

Gender studies, Video games, and Teaching

An analysis of Tomb Raider and Uncharted through gender studies.



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Abstract

The aim of this study is to conduct a critical analysis of two video games through the perspective of gender studies. The reason for doing the analysis is implicitly connected to education. The results produced by this study are meant to showcase how video games can be analyzed critically, similar to how a novel or a movie can be analyzed. Sequentially, this will serve as an example how video games can be the subject in English education.

The implicit aim of this study is to give the reader a sense of what video games can provide in terms of education, how they can be used within the classroom, how they differ from other mediums, and how they can be analyzed.

Keywords: Video games, Gender studies, Education, Critical theory, Uncharted, Tomb raider

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1. Introduction

This essay uses critical theory to analyse two video games from a gender perspective. It is also connected to education, by arguing how and why video games can be used in the teaching of English. This essay will also deal with describing video games as a cultural artefact in order to show how critical theory can work together with games.

The primary reasons for choosing video games and a gender perspective has to do with personal interest and the nature of the subject matters. Video games and gender studies are two subjects that go very well together, seeing as video games are a medium that has been heavily influenced by gender stereotypes during the last decades. Also, since video games are a growing art form, I feel the need for language teachers to take a stand in regards to this growth. Therefore, one of the aims in this study is to show that a critical analysis of video games can be conducted, and in long term, employed in the classroom if interest for such a project exists.

Research questions

- What similarities and difference can be found in the characters *Lara Croft* and *Nathan Drake* from the perspective of gender studies?
- How do the two games in question choose to depict masculinity and femininity?
- Violence is a major theme in both these video games. Is it possible to discover a pattern in the violence through the perspective of gender studies?

1.1 Introduction to the video games

The games chosen for this study are *Uncharted: The Nathan Drake collection* (2015) and *Tomb Raider – Definitive edition* (2014). Both these games are re-mastered versions of their original counterparts. The primary reason for using the re-mastered versions is due to them being on the PlayStation 4, which has a built in recording function, i.e. capturing footage is a lot easier. In the case of *Uncharted: The Nathan Drake collection*, the game features all three of the main entries in the Uncharted-series. No changes in the narrative or the game mechanics have been made in these re-mastered version. The changes that are made feature improved graphic fidelity and better performance.

Both these games exhibit similarities in their respective narratives. Both feature a quest for treasures of archaeological value, and both protagonists are put through copious amounts of danger where they manage to survive against all odds. In many respects, both these games can be compared to the Indiana Jones movies. They also share similarities in terms of gameplay mechanics. Both games can be categorised within the genre *third person shooter*. This means that the camera in the games is situated behind the main character during gameplay, and that your primary way of interacting with obstacles is to shoot at them. The major difference between the two games, which is a difference that will be central to this study, is that the protagonist in each game respectively is a man and a woman. These games can also be categorized as triple-A games, which is a category within the videogame industry that essentially means that the games have very big budgets and are developed by large teams. One could draw the comparison between AAA-games and blockbuster Hollywood productions. Since both these games can be classified as AAA-titles and were both developed by American companies, one is able to assume that the games have been influenced by the gender norms present in western societies. Of course, these games may not take any particular

stand in the matter of traditional gender roles, since it is not particularly relevant to neither **games'** plot nor their game mechanics. However, while the games might not take an active stand in this matter, they might still be influenced by the norms regarding gender roles, and concepts such as masculinity and femininity.

2. Background

2.1 Masculinity & femininity during the 20th century

In this study, a great deal of focus will be put on the terms of masculinity and femininity. The definition of these terms will draw heavily on the book *Masculinity and Femininity – The taboo Dimension of National Cultures* by the social psychologist and anthropologist, Geert Hofstede (1998). However, a historical perspective of masculinity and femininity will also be included. Two very influential authors will be used to create this historical perspective, namely: Virginia Woolf and Simone de Beauvoir. Both these authors had a huge impact on society in their respective time, and they still remain relevant to this day, which is one of the reasons they have been chosen for this study.

To start with, Virginia Woolf's novel *A room of one's own* (1929) will be discussed. The novel features a female protagonist who seeks to answer why women are treated much worse than men in society. She discovers that one of the primary reasons for this mistreatment is that women are not allowed to occupy rooms and spaces in the same extent as men are. When writing about rooms, Woolf is not only talking about physical rooms, but also rooms as in places and positions. The answer to why women are not allowed in these rooms can be found in the laws and norms of society. One example that Woolf brings forth, is the difficulty for a woman to be a writer due to these restrictions. A woman lacked the accessibility to three important conditions that a **writer needs**. These were: A relative financial

stability, leisure time, and privacy. In the second chapter, the protagonist heads to the library in order to find answers to why women are so systematically oppressed. She finds several books written on the subject of women, all of them by male authors. There seems to be an illogical anger aimed towards women in several of these books. The protagonist comes to the conclusion that the reason for the anger has more to do with **the author's** interpretation that men are superior, rather than the inferiority of women. To summarize, *A room of one's own* discusses and criticises the limitations that are brought upon women in society, through short fictive stories. Being released during the first feminist wave, this novel gives insight into women's **struggle** during its time period.

Jumping forward in time to the second feminist wave, Simone de Beauvoir and her magnum opus *The second sex* (1949) will be slightly touched upon. This work is arguably one of the most influential pieces of feminist writing **of** the 20th century. The book centres on the theme that women are the other in comparison to men. One could say that men are always the norm. **E**ven if a woman were to perform just as well in any given occasion, it is going to be viewed as an exception. This thought of women as the exception or the other is a theme that will be especially relevant when analysing Lara's role compared to Nathan's. Another question that is prevalent in the book is the question of why women throughout history have been systematically oppressed. Written samples about women's inferiority in biology, history, and psychology exist, but an adequate explanation to why women have been, and are still being oppressed cannot be found. de Beauvoir also brings forth the idea that one is not born a woman, but rather becomes one through upbringing and the influence **of** society and its **norms**. This aspect will be delved deeper into when the term gender is defined. Finally, de Beauvoir gives us a quote that captures much of the essence of gender studies "One is not born, but rather becomes, a woman" (p.295). This quote rings very true even today, and capsulate a lot of what gender studies entail.

Both these authors wrote their texts as criticisms of their times. Thusly, these authors will mainly be used to give a historical perspective on gender studies to show **where** many of its thought and ideas drew inspiration from.

2.2 Video games & education

Two major reasons exist why video games have been chosen for this study, when it would be more common to use either novels or movies as the material. The primary reason is to contribute to video games being taken more seriously as a cultural artefact, and not just seen as mindless entertainment. According to game designer and author Jane McGonigal (2011), games are extremely effective at creating positive emotions in the players. She argues that when people are playing a well-designed game, they are voluntarily putting themselves through unnecessary obstacles and performing at their peak skill level. (McGonigal, 2011). This is one of the aspects that makes video games stand out in contrast to other cultural artefacts, the fact that they require some degree of skill in order to be fully enjoyed.

The other major reason for choosing video games has to do with the amount of teenagers and young adults that are invested in video games. According to a Swedish study of teenagers and their relationship with media (such as TV, internet, and video games), the amount of adolescents, ages 13-18, that played more than 3 hours a day in 2014 lies around 22% (Ungar och medier 2015, p.31). Another study on a European scale by ISFE (Interactive software federation of Europe), conducted in 2012, shows that Sweden comes in first place in many of the statistics covering gaming usage. This includes: Frequency of gaming, where 34% of the participants answered that they play games on weekly basis, and incidents of gaming by age and gender, **where** 89% of males and 81% of females in the age group 16-24

answered that they do play games (Videogames in Europe consumer study, 2012, p. 3-5).

Therefore, it is important to promote critical analysis of video games in order to reflect upon the messages they send to the players. Indeed, the players are a central aspect of this study as they are the target group for these games. That is why this study is not meant to be viewed in a theoretical vacuum. Rather, one of its purposes is to be of use within the field of education.

The relationship between this study and education is connected via four different points.

These point are as follows: Adolescents and young adults tend to spend a lot of time with video games, the curriculum for English declares that students should use different mediums, video games can be beneficial to the students on an educational level, and lastly, the subject of gender can be linked to both education and video games. Each of these four points are crucial to this study and does therefore warrant a more thorough explanation.

As mentioned in the introduction, one of the reasons for choosing video games as the medium to analyse boils down to its growing presence. Which rings especially true for adolescents and young adults, as shown by the two statistic examples on page 6. These two examples show how video games are consumed by people in the age group **where** they would still be within the school system, hence the connection to education.

The second connection is centred on the curriculum for English in the Swedish education system. Two point serve to reinforce the claim that video games can be used within the framework of English education. The first one states that the English the students are facing within the classroom should be connected to their own life experiences. If there are students that have a lot of experience with video games - which is highly likely considering the statistics shown - they should be given the opportunity to work with video games within an English framework. The second point states that the students should be given the opportunity to interact with different types of mediums in order to develop their proficiency in

English. Different mediums is not a very descriptive term, therefore, it can be said to cover video games as a medium too (Skolverket, Curriculum for English, 2011).

The third point in regards to education is based on recent articles that show how video games can be used in an education setting. One such article, by Monke (2009) argues that recent studies of video games show that they can provide stimulating mental challenges when used in a correct setting. This statement can be reinforced by McGonigal (2011) who states that a well-designed video game challenges the player incrementally so that he/she is always performing at his/her highest skill level.

Finally, both video games and education can be linked to gender studies. The connection to video games are shown throughout this entire study, and exemplified in the upcoming section 2.3. The document “Det öppna klassrummet” (The open classroom) describes how and why teacher should work with gender studies. Some of the points that are brought up include: being critical towards norms, and showing acceptance for students with students who does not identify with their biological sex. Video games occupy an important space in our culture, and as the technology has moved forward, the influence video games occupy has grown. **The four arguments presented could be** used in the classroom to give teachers and students alike a golden opportunity to incorporate video games into the education if the interest is present.

2.3 Gamergate

The connection between gender and video games has so far only been touched upon.

Therefore, it is almost mandatory to bring up Gamergate as an example **of the connection between gender and video games, and how it is a sensitive subject.** According to an article by Jay Hathaway (2014) the Gamergate movement started in 2014 as a viral campaign on various forums and social media, protesting against progressivism in video games and video game

culture. Most noticeably, the people behind the Gamergate campaign were responsible for harassment against some of the front figures for progressive thinking **in video games**. Examples include game developer Zoë Quinn, and feminist media critic Anita Sarkeesian. The reasoning behind these actions were mainly due to the critique video games had received during the last years for not being progressive enough and for not striving towards representing men and women equally. The people behind Gamergate saw video games as entertainment only, and discarded the notion that sexism and unequally within video games should be discussed. Since Gamergate sparked such extreme feelings and actions from people involved, it is safe to say that the issue of gender and video games is still very relevant, and thusly worth **being** analysed critically.

3. Theory/Method

3.1 Definition of a video game

Video games and critical theory are two pillars on which this study rests upon. It is therefore paramount that these two concepts are defined properly in order for this study to be valid. First and foremost, the definition of critical theory has to be clarified. In very simple terms, critical theory can be summarized as critically looking at a piece of art with a specific focus, or a lens. Critical theory and literary criticism can also be said to be the same in this context (Tyson, 2006). However, since this study deals with video games rather than novels, it would be very strange to call it a literary analysis.

Video games are obviously not the same as novels or movies, and in the end it would be futile to compare the different mediums with each other. The major aspect that differs video games from movies and novels is that while the latter two examples are static, video games are dynamic. When reading a novel or watching a movie, the consumer have no

input on the outcome of the story. Of course, every person will have their own interpretation of these mediums, but the mediums themselves will objectively play out the exact same way each time.

When playing a video game, the player is in direct control of the events that happen, the story is dynamically moved forward. According to game designer and author Jane McGonigal (2011), four criteria exist to define what a game is. These four are: a goal, rules, a feedback system, and voluntary participation. A goal is something the player is actively working towards, the rules tell the player what she/he can and cannot do, and the feedback system shows the player how close the goal is. A second definition of what a game is comes from Bernard Suits. His definition goes as follows: “Playing a game is the voluntary attempt to overcome unnecessary obstacles” (As quoted by McGonigal (2011), p. 22).

With all that said, there are a few aspects to keep in mind when analysing the games. The question still remain how critical theory will be applied onto a video game. Since both these games feature a linear narrative – i.e. the player cannot change the story through their input - the narrative itself will be critically analysed. However, video games also feature an interactive aspect. As mentioned in the definition of games by Jane McGonigal (2011), there are always rules to follow in any game. In a video game, these rules dictates how the player can overcome the obstacles and finally reach the goal. In both these games, the main obstacles comes in the form of killing enemies and traversing the landscape. This aspect of the games gives another dimension to analyse. Not only can the video games’ narrative be looked at through the lens of gender studies, but so can its gameplay mechanics.

The reason why video games are of such interest in terms of gender studies is strongly connected to the fact that video games for a long time have been very lopsided in terms of equal representation between men and women. A study by Dimitri Williams, et al

(2009) shows that males inhabit the role of main character in a game 89.55% of the time, which is quite noticeable. Another reason why video games are interesting from a gender perspective has to do with appealing to different demographics. In a study by Kristen Lucas and John L. Sherry (2004) it is noted that video games tend to appeal more to males than to females. The main reason being that the games themselves are not designed to primarily appeal to girls and women, which can be connected to the study by Williams, et al (2009).

Both these studies are a couple of years old, and the video game industry is prone to quick changes. Therefore, some of the arguments from these studies might not ring as true today as they once did. Still, when looking at section 2.3 (Gamergate) of this essay, it becomes clear that video games as a medium still struggles with gender issues.

3.2 Gender studies

Gender studies consist of many different aspects and issues in relation to gender. According to a study by Johanna Pawelczyk (2002), everything that we say can be said to carry a meaning in terms of gender, which by extension would apply to video games as well. It is therefore possible to claim that gender studies is a very broad field. Since the perspective is so multifaceted, there is interest in specifying which parts of gender studies that will be used in this study, and which will be left out.

To start with, gender studies often include the subject of queer and trans people (Tyson, 2006). While this is a subject of great interest - especially within the culture of video games where trans people have a tendency to be neglected – it is of no interest to this study. The main reason being that both of the protagonists are heterosexual cis-people. Another reason being that it makes the research too broad and diverts from the main issue.

Traditional gender roles also have a tendency to view men and women as a strict dichotomy, in other words, you as an individual are either a man or a woman. According to these norms you cannot be something beyond these two genders, as well as you cannot be both, nor neither one of them. With this dichotomy in place, it can be stated that the traditional gender roles do not leave much room for trans people, and other forms of gender identity that does not fall within the category of either men or women. (Tyson, 2006, p.110)

When discussing gender and gender identities, a very important distinction is made between gender and sex. A person's sex is strictly tied to the genitals a person is equipped with, along with other factors such as the balance of the sex hormones: testosterone and oestrogen. A person's gender has to do with the identity of a person. Traditionally, gender is divided into two roles, men and women, and within both of these gender roles there exists norms of what behaviour is expected, and what is considered taboo. To summarize: Sex is biologically constructed and gender is socially and culturally constructed, as argued by the philosopher and gender theorist, Judith Butler (1999). Gender cannot only be seen as a cultural interpretation of the sexes however. Gender in itself can be said to be responsible for the interpretation of the sexes as different from each other. In other words, the term gender incorporates how we as people view the sex, and how we choose as a society to define what the different sexes entail (Butler, 1999). In order to use the traditional gender roles in an analytic fashion, it is important to understand the defining factors of the traditional gender roles, and which values they stand for. These values are classified as norms and describe what is expected of men and women respectively. Under the sections masculinity and femininity (3.3, 3.4), these norms will be defined in order to be used in the analysis.

The questions asked by this study are closely linked to feminist ideas and concepts. Despite that, I have chosen not to work with a feminist perspective within this study due to a couple of reasons. Judith Butler criticise the notion of feminism on the grounds that

by constructing a viewpoint wherein the **women are** fighting against a political system for equal right, feminism itself becomes partially responsible of creating the very system which they are fighting (Butler, 1999). This statement rings very true for this study as well, since the aim lies within the perceived ideas of masculinity and femininity, and how the two video games portray them.

In the sections below, the norms of masculinity and femininity used for this study will be defined. These norms will largely be based on the definitions used by Hofstede in his theory of cultural dimensions. It is only his definitions on masculinity and femininity that will be used however, since his theory on a larger scope is not applicable on this study.

3.3 Masculinity

Hofstede (1998) chooses to define the masculine trait with the following characteristics: assertive, tough, and focused on material success. With these characteristics attached to masculinity, it can be said that men are expected to be the stronger gender according to the norms. Due to this norm, it can be said that men in a greater extent than women see themselves as strong and tough. This can in turn cause men to more easily overestimate their strength, and therefore not be as careful or cautious as women might be (Will H. Courtney, 2000). This strength and toughness lies in stark contrast to what is traditionally viewed as feminine. It can be said that within the traditional role of masculinity lies a fear of being seen as feminine, as this would be the opposite to masculine (Will H. Courtney, 2000). In terms of emotion, traditional masculinity is far more restricted than the feminine counterpart in expressing their emotions in the open. It is generally accepted for a man to be emotional privately, but when in public, great emphasis is put on showing a cool and tough outwards demeanour in order to not be humiliated (Eva Randell, Lars Jerdén, Ann Öhman, Bengt Starrin & Renée Flacking, 2015).

The following points should be seen as a summarization of the traits that characterizes masculinity according to traditional gender roles.

- It is masculine to be tough and assertive.
- It is masculine to see oneself as the stronger gender.
- It is masculine to show a cool and tough demeanour when in public.

3.4 Femininity

The attributes Hofstede (1998) uses to define femininity are the following: modest, tender, and concerned with the quality of life. In contrast to men who are supposed to be strong both physically and mentally, women on the other hand do not automatically have the same expectations put on them. They are not necessary supposed to be weaker than men per se, rather they are allowed by the patriarchal structures to be weaker. One area where women are almost expected to be more fragile than men is in terms of emotions. It is far more accepted for a women to be emotional than it is for a man (Tyson, 2006). In traditional gender roles, it is also believed that feminine job assignments were not as dangerous or tough as the masculine ones (Will H. Courtney, 2000). Within gaming culture itself, there still exists a norm that female gamers are not equal to male gamers. It is perhaps not as prevalent as it has been, but female gamers are still, in many situations, treated as if they were not as skilful as their male counterparts (Thornham, 2011). This phenomena can be linked to how de Beauvoir and Woolf describe the woman's situation as an excluded one, as being the other. The following points should be seen as a summarization of the traits that characterizes femininity according to traditional gender roles.

- It is feminine to tender and modest.
- It is feminine to be allowed to be weaker than men.

- It is feminine to be more openly emotional than men.

3.5 Violence

One aspect that touches upon both gender issues and video games is violence and what implications it carries. Many video games have a focus on violence in some way. Even though there do exist games that are non-combative in their nature, the games chosen for this study contain large amounts of violence.

The connection between gender studies and violence is most obvious when inspecting the statistics regarding crimes of violence committed. According to the Swedish national council for crime prevention (BRÅ), among all the crimes of violence that were committed in 2014, 82% of the suspects were men (BRÅ, Brott och statistik, Våld och misshandel.). This is but one statistic example where men are overrepresented in terms of crimes of violence. Within gender studies, the idea of a violence culture – especially among men – have been frequently discussed. Within this violence culture (which can be considered to be a part of traditional gender roles) there exists an idea that it is manly to be physically strong. One way to show physical strength is of course by fighting. Defeating an opponent in combat can therefore be seen as a sign of strength and therefore a sign of masculinity (Tyson, 2006, Myrntinen, 2003).

Of course, this idea of violence is not explicitly brought upon us, since violence in its many forms are illegal actions. Instead, the idea is considered to be brought upon us in an implicit fashion. One example can be found in a lot of sport settings. In one study aimed at analysing coaches' attitudes and behaviours towards their players, it was discovered that the coaches usually used phrases connected to violence to motivate their players. In many cases

they also used femininity as something negative that should be avoided at all costs (Adi, Adams, Eric Anderson, Mark McCormack, 2010). **The significance** of violence in this study, boils down to how the both protagonists relate to violence and how they use it. Great focus will be put on the context of violence, i.e. How does the character react to the violence around them, both the violence they are exposed to but also the violence they inflict onto others. These aspects will be taken into consideration when evaluation Laura's and Nathan's characters from a gender perspective.

3.6 Method

The method used contains elements from both an inductive perspective and a deductive one. The inductive aspects comes from the fact that prior to this study, I have not played these games. Therefore, it can be said that an inductive approach will be used when first comparing these games, since their content influence the aspects of gender studies that will be relevant. Parallel to the inductive approach there exists a deductive approach. Since this study sets out to answer questions regarding gender, more specifically those surrounding masculinity and femininity, a framework existed prior to me playing the games.

When conducting this analysis, video recordings are used as a primary source **reference**. **The recording** will be conducted via the built in function in the Playstation 4, which allows the player to save video clips with a maximum length of 15 minutes each. Due to this technical limitation, an entire play through will not be available. Instead, only scenes that are relevant to the research will be used. This choice comes with both pros and cons in regards to the credibility of the research. Since games included **in** this genre **tend** to take roughly between 10-30 hours to complete, **the amount of footage would be huge if everything were to be recorded**. This in turn would make it difficult for a viewer to notice the instances that are of interest to this study, due to the length of the videos.

The downside however, is that since not all the footage is available, the viewer will get a narrower perspective on both games, since only instances **that I deem relevant** are shown. This brings up another problem: my judgement of the games. Since I am the one determining if a scene is relevant or not, that puts major responsibility on my judgement. There is a risk that important scenes will be left out due to either lack of attention or incorrect interpretation from my side.

4. Analysis

4.1 The structure of the analysis

The analysis portion is divided into three categories: masculinity, femininity, and violence. Both of the games will be analysed separately with these three categories, to then later be compared in the conclusion. The reason for the three categories is to make the analysis more focused by concentration on one aspect at the time.

The text will reference the video footage of the game by showing a time stamp (abbreviated TS) of the scene being analysed.

4.2 Tomb raider (Link to footage: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=xs0bOO0ug6A>)

Masculinity

According to the traits inhabited by traditional masculinity described in the sections above, Lara Croft shows in many cases that she is quite masculine. In the intro scene, Lara is talking about how she is ready to set her mark on the world and find adventure (Crystal Dynamics, 2014, TS.00:00) Right from the start, this scene shows that Lara is a very assertive and strong character. Another character who is important is the captain of the ship, and Lara's mentor, Roth. In a scene later on, the crew is discussing whether or not they should sail into the dragon's triangle. Roth then interrupts the whole crew, proclaims that he is the captain, and that it is his decision. He sides with Lara who wishes to head into the triangle (TS.01:36). This is another example of a character showing traditional masculinity by being very assertive and proclaiming that he is the one in charge.

Another scene with Roth takes place right after Lara has managed to set up camp, and Roth contacts her via the radio. In this scene, he calms Lara down and gives her instructions on how to proceed (TS.01:50). Once again, this scene shows that Roth is a very strong character, someone who Lara very much looks up to, and also to a certain extent depends upon. One of the side objectives in the game is to find relics. Whenever this happens, Lara shows her archaeological knowledge by describing the relic (TS.02:41). This is not strictly masculine per se, rather this scene showcases Lara as an actual archaeologist, which is an aspect that easily could have been glanced over.

The next scene is one of the most interesting ones in the entire game (TS.02:57). Lara and the expedition's lead archaeologist, Dr Whitman are captured by a group of mercenaries. Two noteworthy events happen in this scene. Firstly, Dr Whitman surrenders, leaving his gun on the ground and telling Lara to do as the mercenaries says while she is

dragged off. Secondly, Lara is pushed up against a tree, while her captor touches her shoulder and neck in an inappropriate fashion. This is also one of the instances where Lara is called “girl”, something that happens frequently throughout the game (TS.03:34,14:01). This scene is important because it is the first scene in the game where Lara is put in real danger by another human being. It becomes quite clear that the mercenary who holds her up against the tree sees her as weak, something that can be attributed to traditional gender roles. Dr Whitman shows cowardice in this scene, which will be a character trait for him throughout the rest of the game. Later he turns out to be an antagonist, which links the attribute of cowardice to that of being an antagonist. According to traditional gender roles, a man should be tough, something that Dr Whitman is not. The next scene of interest is a minor one. The scene shows Mathias – the main antagonist in the game- for the first time in his role as the antagonist (TS.06:15). Mathias has a strong conviction to his cause, is assertive and focused on completing his goal of getting off the island. In other words, Mathias shows some clear masculine traits in his character. In a later scene featuring Mathias, he is once again showing clear masculine traits as he is speaking to a large group of mercenaries, and acting in a very assertive and dominant way towards Lara once she is captured (TS.06:27).

One final point of masculinity in Tomb Raider shows itself late within the game. At this point, Lara has been through numerous life threatening situations, and is ready to face Mathias and save Sam. In one scene especially, it becomes clear that Lara herself now shows some strong masculine attributes. The scene shows how Lara decides to go into the enemy fortress alone, not accepting any help from her friends (TS.06:20) This behaviour can also be said to be masculine, seeing oneself as strong enough to handle the situation alone.

Femininity

Even though it can be argued that Lara is portrayed as a masculine character in Tomb Raider, she still inhabits several feminine traits as well. Early on in the game Lara is forced to hunt for food in order to survive. As she is about to kill a deer, she shows remorse and says that she is sorry (TS.09:02). This can be described as a feminine trait, as Lara shows tenderness and feels sorry for the deer. Next is a scene where Lara is contacted by her mentor, Roth, via the radio. While she talks to him she briefly starts to cry (TS.01:50). Now, considering what Lara has just been through – being shipwrecked, kidnapped, injured, and separated from the group – there is nothing strange with her breaking down a bit here. What is noteworthy in this scene is what happens if one imagines that Lara was a male character instead of a female character. Right away it becomes apparent that a man would not be seen breaking down in the same way Lara does according to masculine trait of retaining an outwards cool demeanour. This is not the only time throughout the game **where** Lara audibly cries. Another scene **where** this happens occurs after Roth dies (TS.10:35). Once again, it is contextually not strange for Lara to cry in this scene. But, if Lara was a male character instead, it would probably be very unlikely that he would cry in this scene.

Another point that connects to femininity in a way is the fact that Lara keeps being called “girl” throughout the game, both by her friends but also by her enemies (TS.03:34,14:01). Now, in the game Lara is quite young (21 years old), which could justify her being called girl. However, she is still old enough to be classed as a legal adult, which would make her a full-grown woman. This can be interpreted as a condescending act towards Lara. It can also just be her young age which makes it more appropriate to use girl instead of woman. The issue of calling an adult woman for girl can be discussed in great detail. In this study however, it is merely going to act as an observation. This observation reinforces the

traditional feminine trait that women are inferior to men, since it can be seen as patronising to call an adult woman for a girl.

Finally, the end of the game features a damsel in distress, played by Lara's friend, Sam (TS. 12:42). Even though Lara is not a male character, there still exists this trope at the end **where** she has to save a woman. Granted, she tried to save another crewmember earlier, Alex, but that failed and he got killed. As a matter of fact, it is only male character who are killed throughout the whole game, without a single female character dying. This slightly reinforces the norm stating that women are weaker than men and needs to be protected.

Violence

One of the primary mechanics in Tomb Raider is shooting, which right from the start makes it a very violent game. The interesting aspect in this case does not revolve around the shooting itself, but rather who you are shooting at. Before this issue is analysed any further, some distinctions are required. When the word *enemy* are used in this context, it refers to standard enemies that appear in video game, i.e. Simple obstacles for the player to defeat. This is not to be confused with *antagonist*, which is the major evil in the game who has both a clear personality and a connection to the narrative.

Apart from some encounters with the wildlife on the island, all the rest of the enemies in the game are men (TS.10:48, 11,:16, 12:00). Even the supernatural enemies towards the end appear to be male. This is not a phenomenon that is in any way exclusive to Tomb Raider (the Uncharted series also only has male enemies), but it is still interesting in many ways. Its most interesting perspective is that only having male enemies in the game reinforces the gender norm that men are supposed to be strong and tough. It can be argued that

from the narrative's perspective it would not make sense to have women as enemies, but it is still noteworthy that 100% of the humans you kill within the game are men. It is simply a common convention that enemies in shooter games are either men or some form of monsters/supernatural beings. All of this killing goes in stark contrast to a scene that occurs fairly early in the game. After Lara has been captured she ends up in a fight with one of the mercenaries **where** she is forced to kill him (TS. 04:24). The game makes a huge scene out of this, and indicates that Lara is not comfortable with killing other people. Despite how much effort is put in this scene it is then swiftly swept away, as Lara talks to Roth about how easy it actually was to kill the man (TS.05:43). Later on in the game you as the player literally kill hundreds of people, and you are even rewarded for certain ways of killing like finishing moves and headshots (TS.11:00-12:00).

Even the game itself points out how many people Lara has killed, in a scene where Mathias questions Lara's morality (TS.12:42).

Another phenomenon present in Tomb Raider that can be linked to both violence and gender studies is Lara's many death scenes throughout the game. Apart from dying from taking too much damage, there also exists several cinematic death scenes that are sprinkled throughout the game. Some of these death scenes include: Lara being shot with arrows, mauled at by wolves, and impaled both through her skull and her stomach respectively (TS.13:10-14:00). The connection to gender studies are made with the two facts that Lara is a woman, and that these are some very gruesome scenes. As women are traditionally portrayed as weaker, tenderer, and more fragile than men, it is interesting that the player is shown these gruesome scenes. This can be said to be a positive phenomenon for equality, since sugar coating the violence Lara is exposed to would indirectly strengthen the belief that women are weaker than men and needs to be protected.

4.3 Uncharted (Link to footage: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=AScBi9I95rE>)

Masculinity

Compared to Tomb Raider, the Uncharted series does not have as many singular moments where it showcases aspects that are interesting from a gender perspective. Instead, there are ongoing themes throughout the trilogy that are of interest. In regards to masculinity, the biggest and most interesting aspect of the games is the characters. Starting off with Nathan Drake, he comes across as a very easy going and witty character with a lot determination and chivalry to him. At an almost constant pace throughout the three games Nathan spouts witty comments, even in situations where he is in obvious danger (Naughty Dag. 2015, TS.00:00). This can be seen as a way to keep up a cool outward demeanour by shrugging off dangerous situations with witty comments. At several point in the games, Nathan acts in a very chivalrous and heroic way to save everyone near and dear to him (TS.03:00). As it is mostly female characters that Nathan want to protect, it can be argued that Nathan in some way sees himself as stronger than the female characters. Even though he acts very brave in some situations, in others it leans more towards stupidity, as he refuses help from people he knows to be competent.

Two other character of interest are Elena Fisher and Chloe Frazer. Both these female characters can be described as very strong and not very feminine in their way of acting. Both Elena and Chloe have several scenes where they show that they are strong and confident in themselves, a very masculine trait (TS.03:36, 07:31). It would be possible to argue that both of these characters are mainly masculine. Neither Elena nor Chloe ever become the damsel in distress that Nathan has to rescue, and when they are put in dangerous situations they are still capable. At the same time, it is quite clear that Nathan wants to protect both Elena and Chloe. However, there are two counter arguments against this being a feminine trait. The first one being that Nathan also want to protect his male friends, and the

second one being that this aspect says more about Nathan than it does about Elena and Chloe.

Femininity

Nathan does not portray much in the way of traditional femininity throughout the three games. A few instances where this shows clearly is when people close to him are injured or believed to be dead (TS.08:05). In these situations, Nathan does not show that much grief or sadness, but rather frustration or aggression. This is shown clearly in the sequences **where** Nathan believes that Sully has been killed. In both of these situations, Nathan first shows despair which is then turned into anger, a very masculine trait. Even when Elena is believed to be dead Nathan is very restrictive in showing his emotions. As a male character it would not be masculine for Nathan to cry over his friends.

Even though both Elena and Chloe are both quite strong and traditionally masculine in their behaviours, they still inhabit traditionally feminine aspects as well. Both these women are protected by Nathan on several occasions throughout the games (TS.03:00). Elena also gets kidnapped and saved at one instance (TS.10:20). While both these characters are shown to be very capable, there are still situations **where** Nathan does not want to put them at risk. Of course, this can both be seen as a caring gesture, but it can also be seen as an expression of gender roles.

Violence

Right from the start, there is one aspect regarding violence that needs to be brought up when analysing the Uncharted series. Just as in Tomb Raider, the player shoots and kills a lot of people in these games. The major difference between Nathan's and Lara's situation is that Nathan willingly searches for treasure, while Lara is shipwrecked on an island

against her will.

With this information in mind, it is remarkable how many people Nathan guns down without any sign of remorse at all (TS.10:39). Just as with many other games you are not supposed to think of the enemies as actual people, but rather as mere obstacles. However if one chooses to think of the enemies as people, then the Uncharted series can be said to have a major character inconsistency in Nathan. **The reason being that** his character is not shown to be particularly violent or aggressive, but rather very easy going (TS.00:00). Since the game itself does not draw any attention to all the people that Nathan kills, it becomes a fact that is very easily neglected. What makes the killing stand out more in Uncharted than in other games might be attributed to Nathan's personality. Many male video game protagonists tend to be very dark, brooding and serious. Nathan's personality lies in contrast to these traits, which might explain why the killing in Uncharted is much more remarkable than in many similar games.

5. Conclusion

As seen in the analysis, all of the games have interesting aspect from the perspective of gender studies. First and foremost, a lot more interesting aspects were found in Tomb Raider than in all of the Uncharted games. The primary reason for this most likely boils down to Lara being a woman in a situation that – within video games – is more commonly occupied by a male character. This means that Lara, in contrast to Nathan, leans heavily towards both masculine and feminine attributes. It can be said that Lara as a female character is allowed to have her softer moments, as well as her tougher ones. This is displayed throughout the game by events such as her crying or breaking down for example. Nathan on the other hand, barely shows any signs of traditional feminine attributes throughout the series. The same can actually be said for the characters Elena and Chloe, both of them show primarily masculine characteristics. In terms of violence, both games both contain an excessive amount in comparison to the narrative. The most striking difference however is that Lara is given more of a reason to kill people, as she is trying to survive and get off the island. Nathan is of course also trying to survive, but every situation he ends up in is caused by his own actions in the first place, which is different to Lara's situation. In terms of violence, the games also feature an all-male cast as the enemies. Even though the games feature narratives that support an all-male cast of enemies, this phenomenon is still problematic from a gender perspective. By not featuring any women as enemies, the games unconsciously reinforces the gender norm that women are frailer and tender than men are. Of course, it would also be considered taboo to actually feature women as enemies, since violence against women is a more sensitive subject than violence against men.

6. Discussion

This study has analysed two video games critically from a gender perspective. It has shown that both of these games inhabit noteworthy traits in terms of gender studies that deserves to be viewed with a critical lens. Therefore, it possible to claim that video games can be analysed critically, which in term can be used within education.

In concordance with the four connections to education, I argue that video games can indeed be useful in an educational setting. In any given assignment that involves critical analysis of a cultural medium, a video game could substitute a novel or a movie. This notion is supported both by the curriculum for English, as well as research conducted within the field of gender studies. It is also likely that some students have a large interest in video games, which in terms may lead to them being more motivated in their work. Lastly, the lenses used in critical theory can be successfully implemented onto video games. Not only can the narrative be studied, butalso the rules and structures of the game.

For further research of the subject, it would be interesting to see more examples of games being analysed through critical theory, since there are many critical lenses and just as many genres of video games. It would also be interesting to analyse how critical theory and video games would work on a more practical level by using the two in a real classroom situation.

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