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Masculinity and Objectification

a narrative study on the representation of masculine identity in video games

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Abstract

Previous studies on the representation of gender roles video games, and how they are able to affect the consumers' understanding of their own gender identity, often focus on the portrayal of female characters and their effect on male and female consumers. This present study deviates from this common trend and chooses to investigate how expressions of masculine identity are designed towards the objectification of women, to gain an understanding of how this sort of narrative may affect male players to adopt a similar attitude. The presupposition is that narrative and graphical elements of a visual medium has the potential to encourage certain behavioural inclinations in the person subjected to it. This is supported by a number of experiments previously conducted by various scholars, which are presented and accounted for. The investigation itself is performed by viewing narrative elements of the chosen video game material and analysing its content based on the theoretical background of masculinity studies and feminist narrative theory, as well as the definition of objectification presented by philosopher Martha Nussbaum.

Keywords Masculinity, Objectification, Feminist narratology, Video game, Priming, Gender role

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1 Introduction

The global video game industry has received a bad reputation for showing a trend of sexualised representations of female characters throughout various instalments and franchises. Scholars have performed an abundance of research the medium of video games and these studies commonly focus on analysing the female character and how her portrayal may affect both male and female consumers, often relating its results to prevalent gender inequality in our society. However, few have chosen to analyse male characters with the intention to explore how they may affect male consumers in similar ways, being a contributing factor in retaining and exacerbating those social norms in inter-gender interactions that are detrimental to our society's struggle for equality.

1.1 Purpose

To fill this gap of research in the field, the purpose of this essay is to perform an analysis of the narrative and portrayal of characters in a video game in order to answer the question: How does the game portray masculine identity by objectifying women? My aim is to illustrate the presence of gender inequalities in a popular cultural medium and discuss the effects they may have, from a theoretical standpoint.

1.2 Material

My primary material for this study will be *Grand Theft Auto V* (commonly shortened to *GTA V*). The *Grand Theft Auto* video game franchise is currently one of the most popular in the world and the games already hold a reputation for violent and misogynistic content which makes it a highly relevant object of this study. This notoriety may already make the game widely discussed and researched within the same field but as my study focuses on the portrayal of masculinity, rather than the more common focus on femininity in the medium, I believe that I will be able to contribute with an alternative perspective and place my study in closer relation with other scholars. An additional reason for choosing this material is to be secure in that it will be sufficient for the purposes of this study, as the game's content can be quite extensive.

Modern video games come in many different forms, some try to resemble our world and society while others aim to present itself through a completely surreal visual experience, some have the player control a human being while others let you control an inanimate object or abstract phenomenon. For the sake of this study, my interests lie in a virtual environment that resembles the human world in order to create a narrative which the player can relate to on a more natural and personal level. Within this category, video games may then choose between a variety of methods to present the world's visual experience to the player.

The first most noticeable aspect of a game's presentation will be the spatial perspective we are given while controlling our character. The two most common perspectives given in most story driven role playing games are referred to as “first person”, the point of view of the character's eyes, and “third person” perspective, a point of view situated outside of the character, usually as a floating “camera” following behind player's character as they control it. Next is the distinction between sequences when the player is actually in control of their character and times when they are not but the story progresses in a short cinematic scene, referred to as cut-scenes. The purpose of the cut-scene is traditionally a method of temporarily removing the player's control in order to advance the story to a place where the player would be unable to reach within the game's mechanical restraints.

In creating the virtual environment of a video game one is met with the obstacle of limited technological development, or is otherwise prompted by the game's particular concept, to restrict the world's boundaries. An example is the finite space in which the gameplay occurs, some games create expansive open worlds where the player may move their avatar freely in the multidimensional space, while other games expressly force the player to move on a certain path, normally in order for the gameplay experience to coincide with the game's defined story. Depending on the genre of game the player's avatar will also be assigned a limited array of actions that allows them to interact with the world in various ways. For example: an action-based video game may let the player's avatar run, climb over objects and perform violent actions against non-player controlled characters (as a part of the game's “environment”) and little else, while a different game may have the player traverse the environment in a calm civilised manner and the ability to interact with other characters through speech. It is important to note that both of these examples are still able to be heavily story-driven games, while some games may have the player instigate story elements through particular interactions others will be designed to present the narrative automatically, after the player fulfils certain objectives.

Grand Theft Auto V falls in the category of a third person, open world, action role playing game. The game contains a story which offers central narrative and character development to its main cast of three playable characters throughout its story. The player controls a character freely through the virtual environment, but is prompted to travel to certain locations in order to progress the story, which the player may do at their leisure. Once the player reaches one of these locations the game triggers an event which usually presents a cut-scene sequence, explaining the current development of the story. After such a sequence the game returns control to the player but with a clearly indicated objective to complete within certain constraints, this is referred to as a “mission”. The mission's purpose is also to progress the story but by simultaneously making the player an interactive part of the experience. This also means that the sequence can not be as subtle or complex as a cut-scene, since the game's mechanics do not allow for such intricate control and variety of actions. Once the mission is complete, full control is once again returned to the player, who is now able to travel through the environment freely until the next mission is triggered. As for the narrative itself, *GTA V* tells the story of Franklin, Michael and Trevor (the three playable characters) who all engage in criminal activities of various kinds which lead them to a correlation with each other. As the story progresses the player experiences their characters' various ventures as they all try to achieve their individual goals by their chosen means. Due to the nature of the characters, the game's missions tend to focus on prompting the player to control a character through a variety of criminal acts such as theft, violence and drug use, among others.

2 Theory and Method

2.1 Theory

Parts of my theoretical background for my study are not expressly related to the field of gender power relations in narrative, but has been collected and applied to the subject and purposes of this investigation to form the foundation of my methodical approach.

2.1.1 Objectification

In *Objectification*, and excerpt from *Philosophy and Public Affairs*, Martha Nussbaum performs an examination of the act of objectifying a person, and its consequences. She begins with analysing the ways that different theorists have applied, discussed and defined the term “objectification”, and how it has been used and interpreted in various literary works. In order to discuss her own ideas and apply new perspectives and theories on the phenomenon, Nussbaum compiles her own definition of seven points that, for the purposes of her investigation, is treated as a definition of how a human being can be treated as an object, according to a number of categories. She proceeds by discussing and clarifying the ways that these items may manifest in social interaction and their subsequent implications on a theoretical level.¹ This compilation of categories and their related description will serve as my frame of reference when defining situations where a person is objectified, in my own study. Nussbaum's list will be referenced in my analysis when I evaluate the material which I have collected and will therefore also serve as the point of reference to determine which sections of material are relevant for bringing to the analysis. Although Nussbaum wrote her article in the field of philosophical debate and works within that discipline, I recognised its potential for a application in a broad spectrum and chose to use it thus.

2.1.2 Masculinity studies

The purpose of studying masculinity identity is to reach a deeper understanding of its central elements and their origins. One tries to define character traits and forms of expression that seem to be culturally related to masculinity and what sort of social implications they create. Imperative to understanding these traits associated with masculine identity is to study the sources which people draw on to create these social norms. Many researchers find that men attempt to contrast themselves

¹ Nussbaum, Martha C.; *Objectification*; Philosophy and Public Affairs Vol. 24 Issue 4; John Wiley & Sons, 1995; pp. 249 – 291.

from what is perceived as naturally feminine and thus begin to outline identity from what “women are not”.² Evidently, another significantly strong influence is the adoption of a male role model, or simply acknowledging other displays of masculine expression to emulate.³ This influence of external sources when building one's gender identity is crucial to the purpose of my study. While the investigation itself does not draw on this research in its execution and process, the presupposition of analysing a game's content for masculine representation is that these sorts of character portrayals work as additional material for a person to draw on in the shaping of their identity. In order to limit the present study within reasonable constraints it will concern itself specifically with objectification of women, as interrelated with a man's expression of his gender identity. This restriction draws on observations in masculinity studies that discern a tendency in men to behave aggressively, hateful or objectifying of women in various ways, as a method to distinguish themselves from women.⁴

2.1.3 Feminist narrative theory

Narratology analyses the presence, purpose and effect of every stylistic method used to tell a story. It observes the environment, rhythm and time-frame of the story's arch, among many other elements.⁵ This present study concerns itself particularly with the construct of characters and how they are made to relate to each other. Narratology examines how characters are typified by being presented in contrast or comparison to one another. This is how the viewer is able to discern basic components of the story, such as who the protagonist and antagonist are, by watching their interactions with other characters and seeing how they differ from each other, but also the more sophisticated and complex elements.⁶

The specific feminist perspective on narratology originates in the observation that women are commonly portrayed as secondary to men, where their value and function are evaluated based on assigned gender roles regarded as “natural”. Therefore, feminist narrative theory has been

² Chodorow, Nancy; *Family structure and feminine personality; Woman, Culture and Society*; Stanford University Press, 1974; p. 50.

³ Connell, Raewyn W.; *Masculinities* (2nd ed.); University of California Press, 2005; p. 35.
Pleck, Joseph H.; *The Myth of Masculinity*; The Massachusetts Institute of Technology, 1981; p. 135.
Kessler, Suzanne J. & McKenna, Wendy; *Gender: An Ethnomethodological Approach*; The University of Chicago Press, 1978; pp. 8 – 9.
Brittan, Arthur; *Masculinity and Power*; Basil Blackwell Ltd, 1989; p. 20.

⁴ Connell; *Masculinities*; 2005; p. 11.
Pleck; *The Myth of Masculinity*; 1981; pp. 108, 113 – 115.

⁵ Verstraten, Peter; *Film Narratology*; University of Toronto Press Incorporated, 2009; pp. 31 – 46.

⁶ Verstraten; *Film Narratology*; 2009; pp. 37 – 40.

developed in order to draw attention to these trends and reach a deeper understanding of subtle ways in which degraded portrayals can take shape, drawing connections between the narrative and current social norms in our culture and expressing alternative ways empower women through narrative means.⁷ The presumption that feminist narrative scholars take on when studying a piece is traditionally in reference to the material's ability to affect consumers with how it represents its female characters. The most commonly expressed concern, and therefore the focus of most feminist narrative studies, is how a female consumer may be influenced to adopt degrading gender roles from the narrative.⁸ This is where my study differentiates from most feminist narrative analyses, while I observe how women may be placed in relation to men in a submissive manner, it is under the presumption that male consumers may be influenced to adopt these attitudes and thus become oppressors of women.

When it comes to studying specifically the narrative in video games there are certain technical elements that become relevant to take into account when conducting a study like this compared to other mediums. Primarily, it is the aspect of interactivity inherent in video game narrative which does not appear in other forms of narrative presentation. In a film or a novel the consumer is a passive observer of the story while in a video game, whether or not the game is constructed in a way to give the player freedom to steer the story's development in a particular direction or it is completely linear and unchangeable, the experience is always perceived from the point of view of the playable character(s). This has the effect of making the player experience events as a character in the story and will thus usually have to deal with a situation through the agency of that character, projecting much of the character's impressions onto the players themselves. This element may have meaningful implications as the experience may be more impressionable and influential on the player's rationale than other narrative mediums, which is supported by research later accounted for.

2.2 Method

As my interest lies in the narrative the study will be limited to relevant elements of the game. The study will primarily focus on the game's cut-scenes, as these are the sections where most of the story is progressed and where characters are able to interact with each other on a more sophisticated level. Additionally I will include conversational interactions that occasionally play out between

⁷ Hollinger, Karen; *Feminist Film Studies*; Routledge, 2012; p. 7.

⁸ Hollinger; *Feminist Film Studies*; 2012; p. 7.

characters during missions as these often aid in presenting more personal qualities of the characters to the player. In order to clearly identify cases of objectification I will adhere to the following definition proposed by Martha Nussbaum:

1. *Instrumentality*: The objectifier treats the object as a tool of his or her purposes.
2. *Denial of autonomy*: The objectifier treats the object as lacking in autonomy and self-determination.
3. *Inertness*: The objectifier treats the object as lacking in agency, and perhaps also in activity.
4. *Fungibility*: The objectifier treats the object as interchangeable (a) with other objects of the same type, and/or (b) with objects of other types
5. *Violability*: The objectifier treats the object as lacking in boundary-integrity, as something that is permissible to break up, smash, or break into.
6. *Ownership*: The objectifier treats the object as something that can be owned by another, can be bought or sold, etc.
7. *Denial of subjectivity*: The objectifier treats the object as something whose experience and feelings (if any) need not be taken into account.⁹

The practical information gathering for this study is not performed by personally executed gameplay but by viewing a video presenting the content, which has been published on the internet. This video features only content gathered from the game itself, being played by an anonymous person. This aspect of foreign manipulation has no consequence on my study whatsoever, as I select and scrutinise the game's narrative elements which will be presented for the player in the same way, regardless of the choices and interactions a player may perform independently of the game's predetermined scenes and dialogue. The purpose of this choice is to shorten the amount of time needed to gather information, as the video excludes large portions of the game's tedious and mechanical gameplay. Additionally this presents the possibility of referencing a scene with greater clarity as I am able to cite the exact time period of its performance in the video.¹⁰

The guideline for the points of interest in my study is derived from the principles of my theoretical background. The points are as follows:

- Which goals and ambitions that are portrayed for each major character to achieve within the game's story; how this relates to the characters' gender and how the characters' ambitions relate to the opposing gender, i.e. how do men regard women for the purpose of achieving

⁹ Nussbaum, Martha C.; *Objectification; Philosophy and Public Affairs* Vol. 24 Issue 4; John Wiley & Sons, 1995 p. 257.

¹⁰ YouTube; *Grand Theft Auto V (GTA 5) Story – All Cutscenes Game Movie HD w/ Gameplay*.

their goals and in what position do women place themselves in relation to men and their agendas in order to fulfil theirs?¹¹

- The function of each major character in relation to the story and setting, i.e. the purpose of their presence as designated by the game's developers; how they are presented in order to create a specific intended impact on the player; what they add to the environment and/or story and the extent of which their gender plays a role in all of the above.
- Interactions between characters: How do men relate to each other with regard to their gender and how do they refer to women in the same sense? In which regard do female characters approach males and vice versa? Are there identifiable objectifying trends involved in these interactions and are these interactions presented as encouraged or discouraged? These may typically include:
 - “Damsel in distress”: When a female character is placed in a vulnerable position and removed of agency, only to simulate the effect of developing a male character’s story and purpose to rescue her.
 - “Disposable woman” or “woman in the fridge”: When a female character's presence and function in the story is only to provide their own death in order to develop the male lead character.
 - Women defined as sexualised decoration or sexual objects for men's desire.
 - Sexualisation of violence towards women.

¹¹ The value of analysing the portrayal of a female character’s goal may seem questionable in a study in masculine expression. The purpose of this is to more clearly demonstrate the distinction between male and female characters and thus give the reader a frame of reference when interpreting the presentation of male counterparts.

3 Previous Research

3.1 Gender in video games

Ewan Kirkland conducted an in-depth analysis of the horror based *Silent Hill* video game franchise, where each instalment presents a linear story for the player to experience. In his essay *Masculinity in Video Games*, he refers to Diane Carr's observation on how the majority of research in video games is centred on women and female characters, while a majority of consumers of the medium are male. This leads him to the focus of his study, to examine the masculine characters of a famous franchise but with a purpose to assess how female characters may be disparaged by how they are made to relate to the male characters in the story. Kirkland identifies a pattern where the player-controlled male character in the games seem to be placed in an environment that many would associate with emasculation, through metaphorical imagery. He then argues that this element of the games' atmosphere is where the "horror" derives from, the implication for a man to be placed in such a position of vulnerability and weakness often associated with women and femininity. In other words, the games create a parody of men's fear of being placed in the submissive and vulnerable position that they themselves may create for women. Thus, Kirkland reaches the conclusion that the *Silent Hill* franchise can in fact be interpreted as a social criticism of those cultural norms that detain women in a subservient position to men.¹² Out of all the research I include in this essay, this study is the most similar to mine due to its focus on discussing masculinity in relation to the games' content.

Another study in the narrative content of video games is *The Lara Phenomenon*, where Jansz and Martis performs a quantitative analysis of video games searching for female characters in a competent and powerful state of agency. Additionally, they take note of corresponding male characters, their race and how may be portrayed with an exaggeration of traditionally masculine traits. They find that many of the male characters in their study are Caucasian lead characters in their stories, while empowered female characters in a position of leadership are moreover portrayed in clear sexualised ways to purposefully entice players, offering the character as an object for enjoyment despite their functions in their stories. Jansz and Martis conclude that the video games in their study fail to offer a sufficiently empowering model of female characters in their games in

¹² Kirkland, Ewan; *Masculinity in Video Games: The Gendered Gameplay of Silent Hill*; *Camera Obscura* 71, Volume 24, Number 2; Duke University Press, 2009.

relation to their male counterparts. While my study will examine the finer details and interactions in a single video game and Jansz and Martis gave a broader overview of the narrative in a number of games, the most prominent difference between this study and mine is the focus on female versus male characters. Jansz and Martis are concerned for the impact on women's social equality when video games portray them in a derogatory manner, meanwhile I am equally concerned for women's empowerment but choose to examine how this may be hindered by the way that men are taught to express their masculinity by example in video games.¹³

Anita Sarkeesian¹⁴ has produced a series of web-published videos (*Tropes vs Women in Video Games*) where she conducts a deep and extensive study of repressive and recurring trends in the portrayal of female characters in video games, throughout the medium's history. These analyses are solely focused on the extent of women's agency relative to their environment, male characters and the stories they exist within.¹⁵ This purpose does not directly relate to the study I wish to perform, although Sarkeesian's work does offer a helpful model for evaluating the level of empowerment and agency of female characters which I will partially draw on draw on in my method.¹⁶

Contrary to a narrative analysis of game content, Christopher Near performs an extensive quantitative study solely on the box-cover art that is designed to promote the video game's content and increase its sale value. *Selling Gender* is a study only interested in the pictorial portrayal of characters appearing in the games, their gender, position of empowerment relative to other characters and whether or not they are made to be sexualised for the viewer's enjoyment. He then relates this data to the games' sales statistics in order to draw a comparison between the games' sale rates and the sexualised and/or generally subservient portrayal of women relative to men on their respective box art illustrations. Due to the lack of great depth to the study, Near is able to make it quite expansive, covering a large number of titles, subsequently making his study more of a quantitative calculation rather than inspecting the deeper implications of the games' content. He finds that the more popular titles were more likely to include male lead characters over female on their box art, where the women often were placed in a compliant and accompanying position

¹³ Jansz, Jeroen & Martis, Raynel G.; *The Lara Phenomenon: Powerful Female Characters in Video Games*; Springer Science & Business Media, 2007.

¹⁴ She holds a bachelor's degree in Communication Studies and a Master's degree in Social and Political Thought. As she has chosen to publish her research through traditionally unorthodox and public forums I find it necessary to take note of her academic background and methods, so as to not give the impression of unprofessionalism.

¹⁵ Sarkeesian, Anita; *Tropes vs Women in Video Games*; Feminist Frequency: conversations with pop culture.

¹⁶ Primarily acknowledging her observations of common derogatory trends in the portrayal of women in video games.

relative their male counterparts, as well as being sexualised.¹⁷ This perspective of how characters of different genders relate to each other is similar to how I will conduct my analysis. However, a clear distinction is that Near's focuses on the agency of women and how they appear to position themselves toward men, while my study interests itself of men's agency and how it relates to their expression of gender identity.

Sexism in online video games does not either directly analyse gameplay content, but rather the cultural effect of the community of consumers. Specifically, the study seeks to evaluate the extent of sexist harassment expressed by other players toward women in network-game related communities. The authors find a pervasive trend in misogynistic behaviour and tie their results to research on identifiable personality traits that have shown to exacerbate sexually discriminatory behaviour. These studies have observed a recurring trend of men expressing masculine identity through a dominating attitude toward people in their surroundings. This information is subsequently identified as a defining factor in misogynistic gender norms that are often observed and criticized in our society.¹⁸

3.2 Cognitive effects of objectifying material

The embodiment of sexualised virtual selves is a study conducted through a series of experiments in order to investigate the “proteus effect”, i.e. a phenomenon where an individual may change their behaviour and manner of rationalising to better fit the manifestation of a virtual avatar they have been controlling shortly beforehand. The experiments consisted of women embodying female characters in a video game space, through a first-person perspective and a fully immersive environment where limb and head movements would control the respective parts of their avatars' bodies. These avatars were all made to resemble each test participant, unbeknown to them, and were displayed with varying levels of sexualised clothing distinguishing each individual. The participants were afterwards asked a series of questions to evaluate to what degree they perceived the likeness of their avatars, their sexualised appearance, whether they showed tendencies to express rape myth acceptance according to the scale presented by M. R. Burt and to what degree they expressed self-objectifying thoughts. The results showed that the participants were in fact likely to be cognitively affected by which avatar they embodied, in a manner that is detrimental to

¹⁷ Near, Christopher E.; *Selling Gender: Associations of Box Art Representation of Female Characters With Sales for Teen- and Mature-rated Video Games*; Springer Science & Business Media, 2007.

¹⁸ Fox, Jesse & Tang, Wai Yen; *Sexism in online video games: The role of conformity to masculine norms and social dominance orientation*; Elsevier Ltd. 2013.

the maintenance of their integrity by showing a trend in rape myth acceptance and self-objectification. The essence of this study is to show how people show tendencies of adopting character traits and acceptance of a virtual character which they themselves control.¹⁹ While this experiment addressed women and female characters and how they objectify themselves, it raises the question, when related to my study, if the same effect is achieved by embodying another assortment of traditionally gender-specific traits, e.g. a dominating *machismo* attitude. To my knowledge such a study has yet to be performed and would be recommended in order to expand the available material for further research in the field.

Mike Z. Yao, Chad Mahood and Daniel Linz presented a study that works under the presumption of the cognitive-neoassociationistic model in order to investigate the activation of sex-related thoughts. The model expresses a psychological perspective that claims emotions to interconnect with each other in a cognitive network. Under this presumption people can thus become “primed” to be more likely to activate thoughts of a certain kind, if thoughts and emotions within the same node are first activated through a form of stimulus. They performed an experiment where a number of participants were asked to play one out of three different video games, one of which was chosen specifically to offer a stimulus that would prime the participants toward sexual thoughts. The participants would afterwards be asked to answer a series of questions to determine their likelihood to sexually harass (LSH) after the scale presented by J. B. Pryor. Results showed that participants that were primed by the sexually oriented video game appeared more likely to sexually harass.²⁰

Similarly, Rudman and Borgida’s *The Afterglow of Construct Accessibility* also studies sexual priming in men but investigates further in order to gain a deeper understanding of the more concrete differences in behaviour when men have been primed to view women as sexual objects. The (all male) subjects were exposed to different sets of advertisements, after which they were asked to conduct an interview with a woman under a disguised pretence. As a result, they noticed several differences in behavioural patterns between experimental and control subjects. In particular, those who had been sexually primed by the stimulus tended to ask sexist questions, move in a closer proximity to the woman, consider her to be friendlier towards them when asked afterwards as well as consider her to be less competent to perform certain duties.²¹

¹⁹ Fox, Jesse & Bailenson, Jeremy N. & Tricase, Liz; *The embodiment of sexualized virtual selves: The Proteus effect and experiences of self-objectification via avatars*; Elsevier Ltd. 2012.

²⁰ Yao, Mike Z. & Mahood, Chad & Linz, Daniel; *Sexual Priming, Gender Stereotyping, and Likelihood to Sexually Harass: Examining the Cognitive Effects of Playing a Sexually-Explicit Video Game*; The Author(s), 2009.

²¹ Rudman, Laurie A. & Borgida, Eugene; *The Afterglow of Construct Accessibility: The Behavioral Consequences of Priming Men to View Women as Sexual Objects*; *Journal of Experimental Social Psychology* 31; Academic Press

Mulac, Jansma and Linz conducted a study in how men can be primed for certain behaviour by viewing sexually explicit video material which specifies particularly in finding and analysing a dominating attitude toward women. The subjects were divided in three groups and were each exposed to non-sexual, sexual but not degrading and sexual material that is degrading to women, respectively. The participants' manner were then analysed on several points to create a mapping of how they appear more or less dominating in relation to a woman compared to the other groups. The test showed that those who had been subjected to sexual material displayed more dominance and anxiety compared to the control subjects, while those who had viewed degrading sexual content acted less anxious and more dominating.²²

Another experiment also had male participants subjected to a video depicting pornographic content, after which the subjects were asked a series of questions designed to determine how they may have become more likely to objectify women. Results showed that the sexually primed participants did indeed have higher tendencies towards an identifiable sexist approach to the experiment's female interviewer.²³ What signifies these studies are their graphic sexual content as priming material. While this is not as present to the same extent in my primary material, the essentials are how portrayals of women in a sexualised and degraded manner may prime a person to behave and rationalise accordingly thus making such a study a relevant reference.

Objectification leads to depersonalization is more of a philosophical investigation, studying the effective implications of objectifying a person and how such rationale relates to depersonalisation. In two different experiments, participants of both genders were asked to answer questions regarding exhibits of both men and women, displayed in objectified and non-objectified ways. The questionnaires covered how the subjects perceived to what level the person depicted experiences abstract mental states, how well they deserve moral treatment, their professional competence and how well they experience pain, among other areas. The experiments showed that objectified individuals were thought to be less capable within these areas.²⁴ Thus, the study demonstrated the

Inc. 1995; pp. 493 – 517.

²² Mulac, Anthony & Jansma, Laura L. & Linz, Daniel G.; *Men's Behavior Toward Women After Viewing Sexually-Explicit Films: Degradation Makes Difference*; *Communication Monographs*, Vol. 69, No. 4; National Communication Association, 2002.

²³ McKenzie-Mohr, Doug & Zanna, Mark P.; *Treating Women as Sexual Objects: Look to the (Gender Schematic) Male Who Has Viewed Pornography*; Society for Personality and Social Psychology Inc. 1990.

²⁴ Loughnan, Steve & Haslam, Nick & Murnane, Tess & Vaes, Jeroen & Reynolds, Catherine & Suitner, Caterina; *Objectification leads to depersonalization: The denial of minds and moral concern to objectified others*; *European*

severity of widespread objectification and related associations, as well as offering a broader perspective of how to study and define objectification.

4 Analysis and Discussion

4.1 Analysis

During the analysis I will present excerpts collected from the content of the game where I have identified instances of female objectification in relation to masculine expression. As explained in the method chapter, this definition of objectification is drawn from the list compiled by Martha Nussbaum which has shaped the conduct of my study. The characters that are brought to scrutiny in the analysis are inconsistent across the different categories I will touch upon, as different characters possess different qualities relative to the narrative and are thus discussed after relevancy.

4.1.1 Character study

This chapter deals with presenting and analysing the game's major characters. I have limited the presentation of goals and ambitions to the three primary, playable characters, as well as two of the most prominent female characters. All of these are also included when analysing their function in relation to the story where I will also touch upon two additional characters, primarily how they contrast with each other in a functional sense.

None of the three playable characters are particularly heroic in the sense of possessing virtuous traits and righteous justification to their actions. However, by having the player control them and presenting the designated objective to further these characters' agenda, they still become protagonists in the sense of the function they fill in the narrative.

Franklin Clinton is a young man who is shown to have grown up in a poor neighbourhood, primarily populated by African Americans like himself. Growing up, he has taken part in a significant amount of the amateur criminal activity common in his neighbourhood, with a lot of risk and little foreseeable gain in the long run. Naturally, he looks for any opportunity to rise out of the ghetto and make a career for himself. Initially he wants to achieve this through legal means, but after seeing the possibilities of a successful professional criminal, from the example of Michael De Santa, Franklin becomes more prone to following in his footsteps.²⁵ While this accomplishment is Franklin's primary ambition, it is also made clear for the player that in this success he hopes to reunite with a woman with whom he previously had been in a relationship. During interactions

²⁵ YouTube; 00:30:40

between the two characters it is explained that she no longer holds interest in Franklin due to his dangerous and unreliable criminal lifestyle.²⁶ However, Franklin still maintains the idea that financial success and promises of change will entice her to come back to him, a tactic which does not work in the end. What this shows us is how, even though he holds deep feelings for this woman, Franklin regards her as shallow, only holding interest in his material worth, and would rather fail in wooing her than realising his own mistakes and aspire to become a better person.²⁷ His status as a playable character, combined with the portrayal of his background and motivations makes him the the main characters whom most players will be more likely to identify with. Despite seeing him making poor life choices during the course of the story, the player is forced to sympathise with his unfair starting point and understand the reasoning behind his actions, however misplaced they may be. This designates his function as a likeable protagonist whom players will root for and probably support his cause as the story develops. In other words, it gives him an aesthetic purpose unrelated to his gender and puts him in a position where, compared to his companions, he is made out to be a sort of beacon of intelligence and rationality. This can lead to the impression, to players who do not conduct such a meticulous study, that Franklin's actions are intended to be seen as righteous, even when they should not.

Michael De Santa, on the other hand, is primarily shown to desire appreciation and recognition for his efforts. Statements like “I’m a great thief”²⁸ and the joy of being “back in action”²⁹ after a successful heist is gravely contrasted to his relationship with his family. Constant bickering and arguments with his wife and two children leave him emotionally exhausted and resigned, meaning that he wishes they could be happier together.³⁰ He appears concerned for his children's future but primarily he wants them to spend time with him and see him as a role model. In expressing this need he takes on a differing approach between his son and daughter. As the son spends most of his time playing video games and remaining unemployed, Michael tries to motivate him into becoming more self-sufficient and decisive in his life.³¹ This is further emphasized when Michael starts to spend more time with the younger Franklin, teaching him the robbery trade, making Franklin “the son I (Michael) never had”³², i.e. a “son” that aspires to be like himself. Meanwhile, Michael's

²⁶ YouTube; 06:23:23

²⁷ Nussbaum

1. *Instrumentality*: The objectifier treats the object as a tool of his or her purposes.

2. *Denial of autonomy*: The objectifier treats the object as lacking in autonomy and self-determination.

²⁸ YouTube; 02:11:48

²⁹ YouTube; 01:28:03

³⁰ YouTube; 00:29:40

³¹ YouTube; 01:02:00

³² YouTube; 02:19:44

daughter attempts to achieve fame and success by abandoning her integrity and become an object for men's enjoyment, which leads him to intervene and stop this from happening without any further attempt of guidance.³³ Likewise, Amanda, Michael's wife, expresses a clear disinterest in her life with him as she repeatedly seeks the company of other men which Michael does not approve of but only reacts by taking out his aggression on the man and does nothing to change Amanda's view of himself.³⁴ Through this observation we acquire a clearer understanding of the true meaning of Michael's interests and ambition as expressed in the story. He wants to be the head of his family, whom the female family members depend upon.³⁵ This outlook is clearly tied to his identity as a man as he only attempts to groom his son to be the same as himself. In many ways Michael functions as the driving element whose actions set off the story which defines the game's events. This gives him the honour of being a core component in the narrative, where it is noteworthy, but not a decisive statement, to point out his gender as male. To determine his intended impact on the player's interpretation of his qualities can be uncertain. As I have analysed his reasoning from a feminist perspective I have been able to acknowledge points where the character's actions effectively marginalise the authority of women, while many other viewers may identify with Michael and his wishes for a relationship with his family. Players who agree with this world view will sympathise with his character, although he does indeed objectify women through his expression of masculinity and fatherhood. This duality makes for an interesting and diverse character but distorts the interpretation of his intended reception.

Trevor Philips is an old, very well acquainted, accomplice of Michael's who is presented as a heavily unstable and dangerous individual. He shows signs of violent and aggressive psychopathic tendencies as he holds little to no empathy toward most people in his surroundings. The greatest exception is his relationship to Michael and his family. On several occasions Trevor describes Michael as his "best friend" and puts great value into the integrity of their relationship.³⁶ This shows a contrast between all of Trevor's other relationships where he manipulates the people in his surroundings with fear and violent threats and everyone serves a purpose toward his own gain.³⁷ The deduction to be made is that Trevor perceives Michael as an equal, rather than a tool, and therefore shows an aspiration for a relationship that is built on respect and friendship, something he

³³ YouTube; 01:04:50, 02:01:10, 05:52:55

³⁴ YouTube; 00:44:40, 01:52:20

³⁵ Nussbaum

2. *Denial of autonomy*: The objectifier treats the object as lacking in autonomy and self-determination.

3. *Inertness*: The objectifier treats the object as lacking in agency, and perhaps also in activity.

³⁶ YouTube; 02:19:53

³⁷ YouTube; 01:51:25

has never had before. What makes this deviation truly interesting is how it extends to Michael's family as well. While most other women Trevor comes across are not regarded with much consideration or respect, he treats Amanda and Tracey De Santa with utmost care and admiration.³⁸ It seems that this relationship can only exist due to the bond that Trevor feels with Michael, i.e. the bond he is able to build with another man but is less likely to share a similar connection with a woman. To be more precise, Trevor shows respect towards Amanda and Tracey due to the respect he feels toward Michael, and it is only through his agency that Trevor relates to the two women, not by seeing them as their own self-determined individuals (an exception to this observation occurs later in the story which I discuss below, pp. 21 – 22). In sum, Trevor's greatest goal as expressed in the story is to form and maintain a true friendship, he appears to feel the need for this relationship to be with a man which could relate to his connection to his own masculinity. We also see how this aspiration leads him to treat related women only as complementary to the men he holds his bond with, making them mere objects of another man's interests in his eyes.³⁹ A lot of Trevor's scenes are presented in a way that gives a sense of morbid humour, meaning that, although he can be arbitrarily aggressive and violent, he is made to be likeable from a viewer's perspective. This comes across as a necessity when such a character is a playable protagonist, in order to create some sense of association between the player and the character they control. In relation to the other protagonists, Trevor offers an element of chaos and ongoing conflict, effectively creating a lot of the story's dramatic tension. His primary value is his rather significant influence on the lives of all the characters he interacts with, meaning that his presence can not be disregarded as arbitrary or by chance.

One of the most meaningful and consistently appearing women of the story is Amanda de Santa, the wife of Michael. Amanda always expresses a deep concern about Michael's violent tendencies and at one point leaves the house along with their children when they feel that his behaviour is progressing out of control. This shows a natural concern for her family and their well-being, something that extends beyond a life together with her husband which suggests a progressive independence to a man.⁴⁰ On the other hand, she is never shown to have a job of any kind and seems to live at home in a very domestic life, in the highly extravagant house that Michael barely

³⁸ YouTube; 01:58:40

³⁹ Nussbaum

2. *Denial of autonomy*: The objectifier treats the object as lacking in autonomy and self-determination.

3. *Inertness*: The objectifier treats the object as lacking in agency, and perhaps also in activity.

7. *Denial of subjectivity*: The objectifier treats the object as something whose experience and feelings (if any) need not be taken into account.

⁴⁰ YouTube; 02:55:00

manages to pay for.⁴¹ On one occasion she is revealed to have an affair with her tennis instructor, whom we previously saw in a very dominating authoritative position while flirting with her.⁴² In other words, Amanda's primary characteristic as she expresses her own ambitions in life is subservience and devotion toward a man that will treat her as an object of his interests.⁴³ What she offers to other characters and the progression of the story is an object and a goal for Michael to strive for. Her presence is a driving force for her husband's development and story arc meaning that she has no importance or agency in her own name, only as supplementary to others.⁴⁴

Tracey de Santa is the daughter of Michael and Amanda, who's greatest dream is to achieve fame by any means, which entices her to perform several acts of self-objectifying behaviour.^{45,46} She represents the sort of materialistic celebrity culture that is prevalent in the western world and affects a lot of young people to aspire for that kind of life. Tracey is fully corrupted by this kind of mentality and is therefore ready and willing to abandon her integrity for a chance at "15 minutes of fame", a mentality which is criticised and caricatured throughout the game. Her entire personality is, in short, the stereotypic definition of a superficial "bimbo". This may be intended as a ironic piece of satire criticising this part of our culture but the reality is that the character of Tracey perpetuates a stereotype of women in this culture. However, this aspect is not developed and expanded upon in the narrative, which could have been done if satire was the intention of developers. Instead, Tracey does not achieve self-determination and choose to preserve her integrity, she remains an object for men to act upon and functions as a tool to develop the relationships of others.⁴⁷ As Anita Sarkeesian argues: instances of "ironic sexism" are still sexist representations of women and the irony relies on that this form of sexism is obsolete in practice,

⁴¹ Nussbaum

3. *Inertness*: The objectifier treats the object as lacking in agency, and perhaps also in activity.

⁴² YouTube; 00:26:00, 00:44:40

⁴³ Nussbaum

3. *Inertness*: The objectifier treats the object as lacking in agency, and perhaps also in activity.

6. *Ownership*: The objectifier treats the object as something that can be owned by another, can be bought or sold, etc.

⁴⁴ Nussbaum

3. *Inertness*: The objectifier treats the object as lacking in agency, and perhaps also in activity.

⁴⁵ YouTube; 01:04:50, 02:01:10, 05:52:55

⁴⁶ Nussbaum

1. *Instrumentality*: The objectifier treats the object as a tool of his or her purposes.

6. *Ownership*: The objectifier treats the object as something that can be owned by another, can be bought or sold, etc.

⁴⁷ Nussbaum

1. *Instrumentality*: The objectifier treats the object as a tool of his or her purposes.

2. *Denial of autonomy*: The objectifier treats the object as lacking in autonomy and self-determination.

3. *Inertness*: The objectifier treats the object as lacking in agency, and perhaps also in activity.

6. *Ownership*: The objectifier treats the object as something that can be owned by another, can be bought or sold, etc.

which it is not.⁴⁸ Therefore it is not completely relevant that Tracey's persona is intended as a caricature, she still represents a female character who's goal is to become an object.⁴⁹ Her presence creates a degrading image of women and it exacerbates issues that our society is still struggling to process and improve. A large portion of Tracey's presence in scenes are defined by her embodiment of the stereotypical "bimbo". This is meant for players to recognise and associate with people in our world, designating the extension of Tracey's existence to comedic relief, specifically comedy aimed at ridiculing her and her characteristics.

During the later portions of the game a billionaire entrepreneur called Devin Weston employs the main characters to perform criminal activities for his gain.⁵⁰ His persona is a complete embodiment of material success, a prospect which he offers the protagonists in their collaboration. This sort of open sector professionalism in order to be monetarily self-supportive is traditionally a male undertaking and may still be widely considered a signifying element of masculinity. With this in mind it becomes more significant when this sort of character expresses objectifying ideas about women, e.g. referencing sexual prowess with women as he introduces himself⁵¹ and sexual acts as a reward for one's services⁵², which directly identifies women's sexuality as exchangeable with monetary or material rewards.⁵³ Later in the story it is revealed that Devin has concealed part of his agenda and eventually betrays the protagonists, where he instead becomes the primary antagonist of the narrative.⁵⁴ This creates relevancy to compare and contrast him with a similar character introduced during the same portion of the story. Solomon Richards, who is an aged film director, befriends Michael after he starts working for Solomon, helping him produce his newest project. In return, Solomon offers the prospect of working in the film industry, a passion Michael has held for a long time but never before seen a likely opportunity for it.⁵⁵ In this sense, both Solomon and Devin represent similar themes, men who have achieved the success that our male protagonists strive for.

⁴⁸ Sarkeesian, Anita; *Tropes vs Women in Video Games*; Damsel in Distress: Part 3; <http://www.feministfrequency.com/2013/08/damsel-in-distress-part-3-tropes-vs-women/>

⁴⁹ Nussbaum

1. *Instrumentality*: The objectifier treats the object as a tool of his or her purposes.

6. *Ownership*: The objectifier treats the object as something that can be owned by another, can be bought or sold, etc.

⁵⁰ YouTube; 03:35:10

⁵¹ YouTube; 04:07:45

⁵² YouTube; 03:46:14

⁵³ Nussbaum

1. *Instrumentality*: The objectifier treats the object as a tool of his or her purposes.

4. *Fungibility*: The objectifier treats the object as interchangeable (a) with other objects of the same type, and/or (b) with objects of other types

⁵⁴ YouTube; 06:34:34

⁵⁵ YouTube; 03:50:40

The difference becomes clear after Devin becomes our enemy while Solomon remains an ally of Michael. This has the effect of enhancing the player's impression of Solomon as honest with good virtues, when he actually seems to possess similar qualities as Devin in terms of their relationship to women and their worth, as Solomon jokes about assistants providing sexual service upon meeting Michael.⁵⁶ This misconstrues the portrayal of Solomon's character as a positive influence even though he embodies an objectifying manner.⁵⁷

4.1.2 Selected scenes and interactions

This chapter will concern particular scenes depicting characters' interactions that show instances of masculine expression in relation to women in various forms.

During his introduction to the main story, Trevor is seen having intercourse with a woman. Shortly afterwards it is revealed that she is in a relationship with another man, who confronts Trevor, and that it is not the first time this has happened. During the confrontation the woman is referred to and treated as an object for them to act upon, her agency is never taken into consideration or discussed.⁵⁸ This interaction is given further meaning as we become more acquainted with Trevor's character and how he relates to other individuals in his surroundings. To everyone he meets, both men and women, he establishes a dominating attitude through sexual statements and referencing his own sexual prowess. This becomes a demonstration of his manhood as he repeatedly refers to his genital organs and related sex-acts, meaning that Trevor creates an example of masculine expression through sexualising and objectifying individuals in his environment.⁵⁹⁶⁰

This whole aspect of Trevor's personality takes an interesting turn when he takes the wife of a prominent leader of a criminal organisation hostage, a woman named Patricia. The purpose of the abduction is to extort the husband into abiding by Trevor's agenda.⁶¹ During her imprisonment

⁵⁶ YouTube; 03:50:40

⁵⁷ Nussbaum

1. *Instrumentality*: The objectifier treats the object as a tool of his or her purposes.

⁵⁸ YouTube; 01:29:50

⁵⁹ YouTube; 01:51:25

⁶⁰ Nussbaum

1. *Instrumentality*: The objectifier treats the object as a tool of his or her purposes.

2. *Denial of autonomy*: The objectifier treats the object as lacking in autonomy and self-determination.

3. *Inertness*: The objectifier treats the object as lacking in agency, and perhaps also in activity.

5. *Violability*: The objectifier treats the object as lacking in boundary-integrity, as something that is permissible to break up, smash, or break into.

7. *Denial of subjectivity*: The objectifier treats the object as something whose experience and feelings (if any) need not be taken into account.

⁶¹ YouTube; 04:05:20

Patricia and Trevor develops an unexpected reciprocal romantic relationship.⁶² A harsh way of interpreting the situation would be to regard Patricia's actions as an irrational display of Stockholm syndrome, making her a sexual object lacking in self-determination as she simply confers herself to any available man. A slightly more lenient perspective is to view Patricia as a rare display of a woman in control of her intimate relationships. Initially she simply appears indifferent to the new situation but she quickly adopts a more authoritative manner towards Trevor,⁶³ to which he seems to respond positively. She eventually informs Trevor that their relationship can not last and that she needs to be reunited with her husband, to which he reluctantly abides. Shortly before their separation we partake a scene where Trevor, in an unusual display of compassion and sensitivity, confides some very intimate emotions with Patricia.⁶⁴ At this point a deeper and more complex side to Trevor's personality is not unknown to the player, this is not what makes the scene surprising. The uniqueness of this interaction is how a character like Trevor expresses such a deep relationship to a woman. It shows him as capable of an emotionally valuable relationship with a woman, not just seeing her as a sexual object, and that he regards her as possessive of her own determination and agency, as he follows her will and lets her leave him. However, the meaning of this situation loses some of its value as only a minimal portion of the game is devoted toward it and not developed much further. Instead of having the experience cause Trevor's character to grow and reach a new level of progression it is only used as a short, unexpected and contradictory anecdote. We understand, as Trevor returns to his previous outlook and conduct, that this section was only intended as comic relief and that it does not reach much further than that, no matter how much depth we read into it.

Part of the game's main story arc involves the protagonists being secretly recruited by the Federal Investigation Bureau (the game world's equivalent of the Federal Bureau of Investigation) to conduct several illegal operations to further their agenda. One of these missions involve abducting a foreign spy currently detained by the rivalling International Affairs Agency (a similar mock version of the Central Intelligence Agency). At the time we reach the captive, referred to as "Mr. K", we witness him about to be tortured as a part of his interrogation. This involves a female agent threatening to, and nearly proceeding to insert an electric torch into his rectum.⁶⁵ The symbolism of the phallus and sexual penetration is very clear and thus gives the scene additional meaning due to how it is presented. The apparent positioning of a man subjected sexual objectification by an

⁶² YouTube; 04:39:10

⁶³ YouTube; 04:23:50

⁶⁴ YouTube; 04:56:30

⁶⁵ YouTube;02:21:48

authoritative woman is clearly intended as a form of role reversal. This is the most crucial aspect of the structure of this moment, had there been two men conducting the same act there would not have been the same connotation to the scene, but by placing a woman in domination of a man it becomes a statement on a gendered issue. Similar to the observations made by Ewan Kirkland in his study, Mr. K experiences a particular dread from this emasculating experience, a feeling that is meant to translate to the player's conception. The point that makes this instance noteworthy is how other situations that follow the traditional sense of women being objectified by men, sexually or otherwise, are not performed with the same horror or shock factor. Female objectification in the game is presented without particular consideration, often having the women engage in various degrading acts themselves and not showing signs of suffering or dismay. By creating this contrast during one of the few moments where a man is subservient to a woman it sends the message that it is unnatural, and therefore wrong, when a man is an object of a woman's actions but normalises and diminishes the significance of women being objects to men.⁶⁶

When Trevor moves to Los Santos, the fictional city in which most of the game takes place, he forcefully stays in the apartment of Floyd, a relative of one of Trevor's accomplices. On repeated occasions Floyd protests that his girlfriend, Debra, would not want strangers like Trevor in their home, to which Trevor responds with questioning Floyd's masculinity in reference to how he holds a strong value to Debra's wishes.⁶⁷ At one point this situation escalates into a discussion regarding the size of their genital organs.⁶⁸ The importance of this scene is how male genitalia is used as synonymous to sexual prowess which in turns becomes representative of the person's authority in a relationship with a woman, as a sub-element of masculine identity.⁶⁹ Trevor describes Floyd's relationship, claiming that Debra us “using” him, which is really only Floyd expressing agreement to Debra's will to be rid of hardened criminals in their apartment. This rationale is then used to further enforce the idea that Floyd has low self-esteem as an explanation to why he is being

⁶⁶ Nussbaum

1. *Instrumentality*: The objectifier treats the object as a tool of his or her purposes.

2. *Denial of autonomy*: The objectifier treats the object as lacking in autonomy and self-determination.

5. *Violability*: The objectifier treats the object as lacking in boundary-integrity, as something that is permissible to break up, smash, or break into.

7. *Denial of subjectivity*: The objectifier treats the object as something whose experience and feelings (if any) need not be taken into account.

⁶⁷ YouTube; 03:01:00, 05:00:00

⁶⁸ YouTube; 03:01:20

⁶⁹ Nussbaum

3. *Inertness*: The objectifier treats the object as lacking in agency, and perhaps also in activity.

7. *Denial of subjectivity*: The objectifier treats the object as something whose experience and feelings (if any) need not be taken into account.

“controlled” by Debra.⁷⁰ Up to this point of the interactions with Floyd and Debra’s relationship the characters have established a understanding of masculine expression as a functioning sexuality and an attitude that disregards the importance of women over the will of men. Later, in a scene where Debra herself is present she accuses Floyd of not being a man as she refers to his menial form of employment, while she herself is significantly more professionally successful.⁷¹ As she directly refers to his gender, this becomes another signifier of masculine identity, that a man is expected to hold financial success exceeding that of his accompanying woman which insinuates that the woman should be complementary to a man when it comes to providing for the household.⁷² Eventually Debra mentions a man called “Bob”, who is insinuated to be another lover and whom she describes as more of a man than Floyd.⁷³ When the scene escalates into chaos Debra mentions that Bob taught her how to use a firearm, as she tries to gain control of the situation.⁷⁴ As Bob is already established as a more viable representation of masculinity, according to Debra, her comment gains a deeper meaning in the context of the symbolism implicit in the scene. The fact that Bob taught her to use a gun can be interpreted as an interrelating component to the concept that he embodies, i.e. the game (inadvertently) presents the statement that masculinity is partly expressed through the monopoly on violent capability in order to establish authority and control. While this does not directly name women as the objects of control the connection can still be drawn through the previously asserted expectation of men to be more authoritative and capable in professional life in relation to women, it becomes insinuated that this violent power is a gendered hierarchy.⁷⁵

4.2 Discussion

This study aimed to cast light on, and place within a theoretical context, the expression of masculine identity which defines itself through an objectifying attitude toward women, in the narrative elements of *Grand Theft Auto V*. The findings show that the game does indeed contain numerous

⁷⁰ YouTube; 01:55:40, 03:03:30, 03:06:48

⁷¹ YouTube; 05:00:16

⁷² Nussbaum

2. *Denial of autonomy*: The objectifier treats the object as lacking in autonomy and self-determination.

3. *Inertness*: The objectifier treats the object as lacking in agency, and perhaps also in activity.

7. *Denial of subjectivity*: The objectifier treats the object as something whose experience and feelings (if any) need not be taken into account.

⁷³ YouTube; 05:00:18

⁷⁴ YouTube; 05:00:40

⁷⁵ Nussbaum

3. *Inertness*: The objectifier treats the object as lacking in agency, and perhaps also in activity.

5. *Violability*: The objectifier treats the object as lacking in boundary-integrity, as something that is permissible to break up, smash, or break into.

accounts of women being treated with or referred to in regard to sexual value or subservience of agency relative to men, presented in a direct verbal or symbolic manner. This investigation was performed in correlation to the theory that such statements in a narrative medium is able to affect the outlook of a male consumer and enforce the possibility of making him an agent of repressive gender norms. However, this raises the question of how this level influence may be affected by subtle aspects of its presentation.

A relevant question that arose during my research concerned the implications of a character's positive or negative function and how they are meant to relate to the consumer's perception of story and conflict. For example, an antagonist fills the function of creating conflict with the story's protagonist and will therefore be presented with negative qualities in order to attract distaste from its audience. The viewer is thus made to understand that the protagonist's actions are righteous, setting a good example of virtuous behaviour, while the antagonist makes poor choices lacking in empathy and therefore acts as a negative example of good character. This basic principle of narrative structure relates back to the material of my study where the characters that are made out to be anti-heroes, in the sense that they are protagonists as we attempt to further their interests, while they simultaneously conduct brutal and violating acts lacking in empathy. It should be clear to most consumers of this kind of story that the characters possess a variety of dimensions, while they are poor examples of good behaviour in one sense they may show reasonable human qualities in another. The point of concern here is where the aspect of masculine identity fits in during the consumption of this narrative. Will a player of *GTA V* interpret the objectification of a woman as a discouraged act by an immoral man, or see it as an unremarkable expression of his gender? Is a character's portrayal of masculinity and the message it sends affected by his narrative function as a "bad guy"? One response could claim that a person's gender exists and projects on the consumer, regardless of their otherwise positive or negative purpose, while another may argue that it does matter. An overhanging point of importance on the matter is the aspect that understanding of these gender norms is difficult as their manifestations are often subtle and complex, which leads to another topic of discussion.

Most critique on video games focus on their elements of violence and the subsequent negative influence they may have on their consumers, although violence is widely condemned by society. This sort of argument would argue that the subtle influence of narrative is stronger than the socially accepted behaviour that is taught through society as a whole, while others would disregard the validity of such claims. While this discussion is not relevant for my study, I find it necessary to

propose further research in the effect of less apparent subjects than violence. Unlike the moral obligations of violent content, the intricacies of gender norms are widely unknown to most people who do not take active measures to educate themselves on the matter. This aspect can cause the consumer to be more easily susceptible to embracing ideas, which is why I find it necessary for future studies to investigate how the influential effects differ when the object of concern is the largely unaware hegemonic imbalance between genders.

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