Lady Popular

In exploring some of the top virtual reality games for teenagers, I came across the highly ranked browser-based game called Lady Popular. The game is targeted at teenage girls and is a fashion game set in a virtual fashion world. As a user, you set up a personalized avatar and explore the fashion career path, which is (unfortunately) measured by overall popularity points.

# Review and Redesign: I will review this product based on the new media content criteria provided in class

## Diversity

**Review:** Lady Popular is very conscious of the various types of users. In creating your avatar, you are provided with a variety of skin tones, facial features and hairstyles to choose from. There is very visual representation for all racial groups but not all genders. There are no male avatars and the only male presence is in the Boyfriend quest, which I will discuss later. The content encourages your character to be a strong female fashion designer however it exploits female stereotypes. In order to even unlock new quests, your avatar must go to the mall and the beauty salon to “refine” her look. The career and apartment quests are not unlocked for a significant amount of time in the game.

**Redesign:** There is little to no variety in body types in this game. I think it is crucial for teenagers to be exposed to a larger variety of body types than current media exposure. There are options to “purchase” larger breasts or a different nose but this is not sending the right message. I would redesign the “Create your look” section to have a large diversity of body types and facial features to help these teenage users feel self-representation. A sense of identity in the game could lead to more positive body image and over self-confidence.

Additionally, the game exploits the female stereotypes of fashion and beauty. I appreciate the goal to be successful in the fashion world, but this should not just entail constant trips to the mall and beauty salon. There should be exposure to the financial side of fashion design and running a business. There are also necessary communication skills and being able to build a portfolio. If I were to redesign this game, I would include more tasks related to the professional skills necessary to be a fashion designer. Women are rarely represented in the media as business professionals with equivalent skills to businessmen. However, this game has the perfect opportunity to represent professional women in the fashion industry with skills that extend the stereotypical world of physical appearance.

Lastly, this game exploits the female stereotype of subservience in relationships. Once you have enough career success, you have the option to pick a boyfriend. Your boyfriend is based on how popular you are and the “quality” of boyfriend increases as you become more popular. In the game, you are reminded to “keep your relationship strong with gifts and kisses. If you neglect your boyfriend, he will break up with you.” This language is problematic and in line with the stereotype that women constantly need to pamper the men in their lives. I would redesign this language to signal friendship as opposed to subservience and alter the concept of boyfriends to be less a part of your overall popularity and more a part of **happiness** or **companionship**.

## Accessibility

**Review**: The content does not support avatars with special needs. There is no self-representation for teenagers with special needs who play this game. There is, however, a bald hairstyle. This hairstyle is rarely featured in beauty/fashion games and can be very reassuring for young teenage girls who are bald for various health reasons.

**Redesign**: For greater self-representation, I would also include avatars in wheelchairs or even options for a cast on the arm/legs. While small, I think this could target a few audiences who rarely feel represented in media.

## Interactivity

**Review**: There is some rich interactivity in the fashion aspect of the game. When creating outfits, you are given complete freedom with the pieces and colors that you choose. However, there is no feedback on the designs you create. There is an avatar, Emma, who leads you through all of the worlds, yet her feedback is typically of the same flavor (“That looks great!”, “OMG, you are so talented!” etc.) The user has access to rich creative content and is able to practice creativity while independently roaming that content.

There is no community aspect, at least in the levels that I got to. You have the opportunity to engage in “fashion duels” with other real players, but there is no direct communication with these players. You are simply competing based on your popularity scores.

**Redesign**: The interactivity is very good in this game. Every action you choose has a direct effect on the game and you have agency in every action. I would not redesign the interactivity – mainly the content!

## Education

**Review**: The entire game is based on popularity points. Popularity is calculated with the following categories:

* Style
* Creativity
* Devotion
* Beauty
* Generosity
* Loyalty

I find these categories themselves to be educational as useful tools for success. However, the end goal of “popularity” feels problematic.

Your avatar also has a bank with a certain amount of money. You earn money by achieving various endeavors in the fashion world. These endeavors can range from winning a fashion duel to designing a great outfit or room. The concept of money is very educational in this game. You need money to purchase new clothing items or beauty products and these items are useful for your overall fashion career. As a result, the game incentivizes spending wisely and saving money for particular products/clothes that will help your career the most.

**Redesign**: While I appreciate the categories that go into popularity, I would change the end goal to be **success** rather than popularity. It is frustrating that this game is encouraging girls to act solely with popularity in mind. I would keep the categories but instead calculate points towards an overall career success rather than popularity. Additionally, I would add a concept of happiness and allow these categories to also improve your overall happiness.

## Value

**Review**: I am not ashamed to admit that I enjoyed playing this game. The time flew and I found myself enveloped in the new world, trying to attain new quests and advance levels. Based on reviews, the game has been a major success for young teenage girls. The content is very rich and can teach valuable lessons about what is required to be a successful fashion designer. The avatar has to “practice” each category of popularity daily to continue to advance in her career. There are numerous exploited stereotypes that I think take away from the overall value of the product. Yet the underlying goal is to have a successful career as a fashion designer and young girls can learn the work that goes into a successful career from this game.

**Redesign:** If you take my redesign of the Diversity and Education categories of this game, the overall value will greatly increase. I appreciate the current goal of the game and if the small tweaks to wording and content are made, the experience will be productive and fun for young teenage girls.

## Artistry/Safety

**Review**: The content itself is very high quality. The avatars look real and the colors/graphics are very engaging and not overwhelming. This product would get an A+ on safety. There is no platform for cyber bullying or violent/sexual content. There is no personal information required to play the game and you have the option to share with Facebook but it is not required.

**Redesign**: I would not change a thing in these categories!