of the Knight Academy boarding school, goddess role in Wing Ceremony	Mortal reincarnation of the Goddess, 1000 year slumber seal	Attende of the Knight Academy, childhood friend of Zelda, engaging in Wing Ceremony	Hylia's chosen knight	Demise (proto-Ganon)	Crystallization/eternal curse of Demise's hatred forms Ganon	Origin point for series; introduction of multiple races and transformative elements
Link between worlds (2013)	Ruler of Hyrule	Trapped in painting	Apprentice blacksmith	Activated trifoce of Courage	Deceased	Yuga Ganon (aka Sorcerer Ganon, revived)	Introduction of Lorule, mirror of Hyrule
Breath of the Wild (2017)	Scholar, unable to access power	Activated power, 100 year battle/seal with Ganon	Wounded, resulting in 100-year recovery, amnesia	Recovers memory, status as Appointed knight, bearer of Master Sword	Sealed	Psyche forms into calamity Ganon	Focus on Zelda as primarily a scholar
Tears of the Kingdom* (2023)	Queen, townsperson, researcher & teacher	Dragon	Zelda's appointed knight, shares home with Zelda	Zonai/King Ruru's arm	Gerudo Tribe Leader/Demon King	Dragon/Beast	This game introduced the Zonai
Echoes of Wisdom (2024)	Princess, Abducted and sealed in crystal	Fugitive, chosen hero, sanctioned by goddesses	Townsperson, strong, heroic, and mute after childhood trauma	Trapped in crystal, duplicated as an enemy; recovers ability to speak	Creator of voids and conflict	Puppet created by Null, opposite of creation	First to feature Zelda as main playable character, non-damsel (Link) encased in crystal, and to explain Link's speech

*Note. Dates are based on North American release

*Indicates that a game is a direct sequel/continuation of adventures of Zelda characters from a previous game plotline

The following games were not included because they did not include substantive gender transformation representations OR the transformative elements were not focused on gender-identities: *Link's Awakening** (1993), *Oracle of Ages* (2001), *Oracle of Seasons* (2001), *Phantom Hourglass** (2007), *Spirit Tracks* (2009)

Aside from recent iterations of the *Legend of Zelda* series, nonhuman transformations seem to be retained for Link and Ganondorf; within these, Link seems to maintain his abilities to think and feel whereas Ganondorf appears to become fully bestial and unreasoning. One possibility is that Link often activates and uses transformations to solve puzzles and problems; Ganondorf uses transformation in moments of desperation and defeat. Zelda often starts the series with powers and capabilities and goes through transformations to either hide her powers, as another person, or activate her powers.

While recent versions of *Zelda* may seem unique because *Zelda* becomes an egg-sac and then a dragon (*BotW*, *TotK*, respectively; continuous character), they share some commonalities with previous versions of *Zelda* as they contain the idea of sealing powers. Almost all iterations of *Zelda* include sealing her powers, either through encasement in stone, crystal, a painting, coma, or removal of her soul; *BotW* and *TotK* are unique in that *Zelda* made a conscious choice to seal herself rather than being sealed through abduction (capture by Ganondorf, a villain, or another entity). Like *Zelda*, Ganondorf is also often sealed, sometimes in stone (*WW*), or banished. A possible comparison or conclusion could be that intense, desperate use of powers leads to these powers being sealed. Ganondorf and *Zelda* have both used their powers in desperation, but *Zelda* is often aware of and plans for this eventuality, leading her to retain or rescue parts of herself. Each of these speak to the individual's unique characteristics. Ganondorf and *Zelda* are both born into royalty and chaotic eras; they cannot choose their circumstances. However, *Zelda* recognizes and plans around her frustration, whereas Ganondorf consistently tries to push through or overpower his crises. *Zelda* may become overwhelmed – losing her consciousness to a bestial form, like a dragon, or being sealed for a number of years, but her assertiveness and thoughtfulness leads to her transition past the beast-like crisis and into a new, adult role. Ganondorf, by contrast, loses himself fully to a beast form; his fixation on power,

control, and fear are helpful in transitioning past a crisis and into a mature, functional adult role.

Together, Link, Zelda, and Ganondorf provide some insight into how transformation works in Hyrule for princesses, chosen heroes, and demon kings: a continuum that shows connections among emotion, logic, and power can be drawn and placed in balance with each other (see Figure 2).

While all of these roles include power and problems, starting circumstances, approaches to problems, and connection and regulation of emotions will impact the type and duration of the transformation. Desperation and feeling completely overwhelmed by emotions, what is called emotion-mind in Dialectical Behavior Therapy,³⁷ appears to set the stage for being overwhelmed by a beast-form (Ganon). Retaining a level head, even in moments of desperation, allows people to become beasts and then return to their human form (Zelda). Furthermore, seeing other forms, even beast forms, as pathways to problem-solve and meet goals, allows for fluid transformation and disengagement from beast forms (Link). Circumstances of birth can impact these transformations: 1) being born with powers/into royalty can lead to using them in desperation, causing them to be sealed (Zelda, Ganon), 2) being born into a group/community may set up a problem-solving/goal-oriented approach (Link), and 3) female gender-socialization/group membership increases the likelihood of being sealed or transforming into other human roles, rather than bestial forms.

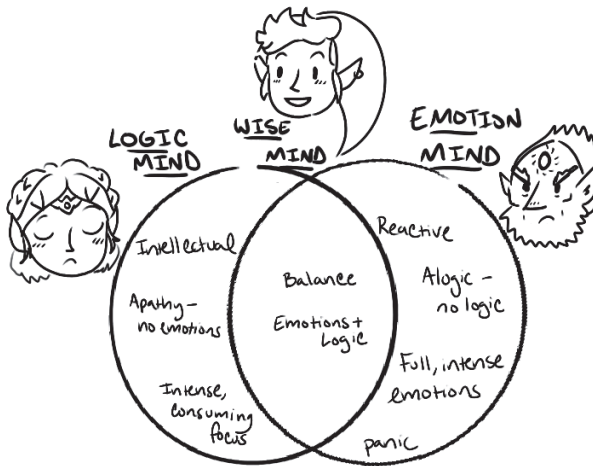


Figure 2. The DBT Model of Logic Mind, Wise Mind, and Emotion Mind

Across Hyrule, women and men seem to inherit powers and titles at an even rate, from shrine maidens and wise men and sages. Powers seem to manifest related to leadership or inheritance rather than gender, all sages in *OoT*³⁸ were in leadership roles (Impa, as an exception but a caregiver/mentor role), and all sages in *TotK* were related, often by family ties, to leadership positions.³⁹ Therefore, the unique expression of powers and transformation that the princess, hero, and demon king present may speak more to how to relate to the archetypes and roles they embody rather than the experience of gender and identity across the world of Hyrule. In fact, there is a marked distinction between games in which the world is radically *changed* by the main characters and games in which the characters *themselves* change. In *Link's Awakening*, *Oracle of Seasons*, *Oracle of Ages*, *Phantom Hourglass* and *Spirit Tracks*, Link undergoes few changes but radically changes the landscape of the world. In *Ocarina of Time* and *A Link to the Past*, the landscape is radically altered in the course of the events of the story, by Ganon. These characters are locked into a cycle: their war-torn or cataclysm-marked landscape

creates extreme versions of the everyday identity crises we all face in our lives. In our case and in the lives of Zelda, Ganondorf, and Link, their characteristics are what help them move into adult roles: heroes, scholars, leaders, and (at our most overwhelmed moments) beasts.

COMING OF AGE: FOR THE REST OF US

The paths that Zelda, Link, and Ganondorf tread and retread throughout time and multiple reincarnations can fill in some of the specifics about the identities, characteristics, and initiation rituals tied to coming-of-age and forming a sense of self. In broad strokes, from a dragons-eye point of view, coming of age is a time of transformation, where a person can lose themselves, potentially permanently (e.g., Ganondorf becoming a bestial Ganon). Men seem to become beasts or beast-like more frequently (Link, Ganondorf), though keeping a level head can create the opportunity to control the transformation (Link). Women seem to be at a higher risk of being abducted or sealed, with few exceptions, and appear to engage in transformations as protection (reversible) or self-sacrifice (reversible with help).

Archetypes tied to masculinity are often described as wild and beastlike, sometimes called the Wildman,⁴⁰ help appraise and contextualize the recurring theme of beast-men in the series. However, what is typically observed related to gender group membership does not align with archetypal roles. There is little relationship between gender and risky or beast-like actions,⁴¹ instead high-risk actions tend to be associated with personality and peer group norms.⁴² Awareness and satisfaction with gendered characteristics across multiple genders is often protective – individuals who are content with their gender in multiple ways (in masculine characteristics, feminine characteristics, nonbinary characteristics, and more) tend to be successful in different domains of their lives.⁴³ One possible reading of Zelda's higher amount of human roles – a pirate,

ninja, and scholar – is that she is more aware of multiple, intersecting identities and genders and can more fluidly move among these identities, compared to Link and Ganondorf.

In general, Hyrule is a complex world that is populated with individuals who are ready to rise up and meet the roles of princess, hero, and demon King that seem to be available every few years or generations. It seems that initiative, thoughtfulness, and emotional awareness may need to be in balance to successfully navigate taking on and personalizing these roles in a way that stabilizes Hyrule – however temporarily.

Our world, too, is filled with events, crises, and relationships – the only difference is that we are in it. Coming-of-age is a term for a static thing, a biological and sociological catalyst, that binds with anyone with relationships, ideas, and skills who is ready to take on challenges and new roles. Like Link, Zelda, and Ganondorf, we can toggle in and out different identities and states; our connection to problem-solving and emotions will create a pathway to process and success in these initiation rituals. We can go through so much, even becoming beasts or unfamiliar to ourselves, but our relationships to others and thoughtfulness can lead us out of any situation.

Link and Zelda complete their successful initiations by returning to themselves – they have explored and folded a new identity into a complex network and understanding of themselves. They pave the way: the hero and princess look like us because they are within us, an internal collection of identities, experiences, and skills that are unique, authentic, and flexible to each individual. At the end of the quest, and the end of the day, the healthiest and most integrated version of you is just you, as a complex, thinking, and feeling person.

SMASH THE POT,
BREAK THE BINARY
LGBTQ+ PSYCHOLOGY AND HYRULE
ANTHONY J. GIFFORD, MSC.

“I apologise for meeting you in disguise, but it was necessary to hide from the King of Evil. Please forgive me...”¹”

-Sheik, Ocarina of Time

The Legend of Zelda (LoZ) series, somewhat unintentionally, has been celebrated for the role it plays in the lives of Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Trans and indeed Queer and/or Questioning (LGBTQ+) individuals. While Nintendo have neither confirmed nor denied the diverse Queerness within the games, the door has been left open for consideration or perhaps plausible deniability². Players of the series have long since discussed and debated the queer-coded themes, monsters, and villains – with countless interpretations that contribute to the rich lore of the games.

Here, we will explore how expressions of gender, sexuality, LGBTQ+ relationships and representations of Queerness challenge cisheteronormative³ ideology.. Ultimately, this chapter shows how LGBTQ+ psychology can deepen our understanding of *LoZ*, inviting players to see themselves—and the world around them—differently through the games.

WHAT IS LGTBQ+ PSYCHOLOGY?

“Oh, but listen to me. I’m being positively uncivil. Allow me to introduce myself³.”

-Ghirahim, *Skyward Sword*

LGBTQ+ Psychology focuses on affirmative and empowering theories that challenge this rigid divide between what is ‘normal’ or not⁴. Instead of framing difference as deficit, this branch of psychology celebrates diversity and aims to give voice to those whose experiences have often been excluded from mainstream psychological theory and practice⁵. It is a psychology that, in *LoZ* terms, dwells in the twilight. What happens when we centre those who have been pushed to the margins? In *Twilight Princess (TP)*⁶, the Interlopers, banished to the Twilight Realm, are framed as dangerous for challenging the established order of Hyrule. Yet their story reveals that those cast into the shadows often carry deep knowledge, transformative power, and ways of being that defy convention. LGBTQ+ Psychology invites us to step into that twilight, to listen to those long silenced and recognise what they’ve always known: that identity, like light and shadow, is never just one thing.

Originally, this area of study was more narrowly defined under the umbrella of ‘Gay and Lesbian Psychology’, with early studies often focused on the impact of stigma, identity development, and coming out experiences among cisgender gay and lesbian individuals⁷. Over time, researchers and activists began to highlight the need for more inclusive understandings, calling attention to the experiences of bisexual, transgender, intersex, asexual, nonbinary, and other queer individuals whose stories didn’t fit neatly within earlier frameworks. It’s a bit like only studying the Kokiri in Kokiri Forest and assuming their forest-bound, childlike existence represents everyone, while overlooking the vastly different lives of the Zora or

Gorons. To truly understand the world, and psychology, we need to venture beyond the Lost Woods.

The acronym LGBTQ+ is used to reflect a broader coalition of identities (lesbian, gay, bisexual, trans, queer, and beyond). Yet, despite this increasing visibility, LGBTQ+ people have historically faced, and continue to face, systemic marginalisation across all walks of life. Homosexuality was listed as a mental disorder in the DSM⁸ until 1973 and- at time of writing- it is still currently illegal” to be LGBTQ+ in 64 jurisdictions worldwide⁹. The term ‘queer’ itself was originally used as a slur, weaponised to shame, isolate, and demean those whose gender or sexuality fell outside of social norms¹⁰. For many, the word still carries those echoes of harm.

‘Queer’ can be used as an umbrella term to not only be inclusive of those wanting to reject specific labels of romantic, sexual and/or gender orientation and identity, but also those affected by other forms of prejudice (e.g., racism, sizeism, ableism etc.). The term has been reclaimed from those who would use the term as an insult or slur¹¹, empowering LGBTQ+ folk to live openly and authentically¹². This chapter will use the word ‘queer’ in the way it has been reclaimed by scholars and activists alike and intend it to bring no harm, malice or upset – just love, empowerment, and terrible *Zelda* puns.

LGBTQ+ Psychology not only provides insight into the mind and behaviour, but it does so in a way that challenges and allows us to think critically. This chapter encourages you to look beyond the surface level of temples, tunics, and Triforce(s), to see the queer potential within *Zelda*’s characters, stories, and worlds. To borrow from the great (philosopher?) Lady Gaga: no matter gay, straight, or bi... there’s something here for everyone. My hope is that you find new ways to think, feel, and maybe even *Link* your own experiences to this queer reading of *LoZ*.

MAJORA'S MASC: GENDER ROLES

“... I used to think that all men, except for the great Ganondorf, were useless... but now that I've seen you, I don't think so anymore!”¹³”

-Gerudo Warrior, *Ocarina of Time*

Sex, in psychological and biological terms, typically refers to the physical characteristics a person is born with. You may be familiar with these biological terms, such as chromosomes (XX or XY), hormones, and genitalia and so this is what we often call *biological sex*¹⁴. However, even this isn't as binary or clear-cut as many people assume. Intersex people, for instance, are born with a combination of male and female biological traits, a natural variation that challenges the strict male/female divide¹⁵.

Gender, on the other hand, refers to the social, cultural, and psychological meanings attached to *biological sex*. Gender is not just about biology, it's about how we're expected to behave, dress, feel, and live based on our assigned sex. As Judith Butler, a leading gender theorist, famously argued, gender is not something we are, but something we do, a performance shaped by social norms and repeated behaviours over time¹⁶. In other words, it's less about what's in our inventory at birth, and more about how we equip and express ourselves throughout the game of life. Just as Link doesn't start out with the Master Sword or the Hero's Tunic, our gender expression isn't fixed, it's developed, chosen, and performed in response to the world around us.

Consider Sheik, the alter ego of Princess Zelda in *Ocarina of Time* (*OoT*)¹⁷. For much of the game, Sheik presents as masculine: strong, silent, agile, with a muscular build and no traditionally “feminine” features (except maybe that killer fringe just poking out). Many players assumed Sheik was male. But when Zelda later reveals herself, we learn that Sheik and Zelda are the same person. This reveal caused debates for years: Was Sheik truly a “disguise”? Was

Zelda performing masculinity as a strategy, or did she briefly become someone else?¹⁸

Whether intentional or not, Sheik offers a fascinating example of gender as performance. Zelda, by taking on the persona of Sheik, subverts the expectations placed on her as a princess and a woman. She escapes the castle, fights in secret, and moves through Hyrule on her own terms. Through this lens, Sheik challenges the assumption that gender is fixed and tied to biology. Instead, it becomes something fluid, strategic—even empowering.

That is, we learn, develop, and internalise ideas about what it means to be our assigned gender based on what society tells us is "normal," "natural," or "appropriate." This process, sometimes called gender socialisation, is deeply shaped by cultural expectations and repeated performances over time¹⁹. In many Western cultures, particularly those shaped by WEIRD ideologies, this has historically been built on the assumption that there are two—and only two—categories of sex: male and female. And from these, two corresponding and “opposite” genders: man and woman.

This binary doesn't reflect the full range of human experience. Worldwide, many cultures recognise more than two genders or allow for more fluid understandings of identity. Indigenous cultures (meaning communities with deep-rooted ancestral, spiritual, and cultural ties to the land) are a great example of non-WEIRD (referring to Western, Educated, Industrialised, Rich and Democratic societies) ways of thinking. For example, the Hijra communities in South Asia, or Two-Spirit identities among many Indigenous North American groups, illustrate that gender diversity is not new, and certainly not confined to modern Western discourse²¹. In fact, many Indigenous frameworks understand gender as deeply spiritual, integrative, and non-binary²². To put it in LoZ terms: not everyone's playing by Hyrule Castle's rulebook, some folks are living by the wisdom of the Sheikah, the rhythms of the Zora, or the traditions of the Gerudo.

Throughout the franchise, we can see echoes of this dynamic. The central kingdom of Hyrule often reflects hierarchical, institu-

tional power — rooted in monarchy, law, and divine prophecy. In contrast, other groups such as the Gerudo, Zora, Rito, and Gorons maintain unique cultural customs, belief systems, and gender dynamics that don't always align with Hyrule's norms. The Gerudo, for example, live in a society almost entirely composed of women, with their own matriarchal structures, the Gorons have their fraternal bonds, while the Zora often display fluidity in roles, tradition, and even embodiment. Throughout the series, the Zora are never static. Their traditions adapt, their roles shift, and their leaders (whether Ruto, Mipha, or Sidon) often blend strength with sensitivity. Their identity as a people is one of transformation, not just symbolic, but literal.

Through its mythologies, *LoZ* invites players to explore themes of balance, liminality, and transformation, blending light and shadow, past and future, masculine and feminine. Characters like the Sages, the goddesses, or Link himself exist between worlds and roles, not strictly bound by one definition. Just like Indigenous gender systems, these figures challenge the idea that identity must conform to binary categories. And importantly, they remind us that there are many ways of knowing and being, especially when we move beyond the centre of power.

Consider Link's quiet and androgynous design, which allows players of all genders to see themselves in the hero. His character does not adhere to a fixed gender role—he performs, adapts, and resists expectations. Through these in-game dynamics, *Zelda* gives us a way to imagine gender not as a destination, but as a journey of becoming, expression, and survival.

The design of the aptly named character Link was intended to enable players to feel linked to the hero of time, no matter their own identity:

“Back during the Ocarina of Time days, I wanted Link to be gender neutral. I wanted the player to think ‘Maybe Link is a boy or a girl.’ If you saw Link as a guy, he’d have more of a feminine touch. Or vice versa, if

you related to Link as a girl, it was with more of a masculine aspect. I really wanted the designer to encompass more of a gender-neutral figure. So, I've always thought that for either female or male players, I wanted them to be able to relate to Link." Zelda Producer, Eiji Aonuma²⁰.

This means players can project their own thoughts and feelings onto Link as they play – which psychoanalysts have described this process as ‘projecting’²¹. While this can be attributed as both positive and negative, designed with intentional androgyny, Link is a character onto whom players of any gender can project themselves, a quiet but powerful rejection of the idea that gender expression must be fixed, visible, or tied to biology. Series producer Eiji Aonuma has articulated this intention:

"When a player is playing a Zelda game, my desire is for the player to truly become Link — that's why we named him Link, so the player is linked to the game and to the experience²²."

By embodying Link, players can experience the empowerment and joy of becoming the Hero of Time, transcending traditional gender norms and embracing a more inclusive gaming experience. And this isn't just speculation from queer theorists or nostalgic gamers. Research suggests that the ability to project onto a character like Link, particularly one who embodies psychological androgyny, can have meaningful benefits for mental health, identity development, and emotional resilience. For example, individuals who relate more to psychological androgyny, meaning they feel comfortable expressing both stereotypically “masculine” and “feminine” traits, tend to report greater psychological flexibility, higher self-esteem, and better overall wellbeing²³. This fluidity enables people to navigate complex social environments with a broader emotional toolkit, whether that's being assertive, nurturing, playful, or introspective²⁴.

Video games have been shown to support identity exploration, especially for LGBTQ+ players. In one study, players reported that

customisable or ambiguous avatars gave them space to try out different gender expressions in a safe, low-stakes environment²⁵. For queer and trans players in particular, characters like Link can offer something quietly radical: the opportunity to explore gender without fear, judgment, or the pressure to explain. Research also shows that trans and gender-diverse youth use avatars to explore, develop, and rehearse their experienced gender identities, often as a precursor to coming out in the offline world²⁶.

So, when we step into Link's boots, we're not just collecting rupees, we're collecting (and nurturing) fragments of ourselves. Whether we're a kid working out who we are, or an adult revisiting that journey with fresh eyes, *The Legend of Zelda* becomes more than a game. It becomes a mirror, a rehearsal space, and a kind of digital safe zone for feeling, becoming, and belonging.

Let's return to Hyrule and zoom in on one of the franchise's most iconic examples of gender performance: *BotW* Gerudo Town sequence. In order to enter the all-female settlement, Link must acquire a Vai outfit: a veil, jewellery, and flowing desert robes traditionally worn by Gerudo women. He can't just walk in with a sword and a shrug; the guards will block him at the gate, telling him, "Vai are only allowed inside." But dressed as one? He's welcomed warmly, even complimented, "You look adorable!" Vilia says admiringly when providing the outfit. Link, for his part, blushes bashfully.

This isn't just a comedic moment or a clever mechanic, it's a powerful illustration of performative gender expression in action, one that aligns closely with concepts from both queer theory and LGBTQ+ Psychology. In this scenario, Link's gender presentation, feminine, culturally coded, and situational, becomes the key to access. And notably, he never mocks the disguise, resists the change, or reasserts his masculinity. He wears the outfit without shame, reinforcing that fluidity is functional, not fraudulent. When Link wears the outfit, guards at the gates wave him through with a casual "Sav'saaba!" (the Gerudo greeting), utterly convinced he belongs. The player, of course, knows the secret: Link hasn't become a

woman, but he is being read as one, and for once, that's a key to access rather than exclusion.

Zelda gives us windows, little slivers of possibility, where gender expression is flexible, playful, and powerful. But those windows are framed within broader cultural scripts that still carry the weight of cisgenderism, stereotyping, and binary thinking. What LGBTQ+ Psychology encourages us to do is to look not just at what's shown, but how it's framed, who gets to choose, and whether that choice is respected. In an ideal world, or perhaps in a future *LoZ* title²⁷, Link might wear the Vai outfit not to sneak in, but just because he likes how he looks in it. *Zelda* might become Sheik not to survive, but to thrive²⁸. Until then, we keep reading between the lines, and between the binaries.

A LINK TO THE HEART: SEXUALITY & LGTBQ+ RELATIONSHIPS

"Whenever there's a meeting a parting is sure to follow. However, the parting need not last forever. Whether a parting is forever or merely for a short while.... That is up to you"²⁹:"

-Happy Mask Salesman, *Majora's Mask*

If gender is a way in which we can express who we are, sexuality is often about who we're drawn to, and how we connect with others emotionally, romantically, and physically. In LGBTQ+ Psychology, sexuality is understood as a spectrum of identities and desires, shaped by culture, biology, emotion, and personal experience. It's complex, fluid, and deeply personal. Kind of like trying to piece together *Zelda's* timeline. You can try to map it, but eventually you just go with what feels right.

Importantly, these labels aren't hard coded like runes on a Sheikah Slate. They're tools, ways of naming lived experience, building community, and navigating identity. But language evolves,

and so do people. Trying to neatly taxonomise sexualities is a bit like trying to organise all of *Zelda's* side quests into one tidy list, possible in theory, but it misses the point. Human sexuality is layered, contextual, and often resists categorisation.

While many players read Link and Zelda as the archetypal heterosexual couple (princess, knight, you know the drill) others point to a deep emotional intimacy that doesn't always follow romantic conventions. In *Skyward Sword (SS)*³⁰, for instance, Link and Zelda's connection is tender, charged, but never explicitly romantic. In *BotW*³¹, Zelda confesses frustration and admiration, but the narrative leaves their feelings open to interpretation. We never get the kiss. There is no "you're my boyfriend now" ending. And that ambiguity, for many queer players, is a gift.

Then there's Mipha, the Zora princess in *BotW* who crafts Link a special suit of armour and writes him a love letter... only to have him stand there with all the emotional subtlety of a tree stump. Does he love her back? He doesn't say. He just takes the armour. In this way, Link could be read as asexual or aromantic — or simply emotionally unavailable because he's been resurrected from a 100-year nap and is too busy fighting robot spiders. Either way, his consistent silence on romantic matters leaves space for projection, interpretation, and queerness.

Importantly, LGBTQ+ Psychology doesn't just celebrate who we love (or maybe in Link's case, do not love) it also looks at how systems treat those forms of love and the psychological impact of this. Until 1973, the American Psychiatric Association classified homosexuality as a mental illness³². That meant queer people were labelled as psychologically "disordered" simply for existing. It wasn't until decades of protest, advocacy, and research that this diagnosis was removed. But even then, queerness was often "normalised" by comparing it to heterosexuality: "Look! We're just like you!" The message was clear: difference is okay, but only if it closely resembles the norm. *You can see how this relates right back to cisheteronormativity again.*

In many countries still to this day, there is this idea that heterosexuality is not just common, but compulsory by law³³. One of its most deeply rooted expressions is the othering of non-heterosexual sexualities. In other words, straight people just are, and queer people are always being asked to explain themselves. And that's the paradox: the minute you label a sexuality; you create a dominant one by default. Much like how fans endlessly speculate on whether Link is into Zelda, Mipha, Sidon, or just emotionally married to his sword, the world has a way of assuming there must be a box to tick, preferably in capital letters and binary terms.

One of the most influential frameworks for understanding queer identity and how they had to explain themselves was the “coming out” model, which outlined identity development as a staged journey: from confusion to acceptance, then disclosure, and finally “pride.”³⁴ While groundbreaking at the time, these models have since been critiqued for being overly linear, Western-centric, and reliant on the assumption that sexual identity must move toward visibility and disclosure. What if, for example, Link never “comes out” because he has no fixed sexuality to disclose? What if he just... exists, in his tunic and his ambiguity, quietly catching feelings (or not) across timelines?

In this sense, LGBTQ+ Psychology now tends to approach sexual identity development as non-linear, context-dependent, and deeply personal³⁵. Some people come out once, others, repeatedly. Some never do. Some, like Link, simply leave the door ajar and let the player decide. His relationships with Zelda, Mipha, Midna, (or even Sidon) are open to interpretation. This ambiguity itself can be understood as a kind of resistance to prescriptive identity labels: Link as a queer-coded blank slate, allowing space for projection, speculation, and fluidity.

But identity doesn't develop in a vacuum. In cisheteronormative societies, stigma, defined as the devaluation of people based on perceived “difference”, can have profound psychological effects³⁶. In this case, the devaluation of those identifying as LGBTQ+. We can

often draw on Minority Stress Theory³⁷, which explores how the chronic social stress of being stigmatised can lead to anxiety, depression, and other negative mental health outcomes. The stress isn't internal—it's structural. It's the sneer when someone calls a character "too feminine." It's the censorship of queer content in games, or the online mockery of players who "ship" Link and Sidon.

Of course, Nintendo didn't explicitly promise us anything. But the emotional intimacy, the gentle glances, the shared heroism, they created a space where many queer players saw themselves reflected. When that space is suddenly closed off by a narrative device like "Here's the fiancée you never knew existed" (in the case of Sidon's newly introduced fiancée Yona in *TotK*) it stings. And it's not just about the 'ship, it's about what these reveals in a broader media pattern. This is what queer media scholars have often called "queer-baiting" or "disappointment tropes", where characters are coded as queer or ambiguously intimate to draw in LGBTQ+ audiences, only for the story to snap back to the safety of heteronormativity at the last minute³⁸. While media often courts LGBTQ+ audiences with winks, subtext, and ambiguous intimacy, it rarely commits to naming that queerness. Why? Because naming it means legitimising it, and legitimacy can be threatening in a world still stuck on binaries. *Back to binaries, surprise surprise!*

Even within the LGBTQ+ umbrella, not all sexualities are treated equally. Certain identities are celebrated or romanticised, while others are misunderstood, erased, or outright ridiculed. LGBTQ+ Psychology has long acknowledged that stigma doesn't just come from outside the community, it can exist within it, too. Take asexuality, for example, often shortened to ace. Asexuality refers to little or no experience of sexual attraction to others, though ace individuals may still form strong emotional, romantic relationships. Like all sexualities, it exists on a spectrum: some people may be sex-repulsed, others sex-indifferent, and many fall somewhere in between. And who better to embody this quiet, unlabelled spaciousness than Link?

Across the franchise, Link often demonstrates deep bonds without overt romantic or sexual motivation. His relationship with Zelda, for example, is often portrayed more as duty-bound loyalty than courtship. In *SS*, they are close and caring, but there's no overt romance. In *TP*, he barely seems to register her at all. And let's not forget his long-standing tradition of politely side-stepping advances, whether it's Ruto throwing herself at him, or Mipha declaring her love and crafting him bespoke armour while he stares off into the middle distance. For many ace players, Link's emotional ambiguity can be affirming. He doesn't have to pursue or reject romance. He just... exists. He shows care, loyalty, affection, but not necessarily desire. And in a world saturated with sexual subplots, that feels quietly radical.

However, LGBTQ+ Psychology also recognises silence as part of the problem. The refusal to name a specific label, doesn't leave space for interpretation; it leaves space for erasure. The more invisible an identity becomes, the easier it is for others to dismiss it. And in many ways, that's the true villain hiding in the shadows of queer representation.

Let's not forget Tingle, the perennially puzzling map-seller in green tights, fairy cosplay, and very little regard for personal space. Is he gay? Is he camp? Is he just really into cartography? The answer, as with many queer-coded characters in gaming, is we don't know, and the game won't tell us. Tingle is flamboyant, theatrical, emotionally intense, all characteristics often read as "queer" by players. Yet, Nintendo distanced themselves from this interpretation:

"...in an interview with Kotaku, series producer Eiji Aonuma shot down speculation about the character's sexuality. Mr Aonuma said: 'He's not gay. He's just an odd person'."³⁹

Real-world queerness isn't just a joke or a subtext. It's a matter of survival. In some parts of the world, same-sex relationships are criminalised, and LGBTQ+ people face violence, imprisonment, or

even death for expressing their love. As of 2024, same-sex acts remain illegal in 64 countries, and in 11 of those, they may carry the death penalty⁴⁰. These are not just legal frameworks, they are psychological battlegrounds, shaping how individuals form relationships, navigate visibility, and experience love.

One of the key shifts LGBTQ+ Psychology offers is the recognition that queer relationships may differ, not in value, but in structure, from what mainstream psychology has long considered "healthy" or "normal." For decades, relationship research privileged monogamous, heterosexual, nuclear arrangements⁴¹. But queer relationships often defy those scripts, not because they are deviant, but because they are creative, adaptive, and deeply relational in ways that challenge normative expectations⁴². This includes non-monogamous arrangements⁴³, chosen families, platonic partnerships, and fluid roles that change across time and context. In many ways, queerness reclaims the emotional side quest. It asks: *what does it mean to love well, if not traditionally?* Maybe it's the lifelong bond between Impa and Zelda, where duty blends with deep emotional loyalty, or the fierce devotion shown by Midna, whose final act in *TP* is not romantic confession, but sacrificial love. Maybe it's the bittersweet farewell between Fi and Link, as she fades into slumber in *SS*, whispering thanks not just as a sword spirit, but as someone who has come to care. These are the kinds of relationships that flourish in queer life, and in queer readings of *Zelda*, too.

Yet even within Hyrule, queerness is often hidden, hinted at, or constrained. Relationships like Link and Zelda's are left ambiguous; potential pairings like Link and Sidon live in fan forums, but not in the text. The space for queer relationships exists, but only in the margins, in side-quests, in costumes, in blushes. It's a world rich in queer potential but still bound by invisible limits.

A Queer Calamity: representations of Queerness

“No matter how much you may desire, you will never be more of a shadow in their world...⁴⁴”

-Zant, *Twilight Princess*

LoZ gives us more than just queerness in subtext or speculation. It gives us a whole world to ask: what does queerness look like when it isn't constrained by the norms we know? And, what happens when queerness is presented not as empowerment, but as danger, failure, or farce?

In LGBTQ+ Psychology, representation is more than a character's presence on screen, it's about visibility with depth, dignity, and possibility⁴⁵. It asks whether a character's identity is portrayed authentically, whether their storyline is allowed complexity, and whether viewers can see themselves reflected in ways that feel affirming. Numerous studies have shown that positive, diverse representation of queer identities in media can support mental well-being, reduce internalised stigma, and offer models for identity exploration and resilience, particularly for young LGBTQ+ individuals navigating their own self-understanding^{46,47}.

But representation is a double-edged Master Sword. When queerness is depicted without care, or used as shorthand for villainy, perversion, or ridicule, it can reinforce harmful stereotypes, worsen social stigma, and undermine the very validation it seeks to offer. A queer-coded character without narrative depth is not representation, it's replication of the same old tropes, dressed in glitter and tragedy.

For example, Ghirahim, from *SS*, is a camp icon. But he's also a prime example of the “queer-coded villain” trope. This refers to a longstanding pattern in media where queerness is associated with danger, deviance, or depravity⁴⁸. These characters often exhibit exaggerated femininity, flamboyance, or gender nonconformity or traits that signal queerness without ever naming it. It's not that they're explicitly LGBTQ+, it's that they're othered in ways that audiences are meant to read as sinister, ridiculous, or both.

In Ghirahim, the femininity, theatricality, and obsession with the hero are not only exaggerated, but they're also weaponised. Queerness becomes something to fear. Similarly, Tingle walks the fine line between queer-coded sidekick and parody. While some fans embrace him as a gay icon, he literally throws confetti and wants to be a fairy, he also embodies a series of uncomfortable stereotypes: infantilised, lonely, socially awkward, and estranged from his father. Representation without care quickly becomes representation without compassion. Even characters like the Great Fairies, who seem to strut straight off a Drag Race runway, raise questions. Are they embodiments of divine feminine power or caricatures? Their over-the-top sensuality, breathy voices, and exaggerated curves might be camp, but camp without context can quickly tip into appropriation. But not all representations fall into the pit of parody.

In *BotW*, Bolson is a rare gem. He is openly flamboyant, femme, and proud. I personally think that him and his construction company are the Queer Eye of Hyrule: designing homes, managing real estate, and making pink trousers look powerful. While some might see him as another camp stereotype, he embodies something more: a queer character who is integrated, competent, and not the butt of the joke. He exists without shame. He builds things. He matters.

We also see glimmers of queerness in the game's underlying relational structures. The bond between Link and the Champions (and later, the Sages) in *BotW* and *TotK* reveals an unspoken but deeply felt chosen family. In LGBTQ+ Psychology, chosen family refers to the supportive networks queer people often build when their biological families reject or misunderstand them⁴⁹. These families offer more than safety, they offer recognition. Link doesn't just team up with these characters, he mourns them, honours them, carries them with him. Their spirits literally become part of his own power.

Why does this matter? Because LGBTQ+ people are statistically more likely to experience loneliness, rejection, and minority stress (the chronic form of stress caused by stigma and social exclusion)⁵⁰.

In this light, the found family structure in *Zelda* becomes more than a narrative device. It becomes a psychological balm, a quiet reassurance that love and loyalty can be rebuilt, even in the ruins.

CONCLUSION

The *LoZ* franchise, like LGBTQ+ Psychology itself, is ultimately about refusing the binary. It resists simple categories. It lets characters be feminine and strong, masculine and tender, asexual and loving, queer and heroic. It offers us not a perfect mirror, but a playground of possibilities. Sometimes problematic, often powerful, always worth exploring.

From a psychological standpoint, this matters. Identity development isn't just about who we are, it's about the environments that give us space to become. The *Zelda* series, in all its timelines and transformations, offers players queer-coded scaffolding on which to build, question, and express themselves. We see the impact of projection, the affirmation of androgyny, the danger of erasure, and the power of chosen family: all fundamental concerns within LGBTQ+ Psychology. It's a digital realm where queerness can be tested, worn, played with, and protected. Where failure isn't the end, but a beginning.

In a world still saturated with cisheteronormative scripts, The *LoZ* gives us an alternative one, where gender is performed not policed, where sexuality is hinted at not hardcoded, and where relationships transcend the expected. And through these worlds, LGBTQ+ Psychology teaches us not only how to think about identity, but how to feel it, across timelines, across differences, across systems that still don't always see us clearly.

So go ahead. Put on the mask. Don the tunic. Enter the shadow realm. There's power in playing queer. There's wisdom in failure. And there's courage in simply being seen.

SURVIVING (CLIMATE)
CALAMITY AND UPHEAVAL
REAL-WORLD LESSONS FROM HYRULE
ANNAYAH M.B. PROSSER, PHD.

After waking from a *long* slumber, you emerge from a rocky tomb onto a grassy cliff. Running out, you see the whole of Hyrule before you, with trees, birds, rivers, lakes, and Hyrule castle far away on the horizon. In another time, you jump down into the unknown, emerging this time from the skies. From below you, you see floating islands, and far, far below, the land of Hyrule. These opening experiences are iconic for many of us, and signal the start of our journey in the land of Hyrule. These title screens to both *Breath of the Wild* (*BotW*)¹, and *Tears of the Kingdom* (*TotK*)² both showcase the stunning natural environment of both games. In *BotW*, Link stands as a solitary figure gazing out into the distance. In *TotK*, Link falls through the sky, trusting that a pond beneath him will catch his fall. Both introductions- while being visually spectacular- serve to centre and illuminate the importance of the natural environment in both games. Long before you know your goals, or the other characters at play, you are introduced to the environment of the land of Hyrule. Through these passages, you can already spot clues about the game's story and progression mechanics, but you know your game plan can

wait for a moment while you take in the visuals of this incredible world.

The *Legend of Zelda (LoZ)* series cannot be disentangled from environmental issues³. Every instalment features unique environments, and requires the player to successfully navigate these environments, and develop connections across a variety of communities to succeed (be it Rito, Zora, Goron or Kukiri). Indeed, a primary inspiration for the series came from series creator Shigeru Miyamoto's childhood experiences growing up in rural Japan and exploring nature:

“When I was younger, I grew up in the countryside of Japan. And what that meant was I spent a lot of my time playing in the rice paddies and exploring the hillsides and having fun outdoors... There's a place near Kobe where there's a mountain, and you climb the mountain, and there's a big lake near the top of it. We had gone on this hiking trip and climbed up the mountain, and I was so amazed — it was the first time I had ever experienced hiking up this mountain and seeing this big lake at the top. And I drew on that inspiration when we were working on the Legend of Zelda game”⁴

In the open-world games in particular, the land of Hyrule plays as large a role as any of our protagonists. The natural landscape is how we connect to the game as players, how we understand the world, and often, how we uncover the story. In *BotW*, the landscape is all we have when we start playing, one-hundred years after the calamity in an empty Hyrule ravaged by Ganon's minions. While *TotK* features more social interaction, and Hyrule initially in a state of 'recovery', it too centres around environmental interactions- with many questlines designed to help folks navigate the changing environment and perils caused by the unfurling 'upheaval'.

We also face multiple environmental crises in the real world today, that all require dramatic social action and behaviour change to

address. Over the past half century, we have seen dramatic declines in nature and biodiversity across the world⁵. If we are to limit the impact of climate change and global heating, international transitions away from the burning of fossil fuels and other environmental harms must take place over the next decade. Climate change is also a problem of equality and justice, with those already most marginalised within society likely to bear the brunt of climate catastrophe⁶. Some scholars therefore see climate change as the biggest ‘moral storm of our time’⁷.

While the *LoZ* franchise does not directly mention these dire climate and biodiversity crises we face IRL, if we listen carefully, the games have a lot to teach us about how humans interact with our natural environment, and what we can do about these multiple crises. We can learn a lot about dealing with crises of nature through engaging with the *LoZ* series. For over fifty years, the discipline of environmental psychology has been focussing on exploring the psychological mechanisms that influence our interactions with the natural environment⁸. In this chapter, I will use theory and findings from across environmental psychology and the wider environmental social sciences to explore the connections *BotW* and *TotK* have to climate action in the real world. I shed light on five lessons we can learn from Hyrule to help us better navigate climate calamity and upheaval back here on earth.

LESSON ONE:

We Must Understand and Connect with our Environment

To succeed in any *Zelda* game, it is vital to carefully consider the environment around you and utilise it to your advantage. This is especially true of the open world iterations of the series: *BotW* and *TotK*. Understanding the environmental cues in both of these games can make or break your experience, and secure your victory or defeat. For example, rainy weather makes it impossible to climb up mountain faces; a lightning storm can electrocute you if you wear metal; enemies sneak up on you as nighttime looms. Similarly, if you pay

attention, a well-timed sunrise can save you from freezing, you can use tools to manipulate the environment, or use that pesky lightning to electrocute some bokoblins instead!

Playing any *LoZ* game requires us to pay close attention to our environment and learn from the patterns we see in nature. Historically, in the environmental social sciences, we have referred to this as ‘ecological literacy’⁹ or ‘climate literacy’: a strong awareness of the environment and the problems it faces. As scholars note: “Climate literacy is built upon a deep appreciation for interconnected processes in the atmosphere, hydrosphere, lithosphere, and biosphere over varying time and space scales and the influence of humans on the climate system”¹⁰. A variety of concepts have been proposed for evaluating ecological literacy, including: environmental knowledge (how much we know), environmental affect (how we feel), cognitive skill (what we can do), and pro-environmental behaviour (how we act)¹¹. Building strong ecological literacy among citizens has been a priority for many organisations worldwide, including forming a central part of many education and governance systems. Ecological literacy has also been linked to pro-environmental behaviour and concern: the more we know about our environment, the more we care about it¹².

Of course, indigenous folks in the real world already know how important it is to understand and work alongside nature. Many indigenous communities are responsible for protecting much of the remaining nature and biodiversity in the world¹³. Their centuries of learned wisdom guide regenerative practices, that allow them to live alongside the land in a collaborative and communal way¹⁴. Just like the Sheikah and the Zonai in *BotW* and *TotK*, we can learn much from these communities, and find ways of living alongside nature that can help us better tackle the challenges of our future.

But, for those of us growing up and living in WEIRD (Western, Educated, Industrialised, Rich and Democratic) societies, we may not have this connection to our natural environment. Playing *LoZ* helps us to build ecological literacy in a variety of ways. The game-

play loops depend on environmental cues, and problem-solving: for example, the temples in *TotK* all feature significant weather or environmental components, which you must uncover to succeed. Many side-quests in both *BotW* and *TotK* draw on the weather or time of day for their resolutions. The game design rewards you for paying attention to the environment, through additional resources and rewards. We see first hand the value of paying attention to, and learning more about the natural environment through our gameplay.

Environmental exploration is also required to progress at many stages of the games: you are required to solve environmental problems to unlock access to the navigation towers in both *BotW* and *TotK*. For the completionists among us, the best example of environmental rewards is undoubtedly finding all the Korok Seeds. These seeds are rewards for environmental puzzles- such as placing apples in statues, getting to a destination within the time limit, falling into a circle of water plants. These puzzles are marked by oftentimes subtle environmental cues that we can only notice through nurturing our curiosity¹⁵, such as noticing a particular plant that looks out of place, a mismatched fruit, or an unusually-marked stump. While not necessary for progression, many players spend hours tracking down Koroks all across Hyrule- finding and solving a variety of puzzles. Those players who search for Koroks spend more time exploring the environment, and learning more about Hyrule's nature. The Hyrule Encyclopaedia is another example of a game mechanic that explicitly rewards curiosity and nature connection within Hyrule. The animals present in the game also map onto real-world analogs, and teach us to keep a close eye out for nature in the real world. The game rewards exploration and environmental concern through providing these extra puzzles and opportunities for creative gameplay.

In the real-world, spending time in nature- particularly during our childhood- is very important for developing connection to nature, and pro-environmental values¹⁶. Those who spend more

time in nature as a child, are more likely to grow up feeling close to, and care about the natural environment. Spending time playing and problem-solving in nature is also linked to improved confidence among children, alongside many other positive outcomes such as improved emotional and cognitive wellbeing, risk management skills and cooperation¹⁷. For adults, spending time in nature through activities like ‘forest bathing’ are important ways for us to develop kinship with, and care for non-human animals and the natural environment¹⁸.

Green and blue spaces are important for our wellbeing and fostering sustainability, but many folks from disadvantaged communities have limited access to natural spaces such as parks, rivers or mountains¹⁹. In the COVID-19 international lockdowns, video games such as *BotW* formed a vital source of nature for many, when the world was closed off^{20, 21}. Some scholars argue that *BotW* is fundamentally a game about being alone in nature, and the players development- or self-actualisation- comes through these experiences of solitude²². Virtual spaces like Hyrule can help us feel more connected to our environment, when this connection isn’t always possible in everyday life.

While video games may help those with mobility or energy challenges to explore nature, more must be done to accommodate and facilitate participation from other disabilities- such as those from the blind community. While *LoZ* can help many of us better connect with our natural environment, the games have a long way to go to ensure that groups with diverse accessibility needs can reap these benefits²³.

LESSON TWO:

Environmental Destruction is Villainy

The *LoZ* series teaches us that it is villains who destroy the environment. In many games within the *LoZ* series, villainy manifests as environmental degradation. Earlier games focus on Ganondorf as an

evil figure, bent on chaos, destruction and political discord. In later games- as the graphical capacities of consoles advance- evil in Hyrule literally degrades the landscape, with Ganon's influence scarring the land with Gloom and Malice in *BotW* and *TotK*; the seas rising in *Wind Waker (WW)*; a parallel dimension threatening to engulf Hyrule in *Twilight Princess (TP)*; and all-consuming rifts expanding throughout the land in *Echoes of Wisdom (EoW)* Unlike many other action-adventure games, in *Zelda*, the hero narrative isn't just about saving any one person: the very environment of the world is at stake. In each game, the plot can be monitored by the state of Hyrule's environment- with the endings of both *BotW* and *TotK* featuring a land healing after disaster.

We also face huge environmental crises in the real world, where a societal reliance on fossil fuels has led to climate change, habitat destruction and global heating that threatens the lives of all who live on earth²⁴. Climate change is a complex problem, that manifests in many ways, and harms many people²⁵. In the real world, it is not just one evil figure that causes this destruction, but many different people and organisations²⁶. The dramatic impact of human beings on climate change has been well-established by the scientific community²⁷, and this is widely recognised by the public internationally²⁸. Some geologists even characterise the time we live in as an epoch where human influence dominates earth systems changes: the 'anthropocene'²⁹. The villains in the *LoZ* series exploit nature for their own gain, just like many of these actors do in real life. Ganon exploits the environment to gain power, and companies degrade the environment in real life for profit³⁰. Research tells us that while the most powerful people within society contribute to climate change the most³¹, the poorest and most vulnerable within society will be most impacted³². So, while the Ganons of the world with power degrade the environment for their own gain, it is Hyrule's innocent people who are most likely to bear the brunt of climate catastrophe.

These facts are obviously frightening, and can be difficult for us to handle. Many of us feel powerless in the face of climate change, or

experience ‘climate anxiety’ about what the future may hold³³. The *LoZ* series gives us a space to engage with environmental destruction, and respond to it, without the complexity real-world action requires. Where we are often disempowered in the real-world, video games allow us to be the hero and to see the difference our actions make in real-time³⁴. This experience of being able to make a real difference to the climate in the game can help people become empowered when facing real-world environmental threats³⁵.

BotW also critiques the idea that technology will save us from this environmental villainy. The Guardians are first used by the royal family of Hyrule as a protective mechanism, but these technologies are quickly turned against them by Ganon’s malice. In the real world, the idea that technology can save us from the impacts of climate change is known as ‘techno-solutionism’³⁶ and is argued by many to be a discourse of climate delay: if technology can save us, we don’t need to change anything ourselves³⁷. Some scholars argue that this warning in *BotW* echoes Japan’s nuclear history, and strong anti-nuclear sentiment³⁸. Technology is used throughout both *BotW* and *TotK* to aid our heroes, but it is also used by the villains to further degrade the environment and wreak havoc on the land of Hyrule. *Zelda* teaches us what many scholars already argue- technologies are only as good as their creators. Technology alone cannot save us from destruction, and if we rely on it too much it may just be our downfall.

LESSON THREE:

It’s Dangerous to Go Alone

Communities within Hyrule are important for story progression, and for unlocking the tools and skills Link requires to defeat Ganon. Throughout the series, the game structure is often organised around visits to different areas of the gameworld, where different communities call home. Link helps these communities with their problems, and in turn, they help Link move forward in his quest to rid Hyrule of

evil. The challenges each community faces are often aligned with the natural environment: such as a raging sandstorm in Gerudo Town, and torrential downpour and flooding in Zora's Domain. The challenges faced within each area require us to understand the environment, and the peoples who live within it to progress forward.

While in *BotW* it is *technically* possible to complete the game without unlocking the divine beasts- this is an extremely challenging endeavour that only speedrunners attempt. The final boss of *BotW*- Calamity Ganon is significantly more difficult if you haven't freed all the champions. It is also impossible to unlock the 'true' ending of the game without defeating all blights in these areas. The game design reinforces this further in *TotK* by locking progress behind localised quests around these environmental issues. We cannot move forward in the games' story without gaining support and aid from heroes hailing from the local areas, or without supporting the Hylians in their rebuilding projects.

Just like in the games, it is very difficult in real-life to change the world without the support of others. Research on vegan and vegetarian communities for example, shows us that acting alone can be a very difficult and isolating experience³⁹, and may lead to us losing enthusiasm for our goals, and even quitting⁴⁰. Researchers know that for groups pursuing a better world, community is an extremely important protective force. When we connect with people who have similar social change goals to us, we are happier, more energised and more able to achieve the changes we want to see in the world⁴¹. Attending events where we can connect with others who share the same goals- such as protests, marches or other forms of collective action- is especially important for environmental activists, who can become isolated and lonely in their pursuit of a better world⁴². Some evidence suggests that connecting with others in this way can even change the course of our own lives for the better, helping us to develop our own identity and sense of purpose⁴³.

The benefits of connecting with others throughout the *LoZ* series are immense. For example, in *BotW*, Link helps release the Zora,

Goron, Gerudo and Rito champion spirits from their respective corrupted divine beasts, and in return- these champions and their communities offer Link aid in the form of weapons, armour, and brute force in the final fights. In *TotK* this support moves into a more corporeal form, where Link helps the new champions to fight Ganon's corrupting influence and they offer him help in their unlocked sage forms: offering new ways to defeat enemies and traverse the land. Link may be the central force guiding the player's experience, but he cannot truly develop and move the story forward without help from others.

LESSON FOUR:

Sometimes, we all just need a (100-year) nap...

Fighting the bad guys is hard work! *BotW* teaches us that even our heroes can't defeat evil without rest. Link's efforts to halt the Calamity leave him on the edge of death, with injuries that only ancient Sheikah technology can help him recover from. This recovery takes a long time- 100 years in the game. During this time, Zelda takes over the fight with calamity Ganon, holding evil at bay until Link is strong enough to recover and emerge victorious. Link's story mirrors the story of many activists and advocates fighting social inequalities and environmental degradation⁴⁴. He works tirelessly throughout the Calamity, putting himself at great risk to serve a higher cause. We know that many activists too work incredibly hard to further the causes they are passionate about, and this hard work can lead to an increased risk of *burnout*⁴⁵. Burnout is characterised by the World Health Organisation as an occupational syndrome with three primary components: exhaustion (extreme tiredness), cynicism (negative thinking about others), and low efficacy (feeling like what you do isn't enough)⁴⁶. Zelda also experiences burnout throughout *BotW*, with the flashback scenes showing her increasingly exhausted and frustrated at her lack of progress in finding her powers before calamity strikes.

Burnout is particularly common in situations, or work environments where overwork is common, or even expected of us. For example, burnout is rife in the games industry, especially within organisations or studios that promote overwork and ‘crunching’ on projects with little breaks⁴⁷. We are also more prone to burnout when working on projects or topics that are emotionally distressing, or when we are encouraged by others to act in ways that do not connect with our idea of who we are and what we care about. For example, many healthcare workers experience burnout associated with what is termed ‘moral injury’, when their working conditions prevent them from caring for their patients effectively⁴⁸. Activists fighting environmental degradation and social injustice can become quickly exhausted from their protest efforts, experiencing ‘activist burnout’⁴⁹.

Sound eerily familiar? Chances are, many of you reading this have experienced periods of burnout in your own life. Survey estimates from the UK suggest that 30% of us suffer from burnout every year⁵⁰. Symptoms of burnout can be grouped into three areas: physical (e.g. exhaustion, insomnia, joint pain), emotional (e.g. self-doubt, anxiety, feeling trapped), and behavioural (e.g. procrastinating, difficulty concentrating and isolation). So, if you were one of those players who kept putting off finishing the game to complete all the side-quests, you were canonically expressing Link’s burnout symptom of procrastination!

In *BotW*, it was only after Link’s 100 year nap, intensive Sheikah-assisted recovery, and a lot of help from his friends that he was able to recover and move forward. We too need to stop to rest in our everyday lives, and studies show that rest, self-care and mindfulness practice can help protect us from burnout⁵¹. We may even need to remove ourselves completely from difficult environments that conflict with our sense of morality- for example, researchers document that many folks are quitting jobs that damage the environment⁵². By taking rest, and controlling our psychological, social and

work environment, we can help to reduce stress and the risk of burning out.

Even after that wonderful 100 year nap, Link still could not defeat Ganon alone, needing the help of multiple champions and sages in both *BotW* and *TotK*. *LoZ* games teach us that even the best of us cannot make it alone, or without rest. In the real world, connecting with likeminded others, remembering our values, and taking that break is a vital way to safeguard ourselves from burnout and keep up our morale.

LESSON FIVE:

Everyone can make a difference

When faced with wicked crises and societal issues, it can be tempting to look for the ‘main characters’ of social change: those who are famous or powerful. When we think about the *Zelda* series, we think first about the main characters: Link, Zelda, and Ganon. But these are not the only characters who make a difference in Hyrule, others contribute to defeating Ganon and work hard to keep up morale. Both the *LoZ* and the academic literature on social action shows us that changing society is as much about the collective efforts of ‘NPCs’ as it is the skill of the main characters.

Scholars point out that there are a variety of ‘enablers’ and ‘constraints’ on our climate actions, that vary according to the positions we hold within our communities and society⁵³. For example, our ability to change the world can depend on the jobs we hold: those working in policy may have more ability to influence policy-makers, whereas those working in the entertainment industry have more ability to reach broader public audiences and educate them about the climate. Those who are richer within society also have more responsibility for greenhouse gas emissions overall, with Oxfam estimating that the top 1% of income-earners internationally generate more carbon emissions than two-thirds of the earth’s population⁵⁴. Other

research points out the vital contributions that these folks of high socio-economic status within society can make to climate action, across their roles as consumers, investors, role models, organizational participants, and citizens⁵⁵. All of us have a part to play to act on climate within our communities, organizations and political systems.

In the side-quests of both *BotW* and *TotK*, we see the efforts community NPCs put into rebuilding Hyrule and improving the living conditions for its people. With Link's help (and collaboration from Hyrulians, Zora, Gerudo, Gorons and Rito across the map) in *BotW*, Bolson's construction crew build an entirely new town ('Tarrey Town'), which we later see becomes an important hub for new relationships and community in *TotK*. NPCs in *TotK* also form a public defense force- Hyrule's 'Monster Fighting Crew', that is charged with keeping the people of Hyrule safe from monster incursions.

Just as in Hyrule, in the real world, if we are to address climate change fully, we need the expertise of many different people, communities and organisations within society. In their book "Not too late", Rebecca Solnit and Thelma Young Lutunatabua share a variety of stories from climate activists across the world- stressing that climate action requires diverse contributions from all of us⁵⁶. In her chapter, Mary Annaïse Helgar offers some advice to those seeking a path forward: "But the question remains. What can I do? Well, now that you understand that the question is complicated, the answer actually emerges as quite simple: do what you're good at. And do your best." Throughout the *LoZ* series, these interconnected and community-oriented storylines show us that working together with others, and using our personal skills and abilities is what will make a real difference.

CONCLUSION

The *LoZ* series has much to teach us about our relationship with the natural environment and climate change. The games remind us to

listen to, and connect with the natural world. They teach us that villains destroy the environment for their own gain, and that heroism is just as much about protecting the environment as it is protecting others. The games teach us that even our heroes can't do it alone, and that even the best of us need time to rest and recharge if we are to fight the forces of evil IRL. Finally- the games show us that everyone can make a difference, and inspire us to find our strength and community. The *LoZ* series gives us an opportunity to be the hero, and to restore Hyrule to its natural beauty, ridding it from Ganon's evil. It's about time we took those lessons into the real world, don't you think?

NOTES

LIST OF GAMES AND IN-TEXT ABBREVIATIONS

1. *The Legend of Zelda. (Family Computer Disc System- Famicom).(1986)* [Video game]. Nintendo. (1986).
2. *Zelda II: The Adventure of Link (NES).(1987).* [Video game]. Nintendo
3. *The Legend of Zelda: Link to the Past (Super Nintendo).* (1992). [Video game]. Nintendo.
4. *The Legend of Zelda: Link's Awakening (Nintendo 64).* (1993). [Video game]. Nintendo.
5. *The Legend of Zelda: Ocarina of Time (Nintendo 64).* (1998). [Video game]. Nintendo.
6. *The Legend of Zelda: Majora's Mask (Nintendo 64).* (2000). [Video game]. Nintendo.
7. *The Legend of Zelda: Oracle of Seasons (GameBoy)* (2001). [Video game]. Nintendo
8. *The Legend of Zelda: Oracle of Ages (GameBoy)* (2001). [Video game]. Nintendo
9. *The Legend of Zelda: A Link to the Past (GameBoy)* (2002). [Video game]. Nintendo
10. *The Legend of Zelda:Four Swords (GameBoy)* (2002). [Video game]. Nintendo
11. *The Legend of Zelda: Wind Waker (GameCube).* (2002). [Video game]. Nintendo.
12. *The Legend of Zelda: Four Swords Adventures (GameCube).* (2004). [Video game]. Nintendo.
13. *The Legend of Zelda: The Minish Cap (GameBoy Advance).* (2004). [Video game]. Nintendo.
14. *The Legend of Zelda: Twilight Princess (GameCube).* (2006). [Video game]. Nintendo.
15. *The Legend of Zelda: Phantom Hourglass (Nintendo DS).* (2007). [Video game]. Nintendo.
16. *The Legend of Zelda: Spirit Tracks (Nintendo DS).* (2009). [Video game]. Nintendo.
17. *The Legend of Zelda: Skyward Sword (Nintendo Wii).* (2011). [Video game]. Nintendo.
18. *The Legend of Zelda: A Link Between Worlds (Nintendo 3DS).* (2013). [Video game]. Nintendo.
19. *The Legend of Zelda: Breath of the Wild (Nintendo Switch).* (2017). [Video game]. Nintendo.
20. *The Legend of Zelda: Tears of the Kingdom (Nintendo Switch).* (2023). [Video game]. Nintendo.

21. *The Legend of Zelda: Echoes of Wisdom* (Nintendo Switch). (2024). [Video game]. Nintendo.
22. *Hyrule Warriors*. (Nintendo WiiU). (2014). [Video game]. Koei Tecmo and Nintendo.
23. *Hyrule Warriors: Age of Calamity*. (Nintendo Switch). (2020). [Video game]. Koei Tecmo and Nintendo.

INTRODUCTION

1. *The Legend of Zelda: Breath of the Wild* (Nintendo Switch) (2017). [Video game]. Nintendo.
2. Fandom. (July 3, 2025). Lifetime unit sales generated by select *The Legend of Zelda* game titles worldwide as of March 2025 (in millions) [Graph]. In Statista. Retrieved August 06, 2025, from <https://www.statista.com/statistics/1389789/zelda-video-game-unit-sales/>
3. *The Legend of Zelda: Tears of the Kingdom* (Nintendo Switch) (2017). [Video game]. Nintendo.

ORACLE OF MOTIVATIONS

1. *The Legend of Zelda*. *Zelda Wiki*. April 15, 2024. Accessed April 15th, 2024. https://zelda.fandom.com/wiki/The_Legend_of_Zelda
2. *The Legend of Zelda: Twilight Princess*. *Zelda Wiki*. April 15, 2024. Accessed April 15, 2024. https://zelda.fandom.com/wiki/The_Legend_of_Zelda:_Twilight_Princess
3. *The Legend of Zelda: The Wind Waker*. *Zelda Wiki*. April 15, 2024. Accessed April 15, 2024. https://zelda.fandom.com/wiki/The_Legend_of_Zelda:_The_Wind_Waker
4. Deci EL, Ryan RM. The “What” and “Why” of Goal Pursuits: Human Needs and the Self-Determination of Behavior. *Psychol Inq*. 2000;11(4):227-268. doi:10.1207/S15327965PLI1104_01
5. Ryan RM, Deci EL. *Self-Determination Theory: Basic Psychological Needs in Motivation, Development, and Wellness*. Guilford Publications; 2018.
6. Ryan RM, Deci EL. Self-determination theory and the role of basic psychological needs in personality and the organization of behavior. In: *Handbook of Personality: Theory and Research, 3rd Ed*. The Guilford Press; 2008:654-678.
7. Formosa J, Johnson D, Türkay S, Mandryk RL. Need satisfaction, passion and wellbeing effects of videogame play prior to and during the COVID-19 pandemic. *Comput Hum Behav*. 2022;131:107232. doi:10.1016/j.chb.2022.107232
8. Rogers R. The motivational pull of video game feedback, rules, and social interaction: Another self-determination theory approach. *Comput Hum Behav*. 2017;73:446-450. doi:10.1016/j.chb.2017.03.048
9. Khan S, Li G, Ali N. Impact of Intrinsic Motivation Factors; Enjoyment, Autonomy and Impulsiveness on Youth Consumer’s Multitasking with Multi-

- Screens. *Int J U- E- Serv Sci Technol.* 2017;10:11-22. doi:10.14257/ijunesst.2017.10.2.02
10. Kosa M, Uysal A. Need frustration in online video games. *Behav Inf Technol.* Published online May 20, 2021:1-12. doi:10.1080/0144929X.2021.1928753
 11. Chen Y, Li R, Liu X. How Relatedness Need Satisfaction or Frustration and Motivation Relate to Well-Being on Social Networking Sites. *Am J Psychol.* 2021;134(2):201-216. doi:10.5406/amerjpsyc.134.2.0201
 12. Kosa M, Uysal A. Need frustration in online video games. *Behav Inf Technol.* Published online May 20, 2021:1-12. doi:10.1080/0144929X.2021.1928753
 13. Mills DJ, Milyavskaya M, Heath NL, Derevensky JL. Gaming motivation and problematic video gaming: The role of needs frustration. *Eur J Soc Psychol.* 2018;48(4):551-559. doi:10.1002/ejsp.2343
 14. Ibid
 15. Thue D, Bulitko V, Spetch M, Romanuik T. Player Agency and the Relevance of Decisions. In: Aylett R, Lim MY, Louchart S, Petta P, Riedl M, eds. *Interactive Storytelling.* Springer; 2010:210-215. doi:10.1007/978-3-642-16638-9_26
 16. Tyack A, Wyeth P. "The Small Decisions Are What Makes it Interesting": Autonomy, Control, and Restoration in Player Experience. *Proc ACM Hum-Comput Interact.* 2021;5(CHI PLAY):1-26. doi:10.1145/3474709
 17. Nagle A, Wolf P, Riener R, Novak D. The use of player-centered positive reinforcement to schedule in-game rewards increases enjoyment and performance in a serious game. *Int J Serious Games.* 2014;1(4):35-47. doi:10.17083/ijsg.v1i4.47
 18. Legault L. The Need for Autonomy. *Encycl Personal Individ Differ.* Published online December 10, 2016. doi:10.1007/978-3-319-28099-8_1120-1
 19. Deci EL, Ryan RM. Motivation, personality, and development within embedded social contexts: An overview of self-determination theory. In: *The Oxford Handbook of Human Motivation.* Oxford library of psychology. Oxford University Press; 2012:85-107. doi:10.1093/oxfordhb/9780195399820.013.0006
 20. Snow EL, Allen LK, Jacovina ME, McNamara DS. Does agency matter?: Exploring the impact of controlled behaviors within a game-based environment. *Comput Educ.* 2015;82:378-392. doi:10.1016/j.compedu.2014.12.011
 21. Legault L, Ray K, Hudgins A, Pelosi M, Shannon W. Assisted vs. asserted autonomy satisfaction: Their unique associations with wellbeing, integration of experience, and conflict negotiation. *Motiv Emot.* 2017;41. doi:10.1007/s11031-016-9593-3
 22. Deci EL, Ryan RM. The "What" and "Why" of Goal Pursuits: Human Needs and the Self-Determination of Behavior. *Psychol Inq.* 2000;11(4):227-268. doi:10.1207/S15327965PLI1104_01
 23. Christou G. The interplay between immersion and appeal in video games. *Comput Hum Behav.* 2014;32:92-100. doi:10.1016/j.chb.2013.11.018
 24. Nuyens FM, Kuss DJ, Lopez-Fernandez O, Griffiths MD. The Empirical Analysis of Non-problematic Video Gaming and Cognitive Skills: A Systematic Review. *Int J Ment Health Addict.* 2019;17(2):389-414. doi:10.1007/s11469-018-9946-0
 25. Johnson D, Klarkowski M, Vella K, Phillips C, McEwan M, Watling CN. Greater rewards in videogames lead to more presence, enjoyment and effort. *Comput Hum Behav.* 2018;87:66-74. doi:10.1016/j.chb.2018.05.025

26. Van den Broeck A, Ferris DL, Chang CH, Rosen CC. A Review of Self-Determination Theory's Basic Psychological Needs at Work. *J Manag.* 2016;42(5):1195-1229. doi:10.1177/0149206316632058
27. Hoffman B, Nadelson L. Motivational engagement and video gaming: a mixed methods study. *Educ Technol Res Dev.* 2010;58(3):245-270. doi:10.1007/s11423-009-9134-9
28. Vallerand RJ, Reid G. On the Causal Effects of Perceived Competence on Intrinsic Motivation: A Test of Cognitive Evaluation Theory. *J Sport Exerc Psychol.* 1984;6(1):94-102. doi:10.1123/jsp.6.1.94
29. Rogers R. The motivational pull of video game feedback, rules, and social interaction: Another self-determination theory approach. *Comput Hum Behav.* 2017;73:446-450. doi:10.1016/j.chb.2017.03.048
30. Cho E, Chen M, Toh SM, Ang J. Roles of effort and reward in well-being for police officers in Singapore: The effort-reward imbalance model. *Soc Sci Med.* 2021;277:113878. doi:10.1016/j.socscimed.2021.113878
31. Jones C, Scholes L, Johnson D, Katsikitis M, Carras MC. Gaming well: links between videogames and flourishing mental health. *Front Psychol.* 2014;5. doi:10.3389/fpsyg.2014.00260
32. Ryan RM, Rigby CS, Przybylski A. The Motivational Pull of Video Games: A Self-Determination Theory Approach. *Motiv Emot.* 2006;30(4):344-360. doi:10.1007/s11031-006-9051-8
33. Ibid
34. Brackett MA, Rivers SE, Salovey P. Emotional Intelligence: Implications for Personal, Social, Academic, and Workplace Success. *Soc Personal Psychol Compass.* 2011;5(1):88-103. doi:10.1111/j.1751-9004.2010.00334.x
35. Ryan RM, Deci EL. *Self-Determination Theory: Basic Psychological Needs in Motivation, Development, and Wellness.* Guilford Publications; 2018.
36. Vella K, Johnson D, Cheng VWS, et al. A Sense of Belonging: Pokémon GO and Social Connectedness. *Games Cult.* 2019;14(6):583-603. doi:10.1177/1555412017719973
37. Elvery G. Undertale's Loveable Monsters: Investigating Parasocial Relationships with Non-Player Characters. *Games Cult.* 2023;18(4):475-497. doi:10.1177/15554120221105464
38. Tyack A, Wyeth P. Exploring relatedness in single-player video game play. In: Proceedings of the 29th Australian Conference on Computer-Human Interaction. ACM; 2017:422-427. doi:10.1145/3152771.3156149
39. Patall EA, Sylvester BJ, Han C woo. The role of competence in the effects of choice on motivation. *J Exp Soc Psychol.* 2014;50:27-44. doi:10.1016/j.jesp.2013.09.002
40. Wulf T, Bowman ND, Velez JA, Breuer J. Once upon a game: Exploring video game nostalgia and its impact on well-being. *Psychol Pop Media.* 2020;9(1):83-95. doi:10.1037/ppm0000208
41. Sedikides C, Wildschut T, Cheung WY, et al. Nostalgia fosters self-continuity: Uncovering the mechanism (social connectedness) and consequence (eudaimonic well-being). *Emotion.* 2016;16(4):524-539. doi:10.1037/emo0000136
42. Ibid

43. Chen Y, Li R, Liu X. How Relatedness Need Satisfaction or Frustration and Motivation Relate to Well-Being on Social Networking Sites. *Am J Psychol.* 2021;134(2):201-216. doi:10.5406/amerjpsyc.134.2.0201
44. Patall EA, Sylvester BJ, Han C woo. The role of competence in the effects of choice on motivation. *J Exp Soc Psychol.* 2014;50:27-44. doi:10.1016/j.jesp.2013.09.002
45. Martela F, Unanue J, Gómez M, Unanue W. Reciprocal Relations Between Meaning in Life, Beneficence, and Psychological Needs for Autonomy, Competence, and Relatedness: Evidence from a Three-Wave Longitudinal Study. *J Happiness Stud.* 2024;25(3):29. doi:10.1007/s10902-024-00741-y
46. Tamborini R, Bowman ND, Eden A, Grizzard M, Organ A. Defining Media Enjoyment as the Satisfaction of Intrinsic Needs. *J Commun.* 2010;60(4):758-777. doi:10.1111/j.1460-2466.2010.01513.x
47. Reer F, Quandt T. Digital Games and Well-Being: An Overview. In: Kowert R, ed. *Video Games and Well-Being: Press Start.* Springer International Publishing; 2020:1-21. doi:10.1007/978-3-030-32770-5_1

GROWING INTO THE HERO OF HYRULE

1. Hyrule Warriors: Age of Calamity. (2020). Nintendo & Koei Tecmo.
2. The Legend of Zelda: Ocarina of Time. (1998). Nintendo. (Released November 1998 in Japan and North America)
3. McAdams, D. P., Trzesniewski, K., Lilgendahl, J., Benet-Martinez, V., & Robins, R. W. (2021).
Self and identity in personality psychology. *Personality Science*, 2.
<https://doi.org/10.5964/ps.6035>
4. American Psychological Association. (n.d.). Science of Psychology. American Psychological Association. <https://www.apa.org/education-career/guide/science>
5. Sussex Publishers. (2005, May 1). *Metaperceptions: How do you see yourself?*. Psychology Today. <https://www.psychologytoday.com/us/articles/200505/metaperceptions-how-do-you-see-yourself>
6. Dweck, C. S. (2008). *Mindset: The New Psychology of Success: How we can learn to fulfill our potential.* Ballantine Books.
7. The Legend of Zelda: Majora's Mask. (2000). Nintendo
8. Della Mirandola, P. (2012). *Pico Della Mirandola: Oration on the dignity of man: a new translation and commentary.* Cambridge University Press.
9. Dweck, C. S., & Yeager, D. S. (2019, May). *Mindsets: A view from two eras.* Perspectives on psychological science: a journal of the Association for Psychological Science.
<https://pmc.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/articles/PMC6594552/>

10. Della Mirandola, P. (2012). *Pico Della Mirandola: Oration on the dignity of man: a new translation and commentary*. Cambridge University Press.
11. Dweck, C. S., & Yeager, D. S. (2019, May). *Mindsets: A view from two eras*. Perspectives on psychological science: a journal of the Association for Psychological Science.
12. Buchanan, A. (2025, February 4). A short history of mindset. https://doi.org/10.31234/osf.io/6yqgc_v2
13. Dweck, C. S. (2008). *Mindset: The New Psychology of Success: How we can learn to fulfill our potential*. Ballantine Books.
14. *ibid*
15. Shane. (2021, February 5). *Carol Dweck: A summary of the two mindsets*. Farnam Street. <https://fs.blog/carol-dweck-mindset/>
16. Schrader, J. (2024, May 29). *15 ways to build a growth mindset*. Psychology Today. <https://www.psychologytoday.com/us/blog/click-here-for-happiness/201904/15-ways-to-build-a-growth-mindset>
17. Yeager, D. S., & Dweck, C. S. (2012). Mindsets That Promote Resilience: When Students Believe That Personal Characteristics Can Be Developed. *Educational Psychologist*, 47(4), 302–314. <https://doi.org/10.1080/00461520.2012.722805>
18. The Legend of Zelda. (1986). Nintendo. (Originally released February 21, 1986, in Japan; August 22, 1987, in North America)
19. *The Legend of Zelda: Link to the Past* (Super Nintendo). (1992). [Video game]. Nintendo.
20. *The Legend of Zelda: Breath of the Wild* (Nintendo Switch). (2017). [Video game]. Nintendo.
21. *The Legend of Zelda: Tears of the Kingdom* (Nintendo Switch). (2023). [Video game]. Nintendo.
22. Dweck, C. S. (2008). *Mindset: The New Psychology of Success: How we can learn to fulfill our potential*. Ballantine Books.
23. Alquist, J. L., & Baumeister, R. F. (2023). Dealing with uncertain situations. *The Journal of Positive Psychology*, 19(6), 923–946. <https://doi.org/10.1080/17439760.2023.2282781>
24. Yeager, D. S., & Dweck, C. S. (2020). What can be learned from growth mindset controversies? *American Psychologist*, 75(9), 1269–1284. <https://doi.org/10.1037/amp0000794>
25. The Legend of Zelda: Tears of the Kingdom. (2023). Nintendo.
26. Squire, K. D. (2008). Video Games and Education: Designing Learning Systems for an Interactive Age. *Educational Technology*, 48(2), 17–26.

- <http://www.jstor.org/stable/44429558>
27. Park, D., Tsukayama, E., Yu, A., & Duckworth, A. L. (2020). The development of grit and growth mindset during adolescence. *Journal of Experimental Child Psychology*, *198*, 104889.
<https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jecp.2020.104889>
 28. Paunesku, D., Walton, G. M., Romero, C., Smith, E. N., Yeager, D. S., & Dweck, C. S. (2015). Mind-set interventions are a scalable treatment for academic underachievement. *Psychological Science*, *26*(6), 784–793. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0956797615571017>
 29. Tao, W., Zhao, D., Yue, H., Horton, I., Tian, X., Xu, Z., & Sun, H.-J. (2022). The influence of growth mindset on the mental health and life events of college students. *Frontiers in Psychology*, *13*. <https://doi.org/10.3389/fpsyg.2022.821206>
 30. Wilson, T. D., Damiani, M., & Shelton, N. (2002). Improving the academic performance of college students with brief attributional interventions. *Improving Academic Achievement*, *89* 108. <https://doi.org/10.1016/b978-012064455-1/50008-7>
 31. The Legend of Zelda: Echoes of Wisdom. (2024). Nintendo.
 32. Aonuma, E., Fujibayashi, H., Dohta, T., Takizawa, S., & Wakai, H. (2023, May 9). *Ask the developer. vol. 9, The legend of Zelda: Tears of the kingdom-part 5*. Ask the Developer Vol. 9, The Legend of Zelda: Tears of the Kingdom-Part 5. <https://www.nintendo.com/us/whatsnew/ask-the-developer-vol-9-the-legend-of-zelda-tears-of-the-kingdom-part-5/>
 33. Mohr, H., Zwosta, K., Markovic, D., Bitzer, S., Wolfensteller, U., & Ruge, H. (2018, November 29). *Deterministic response strategies in a trial-and-error learning task*. PLoS computational biology. <https://pmc.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/articles/PMC6289466/>
 34. Daw, N. D., & Tobler, P. N. (2014). Value learning through reinforcement. *Neuroeconomics*, *283–298*. <https://doi.org/10.1016/b978-0-12-416008-8.00015-2>
 35. The Legend of Zelda: The Wind Waker. (2002). Nintendo.
 36. Aonuma, E., Fujibayashi, H., Dohta, T., Takizawa, S., & Wakai, H. (2023, May 9). *Ask the developer. vol. 9, The legend of Zelda: Tears of the kingdom-part 5*. Ask the Developer Vol. 9, The Legend of Zelda: Tears of the Kingdom-Part 5. <https://www.nintendo.com/us/whatsnew/ask-the-developer-vol-9-the-legend-of-zelda-tears-of>

- the-kingdom-part-5/
 37. The Legend of Zelda: Echoes of Wisdom. (2024). Nintendo.
38. Schneider, A., & Kipp, K. H. (2015). Professional growth through collaboration between Kindergarten and Elementary School Teachers. *Teaching and Teacher Education*, 52, 37–46.
<https://doi.org/10.1016/j.tate.2015.08.006>
39. Aonuma, E., Fujibayashi, H., Dohta, T., Takizawa, S., & Wakai, H. (2023, May 9). *Ask the developer. vol. 9, The legend of Zelda: Tears of the kingdom-part 2*. Ask the Developer Vol. 9,
 The Legend of Zelda: Tears of the Kingdom-Part 2.
<https://www.nintendo.com/us/whatsnew/ask-the-developer-vol-9-the-legend-of-zelda-tears-of-the-kingdom-part-2/>
40. Somekh, B. (1994). Inhabiting each other's castles: Towards knowledge and mutual growth through collaboration. *Educational Action Research*, 2(3), 357–381.
<https://doi.org/10.1080/0965079940020305>
41. The Legend of Zelda: Tears of the Kingdom. (2023). Nintendo.
42. The Legend of Zelda: Twilight Princess. (2006). Nintendo.

THE LONELY SWORDSMAN?

1. Nintendo R&D4. (1986). *The Legend of Zelda* [Digital game]. Nintendo.
2. Ibid.
3. Nintendo. (2017). *The Legend of Zelda: Breath of the Wild* [Digital game]. Nintendo.
4. Nintendo. (2023). *The Legend of Zelda: Tears of the Kingdom* [Digital game]. Nintendo.
5. Perlman, D., & Peplau, L. A. (1998). Loneliness. *Encyclopedia of Mental Health*, 2, 571–581.
6. Lay, C. (2022). The Legend of Zelda: Breath of the Wild as philosophy: Teaching the player to be comfortable being alone. In D. K. Johnson, D. A. Kowalski, C. Lay & K. S. Engels (Eds.), *The Palgrave handbook of popular culture as philosophy* (pp. 1-24). Palgrave Macmillan.
7. Cruz, C. (2023, May 19). 'The Legend of Zelda: Tears of the Kingdom' Is a Perfect Video Game. Rolling Stone. <https://www.rollingstone.com/culture/culture-features/zelda-tears-kingdom-review-1234716773/>
8. Brent, L. J. N., Chang, S. W. C., Gariépy, J.-F., & Platt, M. L. (2013). The neuroethology of friendship. *Annals of the New York Academy of Sciences*, 1316(1), 1-17. <https://doi.org/10.1111/nyas.12315>
9. Nintendo EAD. (1998). *The Legend of Zelda: Ocarina of Time* [Digital game]. Nintendo.

10. Nintendo EAD. (2006). *The Legend of Zelda: Twilight Princess* [Digital game]. Nintendo.
11. Elson, M., Breuer, J., & Quandt, T. (2014). Know thy player: An integrated model of player experience for digital games research. In M. C. Angelides & H. Agius (Eds.), *Handbook of digital games* (pp. 362–387). John Wiley & Sons.
12. Klimmt, C., & Possler, D. (2021). A Synergistic Multiprocess Model of Video Game Entertainment. In P. Vorderer & C. Klimmt (Eds.), *The Oxford Handbook of Entertainment Theory* (pp. 622-646). Oxford University Press.
13. Perlman, D., & Peplau, L. A. (1998). Loneliness. *Encyclopedia of Mental Health*, 2, 571–581.
14. Russell, D , Peplau, L. A. & Ferguson, M. L. (1978). Developing a measure of loneliness. *Journal of Personality Assessment*, 42, 290-294. https://psycnet.apa.org/doi/10.1207/s15327752jpa4203_11
15. Heinrich, L. M., & Gullone, E. (2006). The clinical significance of loneliness: A literature review. *Clinical Psychology Review*, 26(6), 695-718. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.cpr.2006.04.002>
16. Utz, R. L., Swenson, K. L., Caserta, M., Lund, D., & deVries, B. (2014). Feeling Lonely Versus Being Alone: Loneliness and Social Support Among Recently Bereaved Persons. *The Journals of Gerontology: Series B*, 69B(1), 85–94. <https://doi.org/10.1093/geronb/gbt075>
17. Baumeister, R. F., & Leary, M. R. (1995). The need to belong: Desire for interpersonal attachments as a fundamental human motivation. *Psychological Bulletin*, 117(3), 497–529. <https://doi.org/10.1037/0033-2909.117.3.497>
18. Brent, L. J. N., Chang, S. W. C., Gariépy, J.-F., & Platt, M. L. (2013). The neuroethology of friendship. *Annals of the New York Academy of Sciences*, 1316(1), 1-17. <https://doi.org/10.1111/nyas.12315>
19. Leibowitz, E. D. (2019). What is Friendship? *Disputatio*, 10(49), 97-117. <https://doi.org/10.2478/disp-2018-0008>
20. Cocking, D., & Kennett, J. (1998). Friendship and the Self. *Ethics*, 108(3), 502-527. <https://doi.org/10.1086/233824>
21. Nintendo. (2017). *The Legend of Zelda: Breath of the Wild* [Digital game]. Nintendo.
22. Russell, D , Peplau, L. A. & Ferguson, M. L. (1978). Developing a measure of loneliness. *Journal of Personality Assessment*, 42, 290-294. https://psycnet.apa.org/doi/10.1207/s15327752jpa4203_11
23. Woods, B., O’Philbin, L., Farrell, E. M., Spector, A. E., & Orrell, M. (2018). Reminiscence therapy for dementia. *Cochrane Database of Systematic Reviews*, 2018(3), Art. No.: CD001120. <https://doi.org/10.1002/14651858.cd001120.pub3>
24. Franck, L., Molyneux, N., & Parkinson, L. (2015). Systematic review of interventions addressing social isolation and depression in aged care clients. *Quality of Life Research*, 25(6), 1395–1407. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s11136-015-1197-y>
25. Abeyta, A. A., Routledge, C., & Kaslon, S. (2020). Combating loneliness with nostalgia: Nostalgic feelings attenuate negative thoughts and motivations associated with loneliness. *Frontiers in Psychology*, 11, 1-15. <https://doi.org/10.3389/fpsyg.2020.01219>

26. Fried, E. I., Bockting, C., Arjadi, R., Borsboom, D., Amshoff, M., Cramer, A. O. J., Epskamp, S., Tuerlinckx, F., Carr, D., & Stroebe, M. (2015). From loss to loneliness: The relationship between bereavement and depressive symptoms. *Journal of Abnormal Psychology, 124*(2), 256–265. <https://doi.org/10.1037/abn0000028>
27. Eisma, M.C. & Buyukcan-Tetik, A. (2024). Prolonged grief symptoms predict social and emotional loneliness and depression symptoms. *Behavior Therapy*. Advance online publication. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.beth.2024.04.014>
28. Ventura, M., Shute, V., & Zhao, W. (2013). The relationship between video game use and a performance-based measure of persistence. *Computers & Education, 60*, 52–58. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.compedu.2012.07.003>
29. Saraswati, L. A., Rifai, I., & Farhan, M. (2022). Role Playing Game (RPG) Video Games and Loneliness: An Analysis of Finding Paradise Narrative. *Lingua Cultura, 16*(2), 141-146. <https://doi.org/10.21512/lc.v16i2.8192>
30. Vera, E. (2023). Following the hero's memories: The role of memory as a (re)construction of the narrative in *The Legend of Zelda: Breath of the Wild*. *Acta Ludologica, 6*(2), 4-18.
31. Russell, D., Peplau, L. A., & Ferguson, M. L. (1978). Developing a measure of loneliness. *Journal of Personality Assessment, 42*, 290-294. https://psycnet.apa.org/doi/10.1207/s15327752jpa4203_11
32. Heinrich, L. M., & Gullone, E. (2006). The clinical significance of loneliness: A literature review. *Clinical Psychology Review, 26*(6), 695-718. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.cpr.2006.04.002>
33. Seppälä, J. (2022). Loneliness in the Films of Aki Kaurismäki. *Movie: A Journal of Film Criticism, 10*, 11-20. https://warwick.ac.uk/fac/arts/scapvc/film/movie/contents/movie_issue10_loneliness.pdf
34. Nintendo. (2017). *The Legend of Zelda: Breath of the Wild* [Digital game]. Nintendo.
35. Naughty Dog. (2013). *The Last of Us* [Digital game]. Sony Computer Entertainment.
36. Yu, M.X. (2021, November 19). An infinite amount of hope, but not for us: Posthumanism and beautiful post-apocalyptic landscapes in *The Last of Us*. *Digital Patmos, 5*(2). <https://issues.digitalpatmos.com/vol5issue2/2021/11/19/an-infinite-amount-of-hope-but-not-for-us-posthumanism-and-beautiful-post-apocalyptic-landscapes-in-the-last-of-us/>
37. C&I Studios. (2024, February 14). The Psychology of Colors in Film: Influencing Mood and Perception. *C&I Studios*. <https://c-istudios.com/the-psychology-of-colors-in-film-influencing-mood-and-perception/>
38. Tekrø, E.A.N. (2018). *Playing the Sound of Silence: Immersion, Loneliness, and Analysis of Multimodal Intertextuality in 21st Century Video Game Music*. [Master's thesis, University of Oslo].
39. Chattopadhyay, B. (2017). Reconstructing atmospheres: Ambient sound in film and media production. *Communication and the Public, 2*(4), 352-364. <https://doi.org/10.1177/2057047317742171>
40. Nintendo. (2017). *The Legend of Zelda: Breath of the Wild* [Digital game]. Nintendo.

41. Nintendo. (2023). *The Legend of Zelda: Tears of the Kingdom* [Digital game]. Nintendo
42. Lay, C. (2022). The Legend of Zelda: Breath of the Wild as philosophy: Teaching the player to be comfortable being alone. In D. K. Johnson, D. A. Kowalski, C. Lay & K. S. Engels (Eds.), *The Palgrave handbook of popular culture as philosophy* (pp. 1-24). Palgrave Macmillan.
43. Long, C. R., & Averill, J. R. (2003). Solitude: An Exploration of Benefits of Being Alone. *Journal for the Theory of Social Behaviour*, 33(1), 21-44. <https://doi.org/10.1111/1468-5914.00204>
44. Williams, M. (2017, March 28). *Exploring and Uncovering the Dreaded Ubisoft Tower*. VG247. <https://www.vg247.com/exploring-and-uncovering-the-dreaded-ubisoft-tower>
45. Leibowitz, E. D. (2019). What is Friendship? *Disputatio*, 10(49), 97-117. <https://doi.org/10.2478/disp-2018-0008>
46. Nintendo. (2017). *The Legend of Zelda: Breath of the Wild* [Digital game]. Nintendo.
47. Nintendo. (2023). *The Legend of Zelda: Tears of the Kingdom* [Digital game]. Nintendo.
48. Leibowitz, E. D. (2019). What is Friendship? *Disputatio*, 10(49), 97-117. <https://doi.org/10.2478/disp-2018-0008>
49. Brent, L. J. N., Chang, S. W. C., Gariépy, J.-F., & Platt, M. L. (2013). The neuroethology of friendship. *Annals of the New York Academy of Sciences*, 1316(1), 1-17. <https://doi.org/10.1111/nyas.12315>
50. Leibowitz, E. D. (2019). What is Friendship? *Disputatio*, 10(49), 97-117. <https://doi.org/10.2478/disp-2018-0008>
51. Brent, L. J. N., Chang, S. W. C., Gariépy, J.-F., & Platt, M. L. (2013). The neuroethology of friendship. *Annals of the New York Academy of Sciences*, 1316(1), 1-17. <https://doi.org/10.1111/nyas.12315>
52. Ibid.
53. Brent, L. J. N., Chang, S. W. C., Gariépy, J.-F., & Platt, M. L. (2013). The neuroethology of friendship. *Annals of the New York Academy of Sciences*, 1316(1), 1-17. <https://doi.org/10.1111/nyas.12315>
54. Seligman, M. E. (2012). *Flourish: A visionary new understanding of happiness and well-being*. Atria Paperback.
55. Blue Sky Mind. (2019, July). *Positive psychology and relationships: What the research says about happiness & healthy relationships*. <https://www.ablueskymind.com/blog/positive-psychology-and-relationships-research>
56. Nintendo. (2023, May 9). *Ask the Developer Vol. 9, The Legend of Zelda: Tears of the Kingdom—Part 2*. <https://www.nintendo.com/us/whatsnew/ask-the-developer-vol-9-the-legend-of-zelda-tears-of-the-kingdom-part-2/>
57. Puglisi, B. (2011, April 7). Symbolism Entry: Friendship and Camaraderie. *Writers Helping Writers*. <https://writershelpingwriters.net/2011/04/final-symbolism-entry-friendshipcamaraderie/>
58. Brent, L. J. N., Chang, S. W. C., Gariépy, J.-F., & Platt, M. L. (2013). The neuroethology of friendship. *Annals of the New York Academy of Sciences*, 1316(1), 1-17. <https://doi.org/10.1111/nyas.12315>

59. Nahemow, L., & Lawton, M. P. (1975). Similarity and propinquity in friendship formation. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 32(2), 205-213.
60. Segal, M. W. (1974). Alphabet and attraction: An unobtrusive measure of the effect of propinquity in a field setting. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 30(5), 654-657. <https://doi.org/10.1037/h0037446>
61. Roberts-Griffin, C.P. (2011). What is a good friend: A qualitative analysis of desired friendship qualities. *Penn McNair Research Journal*, 3(1), 1-14. <https://repository.upenn.edu/handle/20.500.14332/39712>
62. Nintendo. (2023). *The Legend of Zelda: Tears of the Kingdom* [Digital game]. Nintendo.
63. Brent, L. J. N., Chang, S. W. C., Gariépy, J.-F., & Platt, M. L. (2013). The neuroethology of friendship. *Annals of the New York Academy of Sciences*, 1316(1), 1-17. <https://doi.org/10.1111/nyas.12315>
64. Horton, H.P. (2016, November 14). 'Frances Ha' and the Framing of Friendship. Film School Rejects. <https://filmschoolrejects.com/frances-ha-and-the-framing-of-friendship-31cb712e7827/>
65. Nintendo. (2017). *The Legend of Zelda: Breath of the Wild* [Digital game]. Nintendo.
66. Nintendo. (2023). *The Legend of Zelda: Tears of the Kingdom* [Digital game]. Nintendo
67. C&I Studios. (2024, February 14). The Psychology of Colors in Film: Influencing Mood and Perception. *C&I Studios*. <https://c-istudios.com/the-psychology-of-colors-in-film-influencing-mood-and-perception/>
68. Bartos, B. (2020). *How do colors enhance and ease viewer immersion in the fictional reality of a film? An exploration of the affective nature of color usage in film*. [Bachelor's thesis, University of Groningen].
69. Lay, C. (2022). The Legend of Zelda: Breath of the Wild as philosophy: Teaching the player to be comfortable being alone. In D. K. Johnson, D. A. Kowalski, C. Lay & K. S. Engels (Eds.), *The Palgrave handbook of popular culture as philosophy* (pp. 1-24). Palgrave Macmillan.
70. Long, C. R., & Averill, J. R. (2003). Solitude: An Exploration of Benefits of Being Alone. *Journal for the Theory of Social Behaviour*, 33(1), 21-44. <https://doi.org/10.1111/1468-5914.00204>
71. Grindley, A. (2023, July 26). *How Tears of the Kingdom's Soundtrack Represents Its World*. GameGrin. <https://www.gamegrin.com/articles/how-tears-of-the-kingsdoms-soundtrack-represents-its-world/>
72. Shredfearn. (2018, April 3). *Press A* ~ The Music of Zelda: Breath of the Wild. *A Closer Listen*. <https://acloserlisten.com/2018/04/03/press-a-the-music-of-zelda-breath-of-the-wild/>
73. Nintendo. (2017). *The Legend of Zelda: Breath of the Wild* [Digital game]. Nintendo.
74. Nintendo. (2023). *The Legend of Zelda: Tears of the Kingdom* [Digital game]. Nintendo
75. Leibowitz, E. D. (2019). What is Friendship? *Disputatio*, 10(49), 97-117. <https://doi.org/10.2478/disp-2018-0008>

76. Roberts-Griffin, C.P. (2011). What is a good friend: A qualitative analysis of desired friendship qualities. *Penn McNair Research Journal*, 3(1), 1-14. <https://repository.upenn.edu/handle/20.500.14332/39712>
77. Brent, L. J. N., Chang, S. W. C., Gariépy, J.-F., & Platt, M. L. (2013). The neuroethology of friendship. *Annals of the New York Academy of Sciences*, 1316(1), 1-17. <https://doi.org/10.1111/nyas.12315>
78. Ibid.
79. Long, C. R., & Averill, J. R. (2003). Solitude: An Exploration of Benefits of Being Alone. *Journal for the Theory of Social Behaviour*, 33(1), 21-44. <https://doi.org/10.1111/1468-5914.00204>
80. Baumeister, R. F., & Leary, M. R. (1995). The need to belong: Desire for interpersonal attachments as a fundamental human motivation. *Psychological Bulletin*, 117(3), 497–529. <https://doi.org/10.1037/0033-2909.117.3.497>
81. Cruz, C. (2023, May 19). ‘The Legend of Zelda: Tears of the Kingdom’ Is a Perfect Video Game. Rolling Stone. <https://www.rollingstone.com/culture/culture-features/zelda-tears-kingdom-review-1234716773/>
82. Welsh, O. (2023, May 26). Addison’s sign obsession in Tears of the Kingdom is a little too real. *Polygon*. <https://www.polygon.com/legend-zelda-tears-kingdom/23738758/zelda-TotK-tears-of-the-kingdom-addison-guy-holding-sign-how-many-signs>
83. Nintendo. (2017). *The Legend of Zelda: Breath of the Wild* [Digital game]. Nintendo.
84. Nintendo. (2023). *The Legend of Zelda: Tears of the Kingdom* [Digital game]. Nintendo.
85. Perlman, D., & Peplau, L. A. (1998). Loneliness. *Encyclopedia of Mental Health*, 2, 571–581.
86. Leibowitz, E. D. (2019). What is Friendship? *Disputatio*, 10(49), 97-117. <https://doi.org/10.2478/disp-2018-0008>
87. Cocking, D., & Kennett, J. (1998). Friendship and the Self. *Ethics*, 108(3), 502-527. <https://doi.org/10.1086/233824>
88. Cruz, C. (2023, May 19). ‘The Legend of Zelda: Tears of the Kingdom’ Is a Perfect Video Game. Rolling Stone. <https://www.rollingstone.com/culture/culture-features/zelda-tears-kingdom-review-1234716773/>
89. Pederberg, M. (2019, May 20). Musical Musings: Building the Themes of Tarrey Town “From the Ground Up”. *Zelda Dungeon*. <https://www.zeldadungeon.net/musical-musings-building-the-themes-of-tarrey-town-from-the-ground-up/>
90. Seligman, M. E. (2012). *Flourish: A visionary new understanding of happiness and well-being*. Atria Paperback.

TRIFORCE’S DARK AND LIGHT

1. Paulhus, D. L., & Williams, K. M. (2002). The Dark Triad of personality: Narcissism, Machiavellianism, and psychopathy. *Journal of Research in Personality*, 36(6), 556–563. doi:10.1016/S0092-6566(02)00505-6

2. Johnson, L. K. D. (2018). The Light Triad Scale: Developing and Validating a Preliminary Measure of Prosocial Orientation (Order No. 29245982). Available from ProQuest Dissertations & Theses Global. (2714874660). <https://www.proquest.com/dissertations-theses/light-triad-scale-developing-validating/docview/2714874660/se-2>
3. Kaufman, S. B., Yaden, D. B., Hyde, E., & Tsukayama, E. (2019). The light vs. dark triad of personality: Contrasting two very different profiles of human nature. *Frontiers in psychology, 10*, 467.
4. *The Legend of Zelda: Ocarina of Time* (Nintendo 64). (1998). [Video game]. Nintendo.
5. Dark Horse Comics. (2017). *The Legend Of Zelda Art And Artifacts*.
6. Dark Horse Comics. (2017). *The Legend Of Zelda Hyrule Historia*.
7. *The Legend of Zelda: Tears of the Kingdom* (Nintendo Switch). (2023). [Video game]. Nintendo.
8. Ibid.
9. *The Legend of Zelda: Ocarina of Time* (Nintendo 64). (1998). [Video game]. Nintendo.
10. Belschak, F.D., Muhammad, R.S. & Den Hartog, D.N. Birds of a Feather can Butt Heads: When Machiavellian Employees Work with Machiavellian Leaders. *J Bus Ethics 151*, 613–626 (2018). <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10551-016-3251-2>
11. Jonason, P. K., Slomski, S., & Partyka, J. (2012). The Dark Triad at work: How toxic employees get their way. *Personality and individual differences, 52*(3), 449-453.
12. *The Legend of Zelda: Link to the Past* (Super Nintendo). (1991). [Video game]. Nintendo.
13. Schyns, B., Wisse, B., & Sanders, S. (2019). Shady strategic behavior: Recognizing strategic behavior of Dark Triad followers. *Academy of Management Perspectives, 33*(2), 234-249. <https://doi.org/10.5465/amp.2017.0005>
14. *The Legend of Zelda: Wind Waker* (Wii U). (2002). [Video game]. Nintendo.
15. Lämmle, L., Nussbeck, F. W., & Ziegler, M. (2021). Hello from the Other Side: Can We Perceive Others' Darkness? Observers' Accuracy of the Dark Triad. *Journal of Personality Assessment, 103*(1), 106–119. <https://doi.org/10.1080/00223891.2019.1683020>
16. Chu, L.-C. (2017), Impact of Providing Compassion on Job Performance and Mental Health: The Moderating Effect of Interpersonal Relationship Quality. *Journal of Nursing Scholarship, 49*: 456-465. <https://doi.org/10.1111/jnu.12307>
17. *The Legend of Zelda: Majora's Mask* (Nintendo 64). (2000). [Video game]. Nintendo.
18. Johnson, L. K. D. (2018). The Light Triad Scale: Developing and Validating a Preliminary Measure of Prosocial Orientation (Order No. 29245982). Available from ProQuest Dissertations & Theses Global. (2714874660). <https://www.proquest.com/dissertations-theses/light-triad-scale-developing-validating/docview/2714874660/se-2>
19. *The Legend of Zelda: Breath of the Wild* (Nintendo Switch). (2017). [Video game]. Nintendo.

20. Anik, L., & Norton, M. I. (2014). Matchmaking Promotes Happiness. *Social Psychological and Personality Science*, 5(6), 644-652. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1948550614522303>
21. *The Legend of Zelda: Twilight Princess* (Version Wii). (2006). [Video game]. Nintendo.
22. Miller, J. D., Back, M. D., Lynam, D. R., & Wright, A. G. C. (2021). Narcissism Today: What We Know and What We Need to Learn. *Current Directions in Psychological Science*, 30(6), 519-525. <https://doi.org/10.1177/09637214211044109>
23. Bogart, L. M., Benotsch, E. G., & Pavlovic, J. D. P. (2004). Feeling Superior but Threatened: The Relation of Narcissism to Social Comparison. *Basic and Applied Social Psychology*, 26(1), 35-44. https://doi.org/10.1207/s15324834basp2601_4
24. Grapsas, S., Brummelman, E., Back, M. D., & Denissen, J. J. A. (2020). The “Why” and “How” of Narcissism: A Process Model of Narcissistic Status Pursuit. *Perspectives on Psychological Science*, 15(1), 150-172. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1745691619873350>
25. *The Legend of Zelda: Ocarina of Time* (Nintendo 64). (1998). [Video game]. Nintendo.
26. Amernic, J. H., & Craig, R. J. (2010). Accounting as a facilitator of extreme narcissism. *Journal of Business Ethics*, 96, 79-93.
27. Schyns, B., Wisse, B., & Sanders, S. (2019). Shady strategic behavior: Recognizing strategic behavior of Dark Triad followers. *Academy of Management Perspectives*, 33(2), 234-249. <https://doi.org/10.5465/amp.2017.0005>
28. *The Legend of Zelda: Twilight Princess* (Version Wii). (2006). [Video game]. Nintendo.
29. *The Legend of Zelda: Wind Waker* (Wii U). (2002). [Video game]. Nintendo.
30. Lange, J., Crusius, J., & Hagemeyer, B. (2016). The Evil Queen’s Dilemma: Linking Narcissistic Admiration and Rivalry to Benign and Malicious Envy. *European Journal of Personality*, 30(2), 168-188. <https://doi.org/10.1002/per.2047>
31. Livixbobbix, “[TotK] I translated all of the TOTK cutscenes from Japanese to English”. *Reddit* (2023).
32. Kaufman, S. B., Yaden, D. B., Hyde, E., & Tsukayama, E. (2019). The light vs. dark triad of personality: Contrasting two very different profiles of human nature. *Frontiers in psychology*, 10, 467.
33. *The Legend of Zelda: Twilight Princess* (Version Wii). (2006). [Video game]. Nintendo.
34. *The Legend of Zelda: Skyward Sword* (Nintendo Switch). (2011). [Video game]. Nintendo.
35. *The Legend of Zelda: Twilight Princess* (Version Wii). (2006). [Video game]. Nintendo.
36. *The Legend of Zelda: Skyward Sword* (Nintendo Switch). (2011). [Video game]. Nintendo.
37. Overton, S.C. (2022), "Personality Traits in the Workplace: Examining the Light Triad and its Relationship with Job Satisfaction". *Honors College Theses*. 134. <https://digitalcommons.murraystate.edu/honorsthesis/134>

38. Robinson, Skylar and Lewandowski, Gary (2025) "Is the Light Triad really that light?: The Light Triad's role in relationship savior complex," *Modern Psychological Studies*: Vol. 30: No. 2, Article 4. Available at: <https://scholar.utc.edu/mps/vol30/iss2/4>
39. Koehn, M. A., Okan, C., & Jonason, P. K. (2019). A primer on the Dark Triad traits. *Australian Journal of Psychology*, 71(1), 7–15. <https://doi.org/10.1111/ajpy.12198>
40. Smith, S. F., & Lilienfeld, S. O. (2013). Psychopathy in the workplace: The knowns and unknowns. *Aggression and Violent Behavior*, 18(2), 204-218.
41. Jones, D. N., & Neria, A. L. (2015). The Dark Triad and dispositional aggression. *Personality and Individual Differences*, 86, 360-364.
42. Maddi, S. R. (2006). Hardiness: The courage to grow from stresses. *The Journal of Positive Psychology*, 1(3), 160–168. <https://doi.org/10.1080/17439760600619609>
43. Woodard, C. R. (2004). Hardiness and the Concept of Courage. *Consulting Psychology Journal: Practice and Research*, 56(3), 173–185. <https://doi.org/10.1037/1065-9293.56.3.173>
44. Strauss, C., Taylor, B. L., Gu, J., Kuyken, W., Baer, R., Jones, F., & Cavanagh, K. (2016). What is compassion and how can we measure it? A review of definitions and measures. *Clinical psychology review*, 47, 15-27.
45. Brown, M.E.L., MacLellan, A., Laughy, W. *et al.* Can stoic training develop medical student empathy and resilience? A mixed-methods study. *BMC Med Educ* 22, 340 (2022). <https://doi.org/10.1186/s12909-022-03391-x>
46. *The Legend of Zelda: Majora's Mask* (Nintendo 64). (2000). [Video game]. Nintendo.
47. Fan, R., Xu, K., & Zhao, J. (2018). An agent-based model for emotion contagion and competition in online social media. *Physica a: statistical mechanics and its applications*, 495, 245-259.
48. *The Legend of Zelda: Skyward Sword* (Nintendo Wii). (2011). [Video game]. Nintendo.

MORAL IDENTITIES IN HYRULE

1. *The Legend of Zelda: Wind Waker* (GameCube). (2002). [Video game]. Nintendo.
2. DragonRand100. (2015). The Legend of Zelda Ocarina of Time [Fan fiction novelisation of Ocarina of Time]. Retrieved from <https://www.wattpad.com/story/39782886-the-legend-of-zelda-ocarina-of-time>
3. Hardy, S. A., & Carlo, G. (2011). Moral identity: What is it, how does it develop, and is it linked to moral action?. *Child Development Perspectives*, 5(3), 212-218.
4. *The Legend of Zelda: Twilight Princess* (GameCube). (2006). [Video game]. Nintendo.
5. *The Legend of Zelda: Breath of the Wild* (Nintendo Switch). (2017). [Video game]. Nintendo.
6. Hyrule Warriors: Age of Calamity. (Nintendo Switch). (2020). [Video game]. Koei Tecmo and Nintendo.

7. Lawrence, R. L., & Paige, D. S. (2016). What our ancestors knew: Teaching and learning through storytelling. *New Directions for Adult and Continuing Education*, 149, 63-72.
8. Kilpatrick, W. (1993). *Why Johnny can't tell right from wrong: And what we can do about it*. Simon and Schuster, New York, NY.
9. Nash, R. J. (1997). Answering the "Virtuecrats": A Moral Conversation on Character Education. *Advances in Contemporary Educational Thought Series*, Volume 21. Teachers College Press, Teachers College, Columbia University, 1234 Amsterdam Avenue, New York, NY.
10. Lee, K., Talwar, V., McCarthy, A., Ross, I., Evans, A., & Arruda, C. (2014). Can classic moral stories promote honesty in children?. *Psychological Science*, 25(8), 1630-1636.
11. Thomson, A. L., & Siegel, J. T. (2013). A moral act, elevation, and prosocial behavior: Moderators of morality. *The Journal of Positive Psychology*, 8(1), 50-64.
12. Smethurst, T., & Craps, S. (2015). Playing with trauma: Interreactivity, empathy, and complicity in the walking dead video game. *Games and Culture*, 10(3), 269-290.
13. Dechering, A., & Bakkes, S. (2018, August). Moral engagement in interactive narrative games: an exploratory study on ethical agency in the walking dead and life is strange. In *Proceedings of the 13th International Conference on the Foundations of Digital Games* (pp. 1-10).
14. Schrier, K. (2014). Designing and using games to teach ethics and ethical thinking. *Learning, education and games*, 141.
15. *The Legend of Zelda: Breath of the Wild* (Nintendo Switch). (2017). [Video game]. Nintendo.
16. *The Legend of Zelda: Wind Waker* (GameCube). (2002). [Video game]. Nintendo.
17. Kinsella, E. L., Ritchie, T. D., & Igou, E. R. (2015). Zeroing in on heroes: a prototype analysis of hero features. *Journal of personality and social psychology*, 108(1), 114.
18. *The Legend of Zelda: Ocarina of Time* (Nintendo 64). (1998). [Video game]. Nintendo.
19. *The Legend of Zelda: Ocarina of Time* (Nintendo 64). (1998). [Video game]. Nintendo.
20. *The Legend of Zelda: Twilight Princess* (GameCube). (2006). [Video game]. Nintendo.
21. Janoff-Bulman, R., Sheikh, S., & Hepp, S. (2009). Proscriptive versus prescriptive morality: two faces of moral regulation. *Journal of personality and social psychology*, 96(3), 521.
22. *The Legend of Zelda: A Link Between Worlds* (Nintendo 3DS). (2013). [Video game]. Nintendo.
23. Ibid.
24. Boegershausen, J., Aquino, K., & Reed II, A. (2015). Moral identity. *Current Opinion in Psychology*, 6, 162-166.
25. Phenomenal Gaming. (2023, May 15). Korok space program [Video]. TikTok. https://www.tiktok.com/@phenomenal_gaming/video/7233387182143163690

26. Pory Leeks. (2023, May 11). [Video attached] [Video]. X. https://x.com/pory_leeks/status/1656701643671453709
27. Bjm900. (2023, April 22). I don't kill foxes [Online forum post]. Reddit. https://www.reddit.com/r/Breath_of_the_Wild/comments/xjoz8x/i_dont_kill_foxes/
28. Anonymous user. (2018). I... I shot a fox [Online forum post]. GameFAQs. <https://gamefaqs.gamespot.com/boards/189707-the-legend-of-zelda-breath-of-the-wild/75637984>
29. Westerlaken, M. (2017). Self-fashioning in action: Zelda's Breath of the Wild vegan run. In Proceedings of the Philosophy of Computer Games Conference (pp. 1–14). Game Philosophy Network.
30. Böhm, D., Dorland, B., Herzog, R., Kap, R. B., Langendam, T. S., Popa, A., & Bidarra, R. (2021, August). How can you save the world? Empowering sustainable diet change with a serious game. In 2021 IEEE Conference on Games (CoG) (pp. 1–7). IEEE.
31. Cushman, F., Gray, K., Gaffey, A., & Mendes, W. B. (2012). Simulating murder: the aversion to harmful action. *Emotion*, 12(1), 2.
32. Moore, C. (2015). Moral disengagement. *Current Opinion in Psychology*, 6, 199–204.
33. Singer, P. (2004). Animal liberation. In *Ethics: Contemporary Readings* (pp. 284–292). Routledge.
34. Caviola, L., & Capraro, V. (2020). Liking but devaluing animals: Emotional and deliberative paths to speciesism. *Social Psychological and Personality Science*, 11(8), 1080–1088.
35. Caviola, L. (2019). How we value animals: the psychology of speciesism (Doctoral dissertation, University of Oxford).
36. Borgi, M., Cogliati-Dezza, I., Brelsford, V., Meints, K., & Cirulli, F. (2014). Baby schema in human and animal faces induces cuteness perception and gaze allocation in children. *Frontiers in psychology*, 5, 90852.
37. Dhont, K., Hodson, G., Loughnan, S., & Amiot, C. E. (2019). Rethinking human-animal relations: The critical role of social psychology. *Group Processes & Intergroup Relations*, 22(6), 769–784.
38. (14 May 23). The korok crucifixions have begun [Online Twitter post and video]. <https://shorturl.at/CIMQ2>
39. [Diaz, A.] (13 May 23). Tears of the Kingdom players are using Link's new powers to bully Koroks [Online article]. <https://www.polygon.com/legend-zelda-tears-kingdom/23722362/tears-of-the-kingdom-korok-link-zonai-abilities>
40. *The Legend of Zelda: Echoes of Wisdom* (Nintendo Switch). (2024). [Video game]. Nintendo.
41. Aquino, K., & Reed II, A. (2002). The self-importance of moral identity. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 83(6), 1423.
42. Gotowiec, S., & van Mastrigt, S. (2019). Having versus doing: The roles of moral identity internalization and symbolization for prosocial behaviors. *The Journal of Social Psychology*, 159(1), 75–91.
43. Boegershausen, J., Aquino, K., & Reed II, A. (2015). Moral identity. *Current Opinion in Psychology*, 6, 162–166.

44. *The Legend of Zelda: Majora's Mask* (Nintendo 64). (2000). [Video game]. Nintendo.
45. *The Legend of Zelda: Majora's Mask* (Nintendo 64). (2000). [Video game]. Nintendo.
46. Reynolds, S. J. (2008). Moral attentiveness: Who pays attention to the moral aspects of life?. *Journal of Applied Psychology*, 93(5), 1027.
47. Reed II, A., & Aquino, K. F. (2003). Moral identity and the expanding circle of moral regard toward out-groups. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 84(6), 1270.
48. Boegershausen, J., Aquino, K., & Reed II, A. (2015). Moral identity. *Current Opinion in Psychology*, 6, 162-166.
49. Kapitany, R., Hampejs, T., & Goldstein, T. R. (2022). Pretensive shared reality: from childhood pretense to adult imaginative play. *Frontiers in Psychology*, 13, 774085.
50. Kapitány, R., & Francis, K. (2022, August 19). Identity Fusion between Imaginary Characters and Oneself during Moral Dilemmas: An examination of cognitive quarantine during adult pretend play. <https://doi.org/10.31219/osf.io/8bz2x>
51. Kapitany, R., Hampejs, T., & Goldstein, T. R. (2022). Pretensive shared reality: from childhood pretense to adult imaginative play. *Frontiers in Psychology*, 13, 774085.
52. Sidhu, P., & Carter, M. (2021). Pivotal play: Rethinking meaningful play in games through death in dungeons & dragons. *Games and Culture*, 16(8), 1044-1064.
53. Reese, E., & Whitehouse, H. (2021). The development of identity fusion. *Perspectives on Psychological Science*, 16(6), 1398-1411.
54. Kapitany, R., Hampejs, T., & Goldstein, T. R. (2022). Pretensive shared reality: from childhood pretense to adult imaginative play. *Frontiers in Psychology*, 13, 774085.
55. *The Legend of Zelda. (Family Computer Disc System- Famicom.(1986)* [Video game]. Nintendo. (1986).
56. *The Legend of Zelda: Ocarina of Time* (Nintendo 64). (1998). [Video game]. Nintendo.
57. Horii, Y. (Host). (1989). Shigeru Miyamoto. [online published interview]. https://www.zeldadungeon.net/shigeru_miyamoto_and_yuji_horii_discuss_the_rpg_and_the_silent_protagnist_c/
58. *The Legend of Zelda: Breath of the Wild* (Nintendo Switch). (2017). [Video game]. Nintendo.
59. *The Legend of Zelda: Twilight Princess* (GameCube). (2006). [Video game]. Nintendo.
60. *The Legend of Zelda: Majora's Mask* (Nintendo 64). (2000). [Video game]. Nintendo.

“HEY, LISTEN!”

1. *The Legend of Zelda: Ocarina of Time* (Nintendo 64). (1998). [Video game]. Nintendo.
2. Nintendo (1986) *The Legend of Zelda*. [Video game].
3. Nintendo (2023) *The Legend of Zelda: Tears of the Kingdom*. [Video game].
4. Saxelby, R. (2010, August 21). “So many worlds”: Grimes interviewed. *DMY*. <https://dmy.co/new-music/grimes-interview-so-many-worlds>
5. Kheraj, A. (2023, May 19). *Why is the Zelda soundtrack so good? An investigation*. Dazed. <https://www.dazeddigital.com/music/article/59874/1/legend-of-zelda-soundtrack-breath-of-the-wild-sequel>
6. Chennington, P. [@PadChennington]. (2018, August 12). *What is Zeldawave?* YouTube. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=cEb1Tt5peuA>
7. Nintendo (1998) *The Legend of Zelda: Ocarina of Time*. [Video game].
8. Summers, T. (2021). *The Legend of Zelda: Ocarina of Time: A Game Music Companion*. Intellect Books.
9. Nintendo (2017) *The Legend of Zelda: Breath of the Wild*. [Video game].
10. Nintendo (2023) *The Legend of Zelda: Tears of the Kingdom*. [Video game].
11. Nintendo (2017) *The Legend of Zelda: Breath of the Wild* [Video game].
12. Nintendo (2023) *The Legend of Zelda: Tears of the Kingdom*. [Video game].
13. shmuplations. (2021, December 31). *Koji Kondo – 2001 Composer Interview*. Shmuplations.com - 80s/90s/00s Japanese Gamedev Interviews. <https://shmuplations.com/kojikondo/>
14. VideoGameOST [@VideoGameOST1]. (2010, June 23). *Legend of Zelda: Ocarina of Time OST - Zora's Domain*. YouTube. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Maw3A8zUJyM&list=RDMaw3A8zUJyM&start_radio=1
15. Linkvssniceveryday [@Linkvssniceveryday]. (2008, March 2). *The legend of Zelda Ocarina of time-Water temple song*. YouTube. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=7LTAL5zB2w8&list=RD7LTAL5zB2w8&start_radio=1
16. Video Game Music [@videogamemusic7777]. (2020, December 22). *Fire Temple - The Legend of Zelda: Ocarina of Time OST*. YouTube. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=rjZZnoi0GVk&list=RDrjZZnoi0GVk&start_radio=1
17. Extensions-2013-, D. B. X. [@deletedbrawlbrstms3xextens447]. (2019, June 2). *Ice Cavern - The Legend of Zelda: Ocarina of Time Music Extended*. YouTube. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=rldyOijViz0&list=RDrldyOijViz0&start_radio=1
18. SitBar [@sitbar1]. (2023, May 11). *Sky Islands Main Theme | Zelda Tears of the Kingdom Soundtrack*. YouTube. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=dkNx5fivqeTk&list=RDdkNxfivqeTk&start_radio=1
19. Cliffordlonghead [@Cliffordlonghead]. (2024, October 29). *The Depths - The Legend of Zelda: Tears of the Kingdom Music Extended*. YouTube. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=T-OEujWv4Pk&list=RDT-OEujWv4Pk&start_radio=1
20. Chennington, P. [@PadChennington]. (2018, August 12). *What is Zeldawave?* YouTube. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=cEb1Tt5peuA>

21. Docs, T. G. [@ThomasGameDocs]. (2023, April 28). *The most controversial Zelda song*. YouTube. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=YF6x1WxykaM>
22. Halo2playa [@Halo2playa]. (2019, August 9). *Gerudo Valley - The Legend of Zelda: Ocarina Of Time*. YouTube. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=0hEYvdMoF2g&list=RD0hEYvdMoF2g&start_radio=1
23. GORONMASK [@GORONMASK]. (2010, September 24). *Zelda Ocarina of Time Music - Goron City*. YouTube. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=UP61I8hY9NI&list=RDUP61I8hY9NI&start_radio=1
24. VideoGameOST [@VideoGameOST1]. (2010, June 23). *Legend of Zelda: Ocarina of Time OST - Zora's Domain*. YouTube. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Maw3A8zUjyM&list=RDMaw3A8zUjyM&start_radio=1
25. Extensions-2013-, D. B. X. [@deletedbrawlbrstms3xextens447]. (2019, June 2). *Temple of Time - The Legend of Zelda: Ocarina of Time Music Extended*. YouTube. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=nOsImksL5I4&list=RDnOsImksL5I4&start_radio=1
26. Guy, T. [@ThemeGuy666]. (2009, January 28). *Legend of Zelda: Ocarina of Time Market Theme*. YouTube. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=PrUClx4a7Y0&list=RDPrUClx4a7Y0&start_radio=1
27. Sylvurr [@SylvurrTV]. (2024, August 6). *Lost Woods - The Legend of Zelda: Ocarina of Time OST*. YouTube. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=V9so9y-8Dgk&list=RDV9so9y-8Dgk&start_radio=1
28. Treize [@yukinonfan]. (2017, February 27). *The Legend of Zelda: Breath of the Wild OST - Kakariko Village*. YouTube. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=3Sjiz4DHMgw&list=RD3Sjiz4DHMgw&start_radio=1
29. Kamikazedude [@kamikazedude]. (2009, April 23). *Zelda Ocarina of Time Music Great Fairy Fountain*. YouTube. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=IrCGpPZ8CCE&list=RDIrCGpPZ8CCE&start_radio=1
30. Jeanbon [@Jeanbon0]. (2023, May 17). *The Legend of Zelda Tears of the Kingdom - Shrine Theme*. YouTube. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=5gnwn0aUpQY&list=RD5gnwn0aUpQY&start_radio=1
31. Lamb, P. [@peacheslamb3546]. (2017, March 3). *Stables (The Legend of Zelda: Breath of the Wild OST)*. YouTube. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=IhdibdC4azQ&list=RDIdibdC4azQ&start_radio=1
32. Halo2playa [@Halo2playa]. (2019, August 14). *Kokiri Forest - The Legend of Zelda: Ocarina Of Time*. YouTube. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=aQ6Fq-LfDZQ&list=RDaQ6Fq-LfDZQ&start_radio=1
33. Halo2playa [@Halo2playa]. (2019, August 14). *Forest Temple - The Legend of Zelda: Ocarina Of Time*. YouTube. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=c_G7Haf1aOI&list=RDc_G7Haf1aOI&start_radio=1
34. Extensions-2013-, D. B. X. [@deletedbrawlbrstms3xextens447]. (2019, June 2). *Shadow Temple - The Legend of Zelda: Ocarina of Time Music Extended*. YouTube. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=faV3aLWpVvk4&list=RDfaV3aLWpVvk4&start_radio=1
35. Guy, T. [@ThemeGuy666]. (2009, January 28). *Legend of Zelda: Ocarina of Time Market Theme*. YouTube. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=PrUClx4a7Y0&list=RDPrUClx4a7Y0&start_radio=1

36. Dmon [@MajorDmon]. (2013, June 3). *The Legend of Zelda - Ocarina of time Soundtrack: Destroyed Market [Extended]*. YouTube. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=8iwfLAuW5-k&list=RD8iwfLAuW5-k&start_radio=1
37. Juslin, P. N. (2013). From everyday emotions to aesthetic emotions: towards a unified theory of musical emotions. *Physics of Life Reviews*, 10(3), 235–266.
38. Blipsounds [@Blipsounds]. (2017, May 1). *The Sound Effects of Breath of the Wild - Video Game Sound Design Analysis*. YouTube. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=8WhgmBOP7Fg>
39. Hira, C. [@CadenceHira]. (2024, November 23). *Why Does Snow Level Music Sound COLD?* YouTube. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=0X4DTfDT4xo>
40. Omnistone, M. [@MrOmnistone]. (2017, November 17). *Zelda botw OST - Hyrule Castle Outside + Inside transition*. YouTube. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=yFYEzs6Gvsg&list=RDyFYEzs6Gvsg&start_radio=1
41. DougyFreshGames [@DougyFreshGames]. (2017, March 14). *Lost Woods - Breath Of The Wild Music*. YouTube. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=_veOLEx7oJc&list=RD_veOLEx7oJc&start_radio=1
42. Siefkas, D. (n.d.). *Song for a lost hero: Breath of the wild's lost woods and the makings of a musical maze*. Retrieved May 19, 2024, from <https://static1.squarespace.com/static/5b54f59396e76fb72924b8b4/t/63161b67a5656123b51988b3/1662393196207/Siefkas+-+Song+for+a+Lost+Hero.pdf>
43. Halo2playa [@Halo2playa]. (2019, August 14). *Forest Temple - The Legend of Zelda: Ocarina Of Time*. YouTube. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=c_G7Haf1aOI&list=RDc_G7Haf1aOI&start_radio=1
44. Save Data (2019) *The Forest Temple in Ocarina of Time Has the Most Perfect Atmospheric Music in a Video Game*. YouTube. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=KnUqRLaKna>
45. Ibid.
46. Zilber, D. (2022, August 16). *Breathe Easy: Future-Past Escapism with Breath of the Wild*. Ssense. <https://www.ssense.com/en-us/editorial/culture/breathe-easy-future-past-escapism-with-breath-of-the-wild>
47. Crossing, A. [@ambiancecrossing]. (2023, January 14). *Zelda BOTW: Nature Sounds to study / relax*. YouTube. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=mxeCFLG_ZF4
48. Ratcliffe, E. (2021). Sound and Soundscape in Restorative Natural Environments: A Narrative Literature Review. *Frontiers in Psychology*, 12, 570563.
49. Ray, T. N., Franz, S. A., Jarrett, N. L., & Pickett, S. M. (2021). Nature Enhanced Meditation: Effects on Mindfulness, Connectedness to Nature, and Pro-Environmental Behavior. *Environment and Behavior*, 53(8), 864–890.
50. music_zelda [@music_zelda4496]. (2023, September 11). *Middle Boss Battle - The Legend of Zelda: Ocarina of Time*. YouTube. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=RYkbobtyG7c&list=RDRYkbobtyG7c&start_radio=1
51. Switch, Z. [@zeldaswitch2324]. (2017, March 6). *The Legend of Zelda: Breath of the Wild OST - Guardian Battle*. YouTube. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=jrZq5vPKDEw&list=RDjrZq5vPKDEw&start_radio=1
52. Dainee [@notainee]. (2023, May 14). *Gloom Spawn [Gloom Hands] | The Legend of*

- Zelda: Tears of the Kingdom OST*. YouTube. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=SgIdTn4HiwM&list=RDSgIdTn4HiwM&start_radio=1
53. Juslin, P. N. (2013). From everyday emotions to aesthetic emotions: towards a unified theory of musical emotions. *Physics of Life Reviews*, 10(3), 235–266.
 54. Stormkyleis [@Stormkyleis]. (2010, October 27). *The Legend of Zelda: Ocarina of Time - ReDead Scream (Sound Effect)*. YouTube. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=NXvHaPodYhE>
 55. shmuplations. (2021, December 31). *Koji Kondo – 2001 Composer Interview*. Shmuplations.com - 80s/90s/00s Japanese Gamedev Interviews. <https://shmuplations.com/kojikondo/>
 56. music_zelda [@music_zelda4496]. (2023, April 6). *Hyrule Field - The Legend of Zelda: Ocarina of Time*. YouTube. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=s3YA4-mDkPk&list=RDs3YA4-mDkPk&start_radio=1
 57. Hoang, H. [@hanghoang1688]. (2017, August 20). *Molduga Battle The Legend of Zelda Breath of the Wild OST*. YouTube. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=_IA6KS6HXDM&list=RD_IA6KS6HXDM&start_radio=1
 58. Juslin, P. N. (2013). From everyday emotions to aesthetic emotions: towards a unified theory of musical emotions. *Physics of Life Reviews*, 10(3), 235–266
 59. Effects, Y. S. [@FreeYouTubeVideoEffects]. (2017, October 20). *Zelda Rupee Sound Effect [Free Sound Effect]*. YouTube. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=9HZ-kj3mP5Q>
 60. Sprout, D. [@dekusprout132]. (2012, April 20). *Legend of Zelda - Chest Opening and Getting Item*. YouTube. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=69AyYUJUBTg&list=RD69AyYUJUBTg&start_radio=1
 61. ケヴオサン K. [@_kevosan]. (2019, May 25). *New Location (The Legend of Zelda: Breath of the Wild OST)*. YouTube. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=6R_1RyWDPCI
 62. Surf The Waveform [@surfthewaveform]. (2023, May 31). *Legend Of Zelda: TOTK Heart Upgrade Resound*. YouTube. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=1GSKCrIHWtQ>
 63. ケヴオサン K. [@_kevosan]. (2019, June 28). *Sheikah Sensor Ping (The Legend of Zelda: Breath of the Wild OST)*. YouTube. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=9s9QvDvIN5I>
 64. Lapraniteon [@Lapraniteon]. (2019, November 3). *Cooking: Great! - The Legend of Zelda: Breath of the Wild Sound Effect*. YouTube. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=1fi85dxZZFE>
 65. Savage, D. [@DylanSavage]. (2011, November 20). *The Legend of Zelda: Ocarina of Time - Secret Sound*. YouTube. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=9d3qCPCMgH4>
 66. Docs, T. G. [@ThomasGameDocs]. (2020, May 5). *Zelda's most iconic sound effect (ft. @8bitMusicTheory)*. YouTube. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=dTrBbpkMHuA>
 67. Marshall Magee (2023) *Why Does Tears Of The Kingdom Sound So Good?* YouTube. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=toEdi_wjTGM
 68. Dimitriadis, T., Della Porta, D., Perschl, J., Evers, A. W. M., Magee, W. L., &

- Schaefer, R. S. (2024). Motivation and music interventions in adults: A systematic review. *Neuropsychological Rehabilitation*, 34(5), 649–678.
69. Blipsounds [@Blipsounds]. (2017, May 1). *The Sound Effects of Breath of the Wild - Video Game Sound Design Analysis*. YouTube. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=8WhgmBOP7Fg>
 70. Ratcliffe, E. (2021). Sound and Soundscape in Restorative Natural Environments: A Narrative Literature Review. *Frontiers in Psychology*, 12, 570563.
 71. Ray, T. N., Franz, S. A., Jarrett, N. L., & Pickett, S. M. (2021). Nature Enhanced Meditation: Effects on Mindfulness, Connectedness to Nature, and Pro-Environmental Behavior. *Environment and Behavior*, 53(8), 864–890.
 72. xkiki94x [@xkiki94x]. (2008, October 5). *Zelda Ocarina Of Time - Zelda's Lullaby*. YouTube. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=EPHfbtjqWM8&list=RDEPHfbtjqWM8&start_radio=1
 73. Lindholm, J. [@Gamemusicnerd]. (2011, April 30). *The Legend of Zelda: Ocarina of Time Original Soundtrack Track 11: Epona's Song*. YouTube. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=MBU2IJ1Mnjw&list=RDMBU2IJ1Mnjw&start_radio=1
 74. Extensions-2013-, D. B. X. [@deletedbrawlbrstms3xextens447]. (2019, June 2). *Sheik's Theme - The Legend of Zelda: Ocarina of Time Music Extended*. YouTube. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ubQunBvBvR4&list=RDubQunBvBvR4&start_radio=1
 75. Elithralith [@Elithralith]. (2017, March 11). *Mipha's theme - The Legend Of Zelda Breath Of The Wild*. YouTube. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=oC84xDccaos&list=RD0C84xDccaos&start_radio=1
 76. Lamb, P. [@peacheslamb3546]. (2017, March 3). *Riding - Day (The Legend of Zelda: Breath of the Wild OST)*. YouTube. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=FhXoJKoUuXE&list=RDfHxOjKoUuXE&start_radio=1
 77. Omnistone, M. [@MrOmnistone]. (2017, November 17). *Zelda botw OST - Hyrule Castle Outside + Inside transition*. YouTube. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=yFYEzs6Gvsg&list=RDyFYEzs6Gvsg&start_radio=1
 78. Aff [@gAff56]. (2022, March 27). *Kass's 'Ancient Song' | Breath of the Wild - Original Soundtrack*. YouTube. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=OzwFPP28_c8&list=RD0zwFPP28_c8&start_radio=1
 79. Sulimo, M. [@Manwes_Inspiring_Trax]. (2023, May 22). *Tears of the Kingdom OST: Stormwind Ark*. YouTube. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ttD7z37u6Lo&list=RDttD7z37u6Lo&start_radio=1
 80. shmuplations. (2021, December 31). *Koji Kondo – 2001 Composer Interview*. Shmuplations.com - 80s/90s/00s Japanese Gamedev Interviews. <https://shmuplations.com/kojikondo/>
 81. Extensions-2013-, D. B. X. [@deletedbrawlbrstms3xextens447]. (2019, June 2). *Temple of Time - The Legend of Zelda: Ocarina of Time Music Extended*. YouTube. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=nOs1mksL5I4&list=RDnOs1mksL5I4&start_radio=1
 82. Data, S. [@SaveDataTeam]. (2023, April 15). *Why the Temple of Time's Theme in Ocarina of Time is such an Amazing Piece of Zelda Music*. YouTube. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=UF-NWkqmoIk>

83. 8-bit Music Theory [@8bitMusicTheory]. (2023, February 22). *The DORIAN Mode Feels MYSTERIOUS (among other things)*. Youtube. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=SbRD3tPipNw>
84. Juslin, P. N. (2013). From everyday emotions to aesthetic emotions: towards a unified theory of musical emotions. *Physics of Life Reviews*, 10(3), 235–266: p.g. 242
85. Madison, G., & Schiölde, G. (2017). Repeated Listening Increases the Liking for Music Regardless of Its Complexity: Implications for the Appreciation and Aesthetics of Music. *Frontiers in Neuroscience*, 11, 147.
86. shmuplations. (2021, December 31). *Koji Kondo – 2001 Composer Interview*. Shmuplations.com - 80s/90s/00s Japanese Gamedev Interviews. <https://shmuplations.com/kojikondo/>
87. RetroLevel [@Retrolevel]. (2017, July 23). *Minuet of Forest The Legend of Zelda Ocarina of Time*. YouTube. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=mMFkfR76hN8&list=RDmMFkfR76hN8&start_radio=1
88. MiddleCloud [@MiddleCloud_]. (2022, January 29). *The Legend of Zelda: Ocarina of Time | Title Theme | 近藤浩治 [Koji Kondo]*. YouTube. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=xY8U9byTrzI&list=RDxY8U9byTrzI&start_radio=1
89. SiIvaGunner [@SiIvaGunner]. (2022, July 1). *Overture of Sages - The Legend of Zelda: Ocarina of Time*. YouTube. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=gkNO8Dlq3po&list=RDgkNO8Dlq3po&start_radio=1
90. Saru [@Saru786]. (2009, January 1). *Zelda: Ocarina Of Time (Music) - Prelude Of Light*. YouTube. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=93py7MHab7c&list=RD93py7MHab7c&start_radio=1
91. RetroLevel [@Retrolevel]. (2017, July 23). *Serenade of Water The Legend of Zelda Ocarina of Time*. YouTube. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Hx1ZM4sbdm8&list=RDHx1ZM4sbdm8&start_radio=1
92. Leeper, G. [@gavinleepermusic]. (2020, May 9). *Learning Modes & Modal Interchange With Zelda Ocarina of Time (and FF7)*. YouTube. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=c4h9SjOQ6hs>
93. Shariatmadari, D. (2015, September 2). *Why does music give us chills? You asked Google – here's the answer*. The Guardian. <https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2015/sep/02/why-does-music-give-us-chills-google>
94. Summers, T. (2021). *The Legend of Zelda: Ocarina of Time: A Game Music Companion*. Intellect Books.
95. DrSuperMarioMan [@DrSuperMarioMan6464]. (2011, January 5). *Zelda Original Soundtrack - Song of Storms*. YouTube. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=UtGHZaq0EGs&list=RDUtGHZaq0EGs&start_radio=1
96. Video Game Music [@videogamemusic7777]. (2020, December 21). *Sun's Song (Ocarina) - The Legend of Zelda: Ocarina of Time OST*. YouTube. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ff4UIzQfQ4k&list=RDff4UIzQfQ4k&start_radio=1
97. Lord, M. [@Memelord2020]. (2023, May 18). *The Legend of Zelda: Tears of the Kingdom – Hestu's Dance*. YouTube. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ROJ7KbwiWig>
98. A Gamer To The Past [@AGTTP]. (2022, September 14). *(No Ocarina) Learned a song - The Legend of Zelda: Ocarina of Time OST | Remastered*. YouTube. <https://>

- www.youtube.com/watch?v=LQ3RYSQmZ8s&list=RDLQ3RYSQmZ8s&start_radio=1
99. Bandura, A. (1977). Self-efficacy - Toward a unifying theory of behavioral change. *Psychological Review*, 84(2), 191–215.
 100. ZeldaIGN [@ZeldaIGN]. (2011, July 6). *Saria's Song - Zelda: Ocarina of Time - Lost Woods - Part 42*. YouTube. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Rpae9QPcJTM&list=RDRpae9QPcJTM&start_radio=1
 101. vysedlegend [@vysedlegend1]. (2009, November 17). *Legend of Zelda: Ocarina of Time - Minuet of Forest*. YouTube. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=NCCw5lphNk4&list=PLovijcilBc-M5WWb7vAyveaug0efwBr-z>
 102. Pure [@Purecraft]. (2012, July 13). *Zelda Ocarina of Time - All Ocarina Songs*. YouTube. <https://youtu.be/cd60Sgob99I?list=RDcd60Sgob99I&t=579> [start: 9min 38sec]
 103. *Ibid.* [start: 6min 13sec]
 104. *Ibid.* [start: 8min 31sec]
 105. Triforce, L. [@LiamTriforce]. (2024, March 21). *Understanding the Music of Ocarina of Time*. YouTube. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=x4ac9_ktK7A

YOUR PRINCESS IS IN ANOTHER BODY

1. Campbell, J. (2008). The monomyth. In *The hero with a thousand faces* (3rd ed., Vol. 17). New World Library.
2. Rosenberg, S. (1995). Multiplicity of Selves. In R. D. Ashmore & L. Jussim (Eds.), *Self and Identity: Fundamental Issues* (pp. 23–45). Oxford University Press.
3. Tobin, D. D., Menon, M., Menon, M., Spatta, B. C., Hodges, E. V. E., & Perry, D. G. (2010). The intrapsychics of gender: A model of self-socialization. *Psychological Review*, 117(2), 601–622. <https://doi.org/10.1037/a0018936>
4. *The Legend of Zelda: Ocarina of Time* (Nintendo 64). (1998). [Video game]. Nintendo.
5. *The Legend of Zelda: Breath of the Wild* (Nintendo Switch). (2017). [Video game]. Nintendo.
6. Campbell, J. (2008). *The hero with a thousand faces* (3rd ed., Vol. 17). New World Library.
7. Eliade, M. (1998). *Myth and reality: Religious traditions of the world*. Waveland Press. (Original work published 1963).
8. Zipes, J. (1994). Introduction. In *Fairy Tale as Myth/Myth as Fairy Tale* (pp. 1–16). University Press of Kentucky; JSTOR. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/j.ctt2jcw6s.5>
9. Crawford, M. (2020). Ecological Systems theory: Exploring the development of the theoretical framework as conceived by Bronfenbrenner. *J Pub Health Issue Pract*, 4(2), 170.
10. Markus, H., & Nurius, P. (1986). Possible selves. *American Psychologist*, 41(9), 954–969. <https://doi.org/10.1037/0003-066X.41.9.954>
11. Sokol, J. T. (2009). Identity development throughout the lifetime: An examination of Eriksonian theory. *Graduate Journal of Counseling Psychology*, 1(2), 14.

12. *The Legend of Zelda: Ocarina of Time* (Nintendo 64). (1998). [Video game]. Nintendo.
13. Ibid.
14. *The Legend of Zelda: Breath of the Wild* (Nintendo Switch). (2017). [Video game]. Nintendo.
15. Proffitt, D. R. (2003). A Spiritual Ascent of the Philosopher-King and the Bodhisattva: An Inquiry into the Central Books of Plato's Republic and the Yogacara School of Mahayana Buddhism [Ph.D., California Institute of Integral Studies]. In *ProQuest Dissertations and Theses* (288093044). ProQuest Dissertations & Theses Global. <https://ezproxy.rit.edu/login?url=https://www.proquest.com/dissertations-theses/spiritual-ascent-philosopher-king-bodhisattva/docview/288093044/se-2?accountid=108>
16. Sokol, J. T. (2009). Identity development throughout the lifetime: An examination of Eriksonian theory. *Graduate Journal of Counseling Psychology*, 1(2), 14.
17. *The Legend of Zelda: Ocarina of Time* (Nintendo 64). (1998). [Video game]. Nintendo.
18. Ibid.
19. *The Legend of Zelda: Twilight Princess* (Version Wii). (2006). [Video game]. Nintendo.
20. *The Legend of Zelda: Breath of the Wild* (Version Nintendo Switch). (2017). [Video game]. Nintendo.
21. Harris, J. R. (1995). Where is the child's environment? A group socialization theory of development. *Psychological Review*, 102(3), 458–489. <https://doi.org/10.1037/0033-295X.102.3.458>
22. Martin, C. L., Kornienko, O., Schaefer, D. R., Hanish, L. D., Fabes, R. A., & Goble, P. (2013). The Role of Sex of Peers and Gender-Typed Activities in Young Children's Peer Affiliative Networks: A Longitudinal Analysis of Selection and Influence. *Child Development*, 84(3), 921–937. <https://doi.org/10.1111/cdev.12032>
23. Perry, D. G., Pauletti, R. E., & Cooper, P. J. (2019). Gender identity in childhood: A review of the literature. *International Journal of Behavioral Development*, 43(4), 289–304. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0165025418811129>
24. *The Legend of Zelda: Tears of the Kingdom* (Nintendo Switch). (2023). [Video game]. Nintendo.
25. Sullivan, A. (2009). Academic self-concept, gender and single-sex schooling. *British Educational Research Journal*, 35(2), 259–288. <https://doi.org/10.1080/01411920802042960>
26. Shi, S. Y., Li, G., Liben, L. S., Chen, Z., & Wong, W. I. (2024). Gender cognitions before and after graduating from single-sex versus coeducational high schools: A longitudinal study using propensity score matching. *Journal of Educational Psychology*, 116(8), 1437–1454. <https://doi.org/10.1037/edu0000879>
27. Dijkstra, J. K., & Berger, C. (2018). Friendship Selection and Influence Processes for Physical Aggression and Prosociality: Differences between Single-Sex and Mixed-Sex Contexts. *Sex Roles*, 78(9), 625–636. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s11199-017-0818-z>
28. Monohan, S. M. (2012). “*And They Never Did Find Him*”: *Dialogues of History, Geography, and Fear in Adolescent Legend-Tripping*.

29. *The Legend of Zelda: Ocarina of Time* (Nintendo 64). (1998). [Video game]. Nintendo.
30. Cirilla, A. G., & Rone, V. E. (2020). *Mythopoeic Narrative in the Legend of Zelda*. Routledge New York.
31. Kuniak, S. F. (2019). It's dangerous to go alone: The hero's journey in The legend of Zelda. In A. Bean (Ed.), *The psychology of Zelda: Linking our world to The legend of Zelda series* (pp. 23–61). Smart Pop.
32. Edinger, E. F. (2017). *Ego and archetype*. Shambhala Publications.
33. Jefferies, L. (2017). *Powerful Wounds: The Essential Mythological Formations for the Superhero/heroine Archetype in American Popular Culture*. Pacifica Graduate Institute.
34. *The Legend of Zelda: Link's Awakening* (Nintendo 64). (1993). [Video game]. Nintendo.
35. *The Legend of Zelda: Link to the Past* (Super Nintendo). (1992). [Video game]. Nintendo.
36. Ibid.
37. Neacsiu, A. D., Bohus, M., & Linehan, M. M. (2014). Dialectical behavior therapy: An intervention for emotion dysregulation. *Handbook of Emotion Regulation*, 2, 491–507.
38. *The Legend of Zelda: Ocarina of Time* (Nintendo 64). (1998). [Video game]. Nintendo.
39. *The Legend of Zelda: Tears of the Kingdom* (Nintendo Switch). (2023). [Video game]. Nintendo.
40. Bly, R. (2015). *Iron John: A book about men*. Hachette UK.
41. Perry, D. G., Pauletti, R. E., & Cooper, P. J. (2019). Gender identity in childhood: A review of the literature. *International Journal of Behavioral Development*, 43(4), 289–304. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0165025418811129>
42. Burrow, H. M. (2023). Ritualized into adulthood: The scarcity of youth-focused rites of passage in America. *Discover Global Society*, 1(1), 22.
43. Perry, D. G., Pauletti, R. E., & Cooper, P. J. (2019). Gender identity in childhood: A review of the literature. *International Journal of Behavioral Development*, 43(4), 289–304.

SMASH THE POT, BREAK THE BINARY

1. *The Legend of Zelda: Ocarina of Time* (Nintendo 64). (1998). [Video game]. Nintendo.
2. Puc, S. (2023) Link is a gay icon, and Zelda Fans Know it, Polygon. Available at: https://www.polygon.com/zelda/23643830/legend-of-zelda-link-gay-icon-breath-of-the-wild-botw-sidon-gerudo?utm_source=chatgpt.com.
3. *The Legend of Zelda: Skyward Sword* (Nintendo Wii). (2011). [Video game]. Nintendo.
4. Baldwin, M., Cahill, L., Davis, S., Evans, S., Gifford, A. J., Harper, B., Jones, B. A., Malik, M., McDermott, D. T., Staras, C., Thorne, N., & Winder, B. (2024).

- LGBTQ+ Psychology. In Banyard, P., Winder, B., Norman, C., Dillon, G., (Eds.) (2024). *Essential Psychology* (4th ed.), Sage, (pp. 493-518)
5. Clarke, V., Ellis, S. J., Peel, E., & Riggs, D. W. (2010). *Lesbian, gay, bisexual, trans and queer psychology: An introduction*. Cambridge University Press.
 6. *The Legend of Zelda: Twilight Princess* (GameCube). (2006). [Video game]. Nintendo.
 7. For example, see Herek, G. M. (2000). The psychology of sexual prejudice. *Current Directions in Psychological Science*, 9(1), 19–22.
 8. The DSM stands for Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders and is used by clinicians, researchers, and mental health professionals to diagnose and classify mental health conditions.
 9. <https://rainbowmap.ilga-europe.org>
 10. Jagose, A. (1996). *Queer theory: An introduction*. nyu Press.
 11. Brontsema, R. (2004). A queer revolution: Reconceptualizing the debate over linguistic reclamation. *Colorado Research in Linguistics*.
 12. Worthen, M. G. (2023). Queer identities in the 21st century: Reclamation and stigma. *Current Opinion in Psychology*, 49, 101512.
 13. *The Legend of Zelda: Ocarina of Time* (Nintendo 64). (1998). [Video game]. Nintendo.
 14. Lips, H. M. (2020). *Sex and gender: An introduction*. Waveland Press.
 15. A field of research is now emerging, called Intersex studies, this is increasing our ever-developing understanding of how biological sex may not be so clean cut. See Monro, S., Carpenter, M., Crocetti, D., Davis, G., Garland, F., Griffiths, D., ... & Aggleton, P. (2021). Intersex: cultural and social perspectives. *Culture, Health & Sexuality*, 23(4), 431-440.
 16. Judith Butler has an incredibly large literature base and is publishing new work all the time, a good starting point is Butler, J. (2013). *Gender as performance*. In *A critical sense* (pp. 109-125). Routledge.
 17. *The Legend of Zelda: Ocarina of Time* (Nintendo 64). (1998). [Video game]. Nintendo.
 18. <https://www.polygon.com/2014/8/5/5948989/zelda-nintendo-sheik-gender-cosplay>
 19. Watson, L. B. (2019). Gender identity and expression in LGBTQ+ communities: Implications for the practice of psychology. *Psychology of Women Quarterly*, 43(3), 298-302.
 20. <https://time.com/4369537/female-link-zelda/>
 21. This process, where players project their own thoughts, feelings, or identities onto a character, is known in psychoanalysis as projective identification or simply projection, a mechanism where individuals attribute their own internal experiences to others
 22. <https://time.com/4369537/female-link-zelda/>
 23. Korlat, S., Holzer, J., Schultes, M. T., Buerger, S., Schober, B., Spiel, C., & Kollmayer, M. (2022). Benefits of psychological androgyny in adolescence: The role of gender role self-concept in school-related well-being. *Frontiers in Psychology*, 13, 856758.

24. Martin, C. L., Cook, R. E., & Andrews, N. C. (2017). Reviving androgyny: A modern day perspective on flexibility of gender identity and behavior. *Sex Roles*, 76, 592-603.
25. . In a study titled "Video Gaming and Gender Dysphoria: Some Case Study Evidence," Griffiths et al. (2016) examined four individuals seeking treatment for gender dysphoria and found that online gaming allowed them to engage in gender swapping, which facilitated coping with their gender identity issues.
26. In a study by Morgan et al. (2020) titled "The Role of the Avatar in Gaming for Trans and Gender Diverse Young People" the participants reported considerable therapeutic benefits, indicating that gaming can have positive mental health implications for trans and gender-diverse individuals.
27. At the time of drafting this chapter, *Echoes of Wisdom* had not been released. Nintendo choosing to centre a game on *Zelda* could be seen as a step in the right direction for blurring binaries.
28. Incidentally, in a related but different franchise *Super Smash Bros. Melee* (2001), the character *Zelda* could transform at will to *Sheik*, but in *Smash Bros. Ultimate* (2018) they are separate fighters. An interesting thing to consider!
29. *The Legend of Zelda: Majora's Mask* (Nintendo 64). (2000). [Video game]. Nintendo.
30. *The Legend of Zelda: Skyward Sword* (Nintendo Wii). (2011). [Video game]. Nintendo.
31. *The Legend of Zelda: Breath of the Wild* (Nintendo Switch). (2017). [Video game]. Nintendo.
32. This darn DSM causing havoc again: Drescher, J. (2015). Out of DSM: Depathologizing homosexuality. *Behavioral sciences*, 5(4), 565-575.
33. Mignot, J. F. (2022). Decriminalizing homosexuality. In *Annales de démographie historique* (Vol. 143, No. 1, pp. 115-133). Belin.
34. Cass, V. C. (1979). Homosexual identity formation: A theoretical model. *Journal of homosexuality*, 4(3), 219-235.
35. Schauer, K. (2021). *Towards an Expansive Understanding of Coming Out and Queer Identity Development: An Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis* (Doctoral dissertation, The Wright Institute).
36. Goffman, E. (1997). Selections from stigma. *The disability studies reader*, 203, 215.
37. Frost, D. M., & Meyer, I. H. (2023). Minority stress theory: Application, critique, and continued relevance. *Current opinion in psychology*, 51, 101579.
38. Dungan, C. (2023). "There's No Way She's Straight": Towards a Heuristic of Positive Queer Representation in Gaming (Doctoral dissertation, George Mason University).
39. https://www.thepinknews.com/2015/02/23/legend-of-zelda-producer-shoots-down-gay-character-rumours/?utm_source=chatgpt.com
40. <https://www.humandignitytrust.org/resources/pride-in-progress-a-roadmap-to-ending-lgbt-criminalisation-the-human-dignity-trusts-strategic-plan-2024-2029/>
41. Hammack, P. L., Frost, D. M., & Hughes, S. D. (2019). *Queer intimacies: A new*

- paradigm for the study of relationship diversity. *The Journal of Sex Research*, 56(4-5), 556-592.
42. Klesse, C. (2016). *The spectre of promiscuity: Gay male and bisexual non-monogamies and polyamories*. Routledge.
 43. Non-monogamous arrangements: Relationship structures where individuals may have multiple romantic or sexual partners, with the knowledge and consent of those involved (e.g., polyamory, open relationships).
 44. *The Legend of Zelda: Twilight Princess* (GameCube). (2006). [Video game]. Nintendo.
 45. Clarke, V., & Peel, E. (2007). From lesbian and gay psychology to LGBTQ psychologies: A journey into the unknown (or unknowable)?. *Out in psychology: Lesbian, gay, bisexual, trans and queer perspectives*, 11-39.
 46. Gomillion, S. C., & Giuliano, T. A. (2011). The influence of media role models on gay, lesbian, and bisexual identity. *Journal of homosexuality*, 58(3), 330-354.
 47. Craig, S. L., McInroy, L., McCready, L. T., & Alaggia, R. (2015). Media: A catalyst for resilience in lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and queer youth. *Journal of LGBT youth*, 12(3), 254-275.
 48. Benshoff, H. M. (1997). *Monsters in the closet: Homosexuality and the horror film*. Manchester University Press.
 49. Milton, D. C., & Knutson, D. (2023). Family of origin, not chosen family, predicts psychological health in a LGBTQ+ sample. *Psychology of Sexual Orientation and Gender Diversity*, 10(2), 269.
 50. Garcia, J., Vargas, N., Clark, J. L., Magaña Álvarez, M., Nelons, D. A., & Parker, R. G. (2020). Social isolation and connectedness as determinants of well-being: Global evidence mapping focused on LGBTQ youth. *Global public health*, 15(4), 497-519.

SURVIVING (CLIMATE) CALAMITY AND UPHEAVAL

1. *The Legend of Zelda: Breath of the Wild* (Nintendo Switch). (2017). [Video game]. Nintendo.
2. *The Legend of Zelda: Tears of the Kingdom* (Nintendo Switch). (2023). [Video game]. Nintendo.
3. Canavan, G. (2019). *The Legend of Zelda in the Anthropocene. Paradoxa*. https://epublications.marquette.edu/english_fac/586/
4. NPR (2015). Q&A: Shigeru Miyamoto On The Origins Of Nintendo's Famous Characters. NPR. Retrieved August, 13, 2020. <https://www.npr.org/sections/alltechconsidered/2015/06/19/415568892/q-a-shigeru-miyamoto-on-the-origins-of-nintendos-famous-characters>
5. Garcia, R. A., Cabeza, M., Rahbek, C., & Araújo, M. B. (2014). Multiple dimensions of climate change and their implications for biodiversity. *Science*, 344(6183), 1247579.
6. Sultana, F. (2022). The unbearable heaviness of climate coloniality. *Political Geography*, 99, 102638.

7. Gardiner, S. M. (2011). *A perfect moral storm: The ethical tragedy of climate change*. Oxford University Press.
8. Steg, L., Van den Berg, A. E., & De Groot, J. I. (2018). Environmental psychology: History, scope, and methods. *Environmental psychology: An introduction*, 1-11.
9. McBride, B. B., Brewer, C. A., Berkowitz, A. R., & Borrie, W. T. (2013). Environmental literacy, ecological literacy, ecoliteracy: What do we mean and how did we get here?. *Ecosphere*, 4(5), 1-20. <https://esajournals.onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/full/10.1890/ES13-00075.1>
10. Dupigny-Giroux, L. A. L. (2016). Climate literacy. *International Encyclopedia of Geography: People, the Earth, Environment and Technology: People, the Earth, Environment and Technology*, 1-5. (p.1)
11. McBeth, B., H. Hungerford, T. Marcinkowski, T. Volk, and R. Meyers. 2008. National environmental literacy assessment project: year 1, national baseline study of middle grades students—final research report. Environmental Protection Agency, Washington, D.C., USA. http://www2.epa.gov/sites/production/files/documents/masternela_year1report_081208_.pdf
12. Pan, W. L., Fan, R., Pan, W., Ma, X., Hu, C., Fu, P., & Su, J. (2023). The role of climate literacy in individual response to climate change: evidence from China. *Journal of Cleaner Production*, 405, 136874.
13. Sze, J. S., Childs, D. Z., Carrasco, L. R., Fernández-Llamazares, Á., Garnett, S. T., & Edwards, D. P. (2024). Indigenous Peoples' Lands are critical for safeguarding vertebrate diversity across the tropics. *Global Change Biology*, 30(1), e16981.
14. Johnson, D. E., Parsons, M., & Fisher, K. (2022). Indigenous climate change adaptation: New directions for emerging scholarship. *Environment and Planning E: Nature and Space*, 5(3), 1541-1578.
15. Wake, I., & Lee, N. (2024). Legend of Zelda Breath of the Wild and the lens of curiosity. In *Encyclopedia of computer graphics and games* (pp. 1053-1054). Cham: Springer International Publishing.
16. Rosa, C. D., Profice, C. C., & Collado, S. (2018). Nature experiences and adults' self-reported pro-environmental behaviors: The role of connectedness to nature and childhood nature experiences. *Frontiers in psychology*, 9, 1055.
17. Dabaja, Z. F. (2021). "The Forest School Impact on Children: Reviewing Two Decades of Research." *Education 3-13*. doi:
18. Ferns, G. (2025). For What It's Earth: Transcending the Human–Nature Dualism Through "Deep Nature Connection". *Business & Society*, 64(5), 851-855.
19. Rigolon, A., Browning, M. H., McAnirlin, O., & Yoon, H. (2021). Green space and health equity: a systematic review on the potential of green space to reduce health disparities. *International journal of environmental research and public health*, 18(5), 2563.
20. Daneels, R. (2021). (Pandemic) Playing for fun, playing for meaning:: a personal essay on how digital games evoke hedonic and eudaimonic experiences during the Covid-19 pandemic. In *Well played retrospective: the past, pandemic, and future of video games, value and meaning*/Davidson, D.[edit.]; et al. (pp. 93-105).
21. Farmer, G., Higson-Sweeney, N., & Fullwood, C. (2025). " It's a good distraction

- from the mayhem of reality": A reflexive thematic analysis on the role of video games to support coping during a crisis. *Frontiers in Digital Health*, 7, 1608322.
22. Lay, C. (2022). The Legend of Zelda: Breath of the Wild as Philosophy: Teaching the Player to Be Comfortable Being Alone. In *The Palgrave Handbook of Popular Culture as Philosophy* (pp. 1-24). Cham: Springer International Publishing.
 23. Larreina-Morales, M. E., & Gunella, C. (2023). Video games for environmental awareness: the accessibility gap. *Universal Access in the Information Society*, 1-13.
 24. Allan, R. P., Arias, P. A., Berger, S., Canadell, J. G., Cassou, C., Chen, D., ... & Zickfeld, K. (2023). Intergovernmental panel on climate change (IPCC). Summary for policymakers. In *Climate change 2021: The physical science basis. Contribution of working group I to the sixth assessment report of the intergovernmental panel on climate change* (pp. 3-32). Cambridge University Press.
 25. Grundmann, R. (2016). Climate change as a wicked social problem. *Nature geoscience*, 9(8), 562-563.
 26. Callahan, C. W., & Mankin, J. S. (2025). Carbon majors and the scientific case for climate liability. *Nature*, 640(8060), 893-901.
 27. Lynas, Mark, Benjamin Z. Houlton, and Simon Perry. "Greater than 99% consensus on human caused climate change in the peer-reviewed scientific literature." *Environmental Research Letters* 16, no. 11 (2021): 114005.
 28. Sparkman, G., Geiger, N., & Weber, E. U. (2022). Americans experience a false social reality by underestimating popular climate policy support by nearly half. *Nature communications*, 13(1), 4779.
 29. Lewis, S. L., & Maslin, M. A. (2015). Defining the anthropocene. *Nature*, 519(7542), 171-180.
 30. Fletcher, R. (2012). Capitalizing on chaos: Climate change and disaster capitalism. *Ephemera: theory & politics in organization*, 12.
 31. Nielsen, K. S., Nicholas, K. A., Creutzig, F., Dietz, T., & Stern, P. C. (2021). The role of high-socioeconomic-status people in locking in or rapidly reducing energy-driven greenhouse gas emissions. *Nature Energy*, 6(11), 1011-1016.
 32. Ngcamu, B. S. (2023). Climate change effects on vulnerable populations in the Global South: a systematic review. *Natural Hazards*, 118(2), 977-991.
 33. Whitmarsh, L., Player, L., Jiongco, A., James, M., Williams, M., Marks, E., & Kennedy-Williams, P. (2022). Climate anxiety: What predicts it and how is it related to climate action?. *Journal of Environmental Psychology*, 83, 101866.
 34. Dhiman, D. B. (2023). Games as tools for social change communication: A critical review. *Global Media Journal*, 21, 61.
 35. Armstrong, S. (2025). What can we do at the end of the world: How narrative forms can afford agency in the context of climate change (Order No. 32000676). Available from ProQuest Dissertations & Theses Global; ProQuest One Literature. (3225188348). Retrieved from <https://www.proquest.com/dissertations-theses/what-can-we-do-at-end-world-how-narrative-forms/docview/3225188348/se-2>
 36. Nightingale, A. J., Eriksen, S., Taylor, M., Forsyth, T., Pelling, M., Newsham, A., ... & Whitfield, S. (2020). Beyond technical fixes: Climate solutions and the great derangement. *Climate and development*, 12(4), 343-352.

37. Lamb, W. F., Mattioli, G., Levi, S., Roberts, J. T., Capstick, S., Creutzig, F., ... & Steinberger, J. K. (2020). Discourses of climate delay. *Global sustainability*, 3, e17.
38. Hutchinson, R. (2021). Observant Play: Colonial Ideology in The Legend of Zelda: Breath of the Wild. *Game Studies*, 21(3).
39. Judge, M., Fernando, J. W., & Begeny, C. T. (2022). Dietary behaviour as a form of collective action: A social identity model of vegan activism. *Appetite*, 168, 105730.
40. Buurman, E. J., Hamshaw, R., & Prosser, A. M. B. (2022, September 9). "Best of both worlds": How do former vegetarians justify (re)introducing meat into their diet?. <https://doi.org/10.31234/osf.io/8qjuy>
41. Nardini, G., Rank-Christman, T., Bublitz, M. G., Cross, S. N., & Peracchio, L. A. (2021). Together we rise: How social movements succeed. *Journal of Consumer Psychology*, 31(1), 112-145.
42. Vestergren, S., Bamberg, S., & Louis, W. (2024). Responding to the socio-ecological crisis: Activism and collective action. *Global Environmental Psychology*, 2, 1-13.
43. Vestergren, S., & Drury, J. (2022). Biographical consequences of environmental activism. In *The Routledge handbook of environmental movements* (pp. 503-517). Routledge.
44. Neas, S., Ward, A., & Bowman, B. (2022). Young people's climate activism: A review of the literature. *Frontiers in Political Science*, 4, 940876.
45. Prosser, A. M., O'Neill, S., Whitmarsh, L., Bolderdijk, J. W., Kurz, T., & Blackwood, L. (2025). Overcoming (vegan) burnout: Mass gatherings can provide respite and rekindle shared identity and social action efforts in moralized minority groups. *Political Psychology*, 46(2), 257-278.
46. Maslach, C., Jackson, S. E., & Leiter, M. P. (1997). Maslach Burnout Inventory: Third edition. In C. P. Zalaquett & R. J. Wood (Eds.), *Evaluating stress: A book of resources* (pp. 191-218). Scarecrow Education.
47. Cote, A. C., & Harris, B. C. (2023). The cruel optimism of "good crunch": How game industry discourses perpetuate unsustainable labor practices. *New Media & Society*, 25(3), 609-627.
48. Griffin, B. J., Purcell, N., Burkman, K., Litz, B. T., Bryan, C. J., Schmitz, M., ... & Maguen, S. (2019). Moral injury: An integrative review. *Journal of traumatic stress*, 32(3), 350-362.
49. Gorski, P. C., & Chen, C. (2015). "Frayed all over." The causes and consequences of activist burnout among social justice education activists. *Educational Studies*, 51(5), 385-405.
50. Mental Health UK (2025). The Burnout Report. Retrieved from: <https://mhukcdn.s3.eu-west-2.amazonaws.com/wp-content/uploads/2025/01/16142505/Mental-Health-UK-The-Burnout-Report-2025.pdf>
51. Gorski, P. C. (2015). Relieving burnout and the "martyr syndrome" among social justice education activists: The implications and effects of mindfulness. *The Urban Review*, 47(4), 696-716.
52. Augustine, G., & Soppe, B. (2023). Why young workers are leaving fossil fuel jobs—and what to do if you feel like 'climate quitting'. *The Conversation*.

53. Hampton, S., & Whitmarsh, L. (2023). Choices for climate action: A review of the multiple roles individuals play. *One Earth*, 6(9), 1157-1172.
54. Oxfam. (2023). Richest 1% emit as much planet-heating pollution as two-thirds of humanity. <https://www.oxfam.org/en/press-releases/richest-1-emit-much-planet-heating-pollution-two-thirds-humanity>
55. Nielsen, K. S., Nicholas, K. A., Creutzig, F., Dietz, T., & Stern, P. C. (2021). The role of high-socioeconomic-status people in locking in or rapidly reducing energy-driven greenhouse gas emissions. *Nature Energy*, 6(11), 1011-1016.
56. Solnit, R., & Young-Lutunatabua, T. (Eds.). (2023). *Not too late: Changing the climate story from despair to possibility*. Haymarket Books.

ABOUT THE EDITOR



Dr. Annayah M.B. Prosser, PhD.

(she/her) is an Assistant Professor in Marketing, Business and Society at the University of Bath School of Management. She is an interdisciplinary social scientist,

with training in social psychology, qualitative research methods and environmental social sciences. Her primary research interests explore the interpersonal dimensions of ethics, identity and advocacy. Previously, she worked at the University of Oxford and Yale University. She has published over thirty research articles in peer-reviewed journals including *Psychological Science*, *Nature Human Behaviour*, the *Journal of Environmental Psychology* and the *British Journal of Social Psychology*. She has appeared in international media outlets such as the BBC, *The Conversation* and Sky News. In 2023, she contributed to the *Psychgeist Taylor Swift* edition, authoring a chapter on the significance of the ‘Taylor’s Version’ project. Annayah’s first Zelda game was *Oracle of Seasons* on the GameBoy, and her favourite Zelda game is *Breath of the Wild*. She rediscovered her love for the series in 2020, finding refuge in an open-world Hyrule throughout pandemic lockdowns.

ABOUT THE AUTHORS

George Farmer (he/they) is a Doctoral Researcher in Psychology at the University of Westminster, exploring potential motivations for video gaming and the effects of those motivations on psychological health factors such as psychological well-being and perceived stress. His published work includes studying the stress-relief potential of video gaming using wearable technology and experimental methods, interview-based work with gamers during the COVID-19 lockdown in the UK, and exploring novel gaming behaviours, such as save-scumming, in Role-Playing Games. George has been playing the *Legend of Zelda* games since *A Link to the Past*, but *Phantom Hourglass* holds a special place in his heart for the deviousness of the symbol imprinting puzzle (if you know, you know).

Danielle Kelly, PhD. (She/Her) is a Lecturer in Psychology at the University of the West of Scotland. Danielle completed her Ph.D. in Metacognition and Education-Based Learning at the University of Stirling in 2018. Due to her love of all things gaming, Danielle has since expanded her research into the area of Cyberpsychology. Her research focuses on applying psychological principles to gaming environments, including research on gaming and cognition, and research into perceptions of gender in online games.

Charalambos “Harry” Loizides (he/him) is an award-winning secondary mathematics teacher in New York with over a decade of experience in the field. Within the schools, Harry finds meaningful

and dynamic ways to blend mathematical topics with numerous scenarios within video and tabletop games. He has previously presented on these topics at Educator's Day at New York Comic Con, various PAX conventions, as well as several education-based conferences like the Long Island Mathematics Conference and the Association of Teachers of Mathematics of New York City Annual Conference. Harry is also the Managing Editor of Six One Indie, an independently operated games media outlet that focuses on amplifying indie voices in gaming. He has also published several chapters in other psychology-focused books, including *The Psychology of Elden Ring* and *The Psychology of The Last of Us*. Harry has fond memories of his first Zelda experience with *The Legend of Zelda: A Link to the Past* when it was rereleased on Game Boy Advance, but his all-time favorite game from the franchise, *Tears of the Kingdom*, was the primary inspiration for his chapter in the book.

Anisha Chintoe, MSc. (She/Her) holds a BA in Media and Information from the University of Amsterdam (the Netherlands) and a MSc in Communication Studies from the University of Antwerp (Belgium). Fascinated by the meaningful and emotional side of digital games, her research focuses on eudaimonic experiences in play. Anisha's enthusiasm for gaming began with her very first title, *The Legend of Zelda: Spirit Tracks*, sparking a lifelong love for the Zelda series that continues to inspire both her academic work and her personal passion for games.

Rowan Daneels, PhD. (He/Him) is a Guest Professor in Communication Studies at the University of Antwerp and a Postdoctoral Researcher in Health Psychology at the Université Libre de Bruxelles. His research expertise resides in positive media psychology and eudaimonic entertainment—personally meaningful, emotional and thought-provoking entertainment—mainly in the context of digital games. He has published in several top-tier academic journals (e.g., *Computers in Human Behavior*, *Psychology of Popular Media*, *Games and*

Culture) and has been awarded with several prizes at the International Communication Association conference. He has contributed to *The Psychgeist of Pop Culture: The Mandalorian* on morality, and he's a co-editor and author for the *The Psychgeist of Pop Culture: Marvel Cinematic Universe* volume. While exploring the plains of Hyrule, Rowan lost his heart to the waterfalls surrounding the Zora palace and Mipha park in *Breath of the Wild* and *Tears of the Kingdom*.

Celeste Sangiorgio, PhD. (she/her), is a licensed clinical psychologist who runs the Behavioral Health and Forensic Psychology Programs at Rochester Institute of Technology as the Interim Program Director. Her work focuses on how people build and enact their beliefs about their own capacities - with a focus on how digital environments, particularly games, can be used to teach long-lasting cognitive behavioral skills (like self-regulation, communication, and intimacy skills). Dr. Sangiorgio's research has included developing ways to rapidly develop and test games designed to target key relationship and self-belief skills, such as a self-guided platform to teach CBT skills for co-occurring substance use and violence (RITchCBT, consultant) and a dating sim, thriller visual novel that teaches relationship and trauma-focused skills (Heart Throb, Research & Development Lead). Dr. Sangiorgio's work includes advocacy on mental health representations in existing games, such as masculinity, substance use, and romance, which she has discussed with the Boston Globe, at PAX conferences, and with the APA, as well as practice directly with adults experiencing mental health symptoms and life stressors (e.g., homelessness, violence, trauma, and other conditions). Dr. Sangiorgio has played video games since she was young - she practiced reading skills by reading the Link to the Past strategy guide to her father as he played. In addition to her work in psychology, Dr. Sangiorgio also holds a BA in religious studies, part of which was focused on the experience of identity in *Ocarina of Time*.

Anthony Gifford, MSc. (He/Him) is a PhD researcher in Psychology at Nottingham Trent University, a lecturer at Birmingham City University, and a lifelong Legend of Zelda™ fan! His work uses LGBTQ+ psychology to examine the health outcomes of marginalised communities - with a focus on HIV prevention amongst Gay and Bisexual Men. As a member of the LGBTQ+ community himself, Anthony is vehement about being a voice of change, conducting emancipatory research to help improve rights and reduce stigmatisation of his community. Anthony was first introduced to Legend of Zelda™ aged 5, by his older brother Alan, when they got a Nintendo 64™, along with Zelda: Ocarina of Time, for Christmas. It remains his favourite game of the franchise (water temple notwithstanding) and he has spent many happy hours with his brother playing run throughs of the game. He was thrilled to be able to combine his passions of LGBTQ+ psychology and The Legend of Zelda™ to contribute to this book and hopes you have enjoyed reading it.

Kathryn Francis, PhD. (she/her) is a Senior Researcher at the Uehiro Oxford Institute and Co-Director of the Design Bioethics Lab in the NEUROSEC group at the University of Oxford. A moral psychologist by training, Kathryn works at the intersection of experimental and social psychology, philosophy, and bioethics. Her research uses experimental and simulation-based methods (including Virtual Reality) to explore moral conflict and disagreement, human–animal and human–nature moral relations, and the ethical challenges posed by emerging technologies in medicine and bioethics. Recently, Kathryn has been rolling the dice (literally) on new ways to investigate moral values and identity, turning to tabletop role-playing games (TTRPGs) and video games as research tools. While she only discovered the expansive landscapes of Hyrule later in life, her love of gaming began in the 1990s, the moment her hands wrapped around the original grey Game Boy.

Niall McLoughlin, PhD. (he/him) has a background that spans both

social research and creative fields, especially music composition and production. As a social scientist he holds a PhD in climate change communication from the University of Bath (dep. of Psychology) and University of Exeter (dep. of Geography). He is Co-Founder/Co-Director of the public opinion data platform Climate Barometer, and is a climate communications consultant. As a musician, he was Nick Berry Arts Scholar during his PhD, which saw him compose pieces for the University of Bath's 50th Anniversary and co-design a new undergraduate module on the psychology of music. He is fascinated by the way these two worlds can overlap – for instance, the role that the arts can play in engaging people with environmental issues, or how psychology helps to make sense of our emotional responses to music. He is a lifelong Legend of Zelda fan – and growing up playing Ocarina of Time on the N64 was a formative experience for him. The game's music had a profound impact, in ways he is still noticing and understanding today.

Alexander MacLellan, PhD. (he/him) is a Postdoctoral Research Fellow based in National Institute of Advanced Industrial Science and Technology, Japan. His current research explores neurocognitive mechanisms and maintenance factors underlying *hikikomori*, a form of pathological social withdrawal. His other research interests include the psychological benefits of practicing philosophy, especially Stoicism. Personally, he is a huge Legend of Zelda fan, having found his way through the Lost Woods into Hyrule when he was 10 and been obsessed with the games ever since. He still doesn't know what his favourite Zelda game is, but is fairly sure it's either The Ocarina of Time or Majora's Mask. Or Windwaker. Or Skyward Sword (the dungeons are excellent, with very endearing characters). Or Link's Awakening (seagulls cause complicated feelings). Or...you get the idea. If you like his chapter, there's more writings on philosophy, psychology, games and anime on his site, alexmaclellan.com.

ABOUT PLAY STORY PRESS

<https://playstorypress.org/about/>

Play Story PressTM is an open community publishing consortium of/by/for the field and our community. We're a diamond open-access academic publishing initiative in which contributors retain all their intellectual property, and neither contributors nor readers are charged fees. We work with our contributors in as timely a manner as possible so that we can share ideas that have impact and significance in our society.

Play Story Press is a culmination of 20 years of open-access publishing and collaborating with the community. Our founders started ETC Press in 2005 as an experimental open-access academic publishing imprint, and our success was a direct result of all the quality work written by our community. Inspired by this, Play Story Press is evolving to focus more on the community and field. Our Consortium works together to shape and support Play Story Press for the field and community, our Editorial Advisory works with the Editors to inform publishing decisions and provide input on how the press grows and evolves, and we collaborate with our Partners to publish their projects.

Publishing with Play Story Press is a friendly, supportive and constructive process focused on encouraging the growth of quality scholarship in this field. Play Story Press is committed to publishing three types of work: peer-reviewed work (research-based books, textbooks, academic journals, conference proceedings), editorially-reviewed general audience work (trade nonfiction, singles, Well

Played singles), and research and white papers. The common tie for all these is a focus on issues related to stories and play as they are applied across various fields.

The concepts of story and play are broad and diverse—from entertainment and narrative to media studies and social studies, games and technology to health and enjoyment, education and learning to design and development, and more. Our authors come from a range of backgrounds. Some are traditional academics. Some are practitioners. And some work in between. Their ability to write about the impact of play and story and their significance in society is what ties them all together.

In keeping with our mission, the Play Story Press uses emerging technologies to design all of our books and Lulu, an on-demand publisher, to distribute our e-books and print books through all the major retail chains, such as Amazon, Barnes & Noble, Kobo, and Apple. We work with The Game Crafter to produce tabletop games.

We publish books but are also interested in the participatory future of content creation across multiple media. We are exploring what it means to publish across multiple media and versions. We believe this is the future of publishing, bridging virtual and physical media with fluid versions of publications and enabling the creative blurring of what constitutes reading and writing.

We don't carry an inventory ourselves. Instead, each print book is created when somebody buys a copy. Since the Play Story Press is an open-access publisher, every book, journal, and proceeding is available as a free download, and we're partner with Knowledge Commons Works for our repository, and our books are in Thoth Open Metadata. We're most interested in the sharing and spreading of ideas. Authors retain ownership of their intellectual property. We release all of our books, journals, and proceedings under a Creative Commons license.

Play Story Press is a registered 501(c)(3) nonprofit in Pennsylvania, USA, with Drew Davidson serving as President. We're an independent organization powered by input and involvement from the

consortium, our contributors, and the community at large. We're an open access, scholar led, mission driven, and peer review press, innovating through publishing, and we invite people to participate. Together, we can explore and create the future of open academic publishing, sharing and spreading ideas and knowledge that can help change the world for the better.

