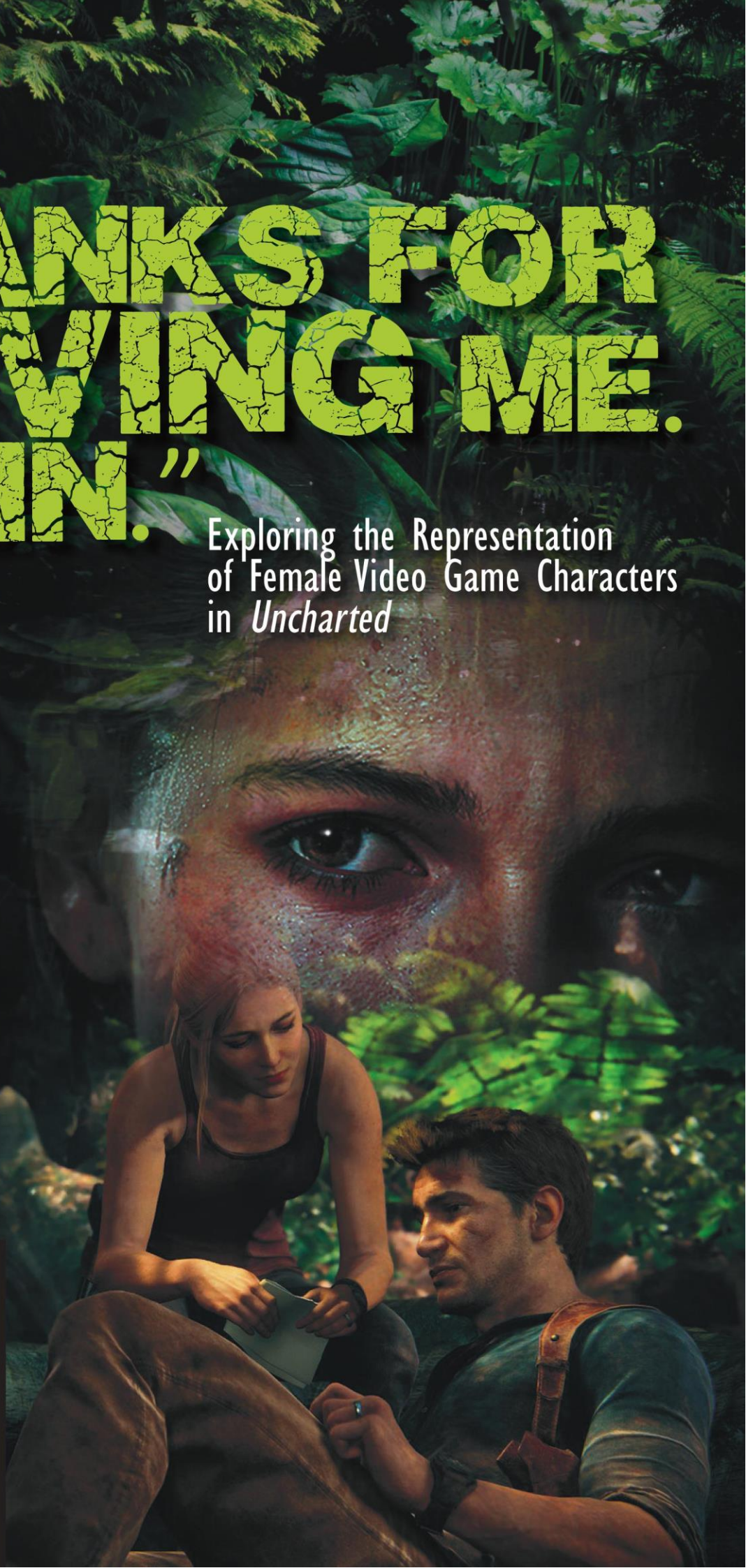


# "THANKS FOR SAVING ME. AGAIN."

Exploring the Representation  
of Female Video Game Characters  
in *Uncharted*

Lotte van Eupen  
s4610326

BA Thesis  
English Language and Culture  
Supervisor: C.J.J. Louttit  
Date: 3rd of July 2020



ENGELSE TAAL EN CULTUUR

Teacher who will receive this document: Dr C.J.J. Louttit

Title of document: “Thanks for saving me. Again.” Exploring the Representation of Female Video Game Characters in *Uncharted*

Name of course: BA Thesis English Literature

Date of submission: 3-7-2020

Please read the Faculty’s Declaration concerning Fraud and Plagiarism preceding this cover sheet. By signing this cover sheet, you also acknowledge your knowledge of and agreement with its terms.

The work submitted here is the sole responsibility of the undersigned, who has neither committed plagiarism nor colluded in its production.

Signed

LvE

Name of student: Lotte van Eupen

Student number: s4610326

## ABSTRACT

This thesis investigates the representation of women in video games and the development thereof through an analysis of the female secondary characters in the four main games of the *Uncharted* series. To answer the question of how the female gender is represented throughout the four *Uncharted* games, this study employs feminist theories by Luce Irigaray, Laura Mulvey, and Karen Boyle to analyse the way in which the characters are or are not objectified, sexualised, and victimised. The analysis indicates that all of the most prominent female secondary characters in *Uncharted* are to some degree subject to objectification, sexualisation, victimisation or a combination of the three. This study also finds, however, that a general improvement of the situation can be traced chronologically through the *Uncharted* series, with the most negative female representations in the first games and the least negative representations in the last game.

**Key words:** damsel in distress, feminism, gender representation, male gaze, objectification, sexualisation, *Uncharted*, victimisation, video game studies, violence

## TABLE OF CONTENTS

<b>Introduction .....</b>	<b>4</b>
<b>Chapter 1 – Theory &amp; Methodology .....</b>	<b>10</b>
1.1 Irigaray and Objectification .....	10
1.2 Mulvey and the Male Gaze .....	11
1.3 Boyle and Victimisation .....	12
1.4 Methodology .....	13
<b>Chapter 2 – Female Representation in <i>Uncharted 1</i> .....</b>	<b>16</b>
<b>Chapter 3 – Female Representation in <i>Uncharted 2</i> .....</b>	<b>18</b>
<b>Chapter 4 – Female Representation in <i>Uncharted 3</i> .....</b>	<b>21</b>
<b>Chapter 5 – Female Representation in <i>Uncharted 4</i> .....</b>	<b>24</b>
<b>Discussion .....</b>	<b>27</b>
<b>Conclusion .....</b>	<b>29</b>
<b>Bibliography .....</b>	<b>30</b>
<b>Appendix .....</b>	<b>32</b>



## INTRODUCTION

Nathan Drake, a witty, Indiana Jones-esque adventurer looking to procure an artifact with a clue to a legendary pirate treasure, opens a door behind the scenes of a black market auction and bumps into a notably muscular woman in an elegant jumpsuit, who notifies him that he is, in fact, not supposed to be there. After a failed attempt at talking his way past her, she twists his hand and throws him to the centre of the dark room. Suspenseful music starts playing as the woman steps into the room, and declares, whilst ominously taking off her heels:

“I’m not in the mood for games. Give me the crucifix.”

“Lady... You’re lucky I’m a gentleman, ‘cause if I weren’t, I would-”

Before Nathan is able to get up and finish his sentence, she kicks him against a bookcase, and the two start fighting. This is where the so-called cutscene ends. The player holding the PlayStation controller is now given the task to fight this woman, which proves to be quite impossible: no matter how the player mashes the buttons, the woman ends up dealing the majority of the blows and eventually defenestrating the overwhelmed treasure hunter.

This is a scene which an estimated twenty seven million PS4 players<sup>1</sup> encountered when playing the fourth and final game of Naughty Dog’s *Uncharted* series, *Uncharted 4: A Thief’s End*. Video games emerged in the 1980s and have nowadays established themselves as a significant part of the entertainment industry, with an estimated 2.5 billion gamers world-wide.<sup>2</sup> This staggering number includes virtually all types of video games, ranging from PC games and console games to mobile games, and a plethora of genres, including the action-adventure game genre which *Uncharted* belongs to, as the scene above demonstrates. *Uncharted 4*’s unbeatable female character, Nadine Ross, led to a wave of controversy. The comment section accompanying a YouTube compilation of all the fights the player has against Nadine shows a clear division. One user claims:

“It’s obvious they wrote the fight so that she beats his ass and he doesn’t get a single hit on her ONLY because she’s a woman and the game would be criticized by

---

<sup>1</sup> “Uncharted 4: A Thief’s End – number of players (PlayStation) – gamstat,” Gamstat, accessed April 29, 2020, [http://gamstat.com/games/Uncharted\\_4/](http://gamstat.com/games/Uncharted_4/).

<sup>2</sup> “2020 Video Game Industry Statistics, Trends & Data,” WePC, accessed March 10, 2020, <https://www.wepc.com/news/video-game-statistics/>.

feminists. Notice how in a lot of games the male protagonist loses against the single female foe of the game. It's crazy that not many people realize that is has to do with censorship.”<sup>3</sup>

Many users seem to agree to the idea that feminist criticism was a driving force behind the development of Nadine. Other users, however, jump to Nadine's defence. One user, for instance, adds to a thread on the fact that Nadine cannot be beaten in a fist fight that “it's just to prove that Nadine is a better fighter, which she is. It has nothing to do with gender,”<sup>4</sup> and a user by the name of GoodOleUltraviolence is simply in awe of the fact that she is “such a kick-ass... What a woman. I'm in love.”<sup>5</sup> Some players clearly seem to be troubled by the fact that a female character is shown to physically dominate a male character, considering it to be highly unrealistic and a way for video game developers to solely please an assumed feminist audience, while another group of players seems very happy to see a rare empowered female character, or any female representation in video games at all. This dispute indicates a larger subject of controversy within the gaming industry, which is the representation of gender.

The video game community traditionally consisted of mostly male gamers, though nowadays women appear to make up almost 52% of the entire community.<sup>6</sup> Despite this apparent majority, women still experience sexism on a large scale within the industry and the community. The industry is found to be “extremely skewed, with female designers, programmers, and producers comprising only a fragment of its workers”<sup>7</sup>, and female gamers “experience ostracism and harassment because of their sex”<sup>8</sup> on a regular basis in online environments. The issue of gender continues within the games themselves, in particular with regard to the representation of the female gender. Although video games are a relatively young field of research, many researchers have studied the representation of gender in games extensively, especially within the feminist debate. A large study of over 500 different male and female characters found that “[females] appeared far less frequently in video games than

---

<sup>3</sup> “Uncharted 4 All Nadine Fights Scenes Vs Nathan Drake,” YouTube video, 12:24, “Izuniy,” May 8, 2016, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=C7Bva1r1jzU>, comment by Zack Woodd, 2020.

<sup>4</sup> Ibid., comment by Joshua Willis, 2017.

<sup>5</sup> Ibid., comment by GoodOleUltraviolence, 2017.

<sup>6</sup> Meg Jayanth, “52% of gamers are women – but the industry doesn't know it,” *The Guardian Online*, Sept. 18, 2014, <https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2014/sep/18/52-percent-people-playing-games-women-industry-doesnt-know>.

<sup>7</sup> Jesse Fox and Way Yen Tang, “Sexism in online video games: The role of conformity to masculine norms and social dominance orientation,” *Computers in Human Behavior* 33 (April 2014): 314.

<sup>8</sup> Ibid., 315.

males and were more likely to be shown in a more sexualized light than male characters”.<sup>9</sup> The same study found that the already scarce female characters were typically secondary (or support) characters rather than protagonists. These secondary, unplayable characters tend to be assigned the role of a passive and attractive damsel in distress who waits to be saved by the male protagonist.<sup>10</sup> This includes some of the most well-known female video game characters, like Princess Peach from Nintendo’s *Super Mario* franchise, or *The Legend of Zelda*’s Princess Zelda. Although most games traditionally featured a male protagonist (and still largely do so today as mentioned above), the gaming industry did see the emergence of games with female protagonists, like *Tomb Raider*, whose protagonist Lara Croft was a particularly strong and independent young woman. Most striking about her initially, however, were her large breasts, skin-tight clothing (and lack thereof) and a generally sexualised appearance.

Lara Croft has been a hot topic in the feminist debate since her creation in 1996, with researchers analysing her strength and independence as a character on the one hand and her sexualised appearance on the other.<sup>11</sup> Various studies focus on the various roles which Lara could be interpreted to carry, including those of a positive role model for girls or a disturbing female Frankenstein’s monster.<sup>12</sup> Some papers value the character of Lara Croft as a female ambassador for women in games, who shows that “female characters in video games do not have to be helpless victims – they can be protagonists as much as any male character can”<sup>13</sup>, whereas other studies consider her character to be catered mainly to the male gaze by “[c]onforming to stereotypical perceptions of female beauty”<sup>14</sup>.

Lara Croft is, of course, not the only female video game character performing the role of protagonist in a popular video game franchise. Needless to say, many other female video game characters have been the subject of feminist research as well. One controversial example is Samus Aran, the main protagonist of Nintendo’s *Metroid* franchise of which the

---

<sup>9</sup> Edward Downs and Stacy L. Smith, “Keeping Abreast of Hypersexuality: A Video Game Character Content Analysis,” *Sex Roles* 62 (2010): 729.

<sup>10</sup> Maja Mikula, “Gender and Videogames: the political valency of Lara Croft,” *Continuum: Journal of Media & Cultural Studies* 17, no. 1 (2003): 80.

<sup>11</sup> Helen W. Kennedy, “Lara Croft: Feminist Icon or Cyberbimbo? On the Limits of Textual Analysis,” *The International Journal of Computer Game Research* 2 no. 2 (2002), <http://www.gamestudies.org/0202/kennedy/>; Maja Mikula, “Gender and Videogames: the political valency of Lara Croft,” 79-87; Hye-Won Han and Se-Jin Song, “Characterization of Female Protagonists in Video Games: A Focus on Lara Croft,” *Asian Journal of Women’s Studies* 20, no. 3 (2014): 27-49.

<sup>12</sup> Anne-Marie Schleiner, “Does Lara Croft wear fake polygons? Gender and gender role subversion in computer adventure games,” *Leonardo* 34, no. 3 (2001): 222-24.

<sup>13</sup> Jade Avis, “Lara Croft – Pixelated Object or Feminist Icon?,” *BrightONLINE student literary journal* no. 6 (November 2015), <http://arts.brighton.ac.uk/projects/brightonline/issue-number-six/lara-croft-pixelated-object-or-feminist-gaming-icon>.

<sup>14</sup> Kirsty R. Horrell and Gareth R. Schott, “Girl Gamers and their Relationship with the Gaming Culture,” *Convergence: The International Journal of Research into New Media Technologies* 6, no. 4 (2000): 45.

first game was published back in 1986. The controversy around Samus Aran's gender lies with the fact that her gender was only revealed to be female at the end of the first game, when she takes off her sci-fi mech suit. This came as an unexpected surprise to the players, considering that "the mech suit signifies clearly a very powerful "bad-ass" (...) image in a very masculinised representation"<sup>15</sup>. Interestingly, the woman operating the suit was far from masculine: with "long legs, a narrow waist, large breasts, and a fragility to the limbs that suggests a total lack of musculature implied by both the mech suit and her character's actions"<sup>16</sup> she appears to be represented in an overly sexualised manner, which could be seen as a problematic instance of gender stereotyping where a woman is only powerful by the virtue of her masculine mechanical suit. Other games that were studied with regard to the representations of female protagonists include *Mass Effect 3*,<sup>17</sup> in which the player can choose to play either a male or a female version of the protagonist, and multiplayer games like *League of Legends*, which one study submitted to a thorough content analysis with regard to the portrayal of femininity.<sup>18</sup>

In the end, however, Lara Croft takes the brunt of academic criticism with regard to the representation of gender in video games. Many recent Lara Croft-centred research papers have made note of Lara's changing appearance throughout the franchise. Between the first *Tomb Raider* game in 1996 and the newest in 2018 Lara's appearance has seen a distinct evolution: more skin coverage and less emphasis on unrealistic beauty standards like disproportionate breasts and an unnaturally thin waist. This visibly decline in physical sexualisation is corroborated by a large content analysis by Lynch et al. of 571 playable female characters, which found a clear "decrease in sexualization of female characters after 2006".<sup>19</sup> What is notable about this study, and other studies into female video game characters, is that the majority focuses on playable characters, or protagonists, rather than secondary (or support) characters, even though the majority of female video game characters consists of support characters, as mentioned above. When secondary characters are the subject of research, they are typically studied alongside playable characters as part of a large-scale

---

<sup>15</sup> Katherine Roberts, "A sociological exploration of female character in the Metroid videogames series," *The Computer Games Journal* 1, no. 2 (2012): 97.

<sup>16</sup> Ibid., 98.

<sup>17</sup> John Kotsiovos, "Representations of femininity in Mass Effect 3," Thesis, University of the Witwatersrand, 2013.

<sup>18</sup> Bryan Kuk and Annette Tézli, "Playing Gender: An Analysis of Femininity in the Popular Culture Phenomenon League of Legends," Thesis, University of Calgary, 2019.

<sup>19</sup> Teresa Lynch, Jessica E. Tompkins, Irene I. van Driel and Niki Fritz, "Sexy, Strong and Secondary: A Content Analysis of Female Characters in Video Games across 31 Years," *Journal of Communication* 66 no. 4 (2016): 13.



content analysis, of which an example is the abovementioned content analysis of over 500 male and female characters,<sup>20</sup> rather than being the focus of the investigation. Another large study which investigated a selection of female protagonists and secondary characters looked at the difference in representation the two types of characters, arriving at the interesting conclusion that “women cast as protagonists are more likely to be strong and independent whereas women cast as support characters are more likely to be weak and dependent, sometimes even stereotyped”.<sup>21</sup> The apparent lack of extensive research focusing on female secondary characters and the evidence that suggests that secondary characters are in fact more likely to be subject to negative gender representation than female playable characters provide an opportunity to focus on female support characters.

A different action-adventure game franchise that, unlike *Tomb Raider*, has not been the subject of much (if any) academic gender-related debate is the *Uncharted* series. This video game franchise is centred around a male treasure hunter named Nathan Drake who, much like Lara Croft, submits himself to countless perilous situations in the pursuit of legendary treasures and lost worlds. All four games from the main series feature the same male protagonist, but in addition each game has a collection of female support characters and, as the introduction above demonstrated with Nadine, even fearsome female antagonists. This makes *Uncharted* a particularly suitable game franchise to investigate, since not one of the female characters in the series is playable. A second reason *Uncharted* is particularly interesting to investigate is the fact that the first game came out in 2007 and the final game from the main series was published in 2016. Several studies including Lynch et al. have pointed out how the degree of sexualisation of female video game characters has seen a steady decline in recent years.<sup>22</sup> Since Lynch et al. even specifies the year 2006 as the turning point, the *Uncharted* series provides a neat window of time in which any changes or developments in the representation of female support characters can be analysed and interpreted, which might in turn support the notion that there is an improving situation for women and their representation in the video game industry. Finally, *Uncharted* has enjoyed an enormous popularity within the international entertainment industry, much like *Tomb Raider*, with the entire series having sold over forty million units one year after *Uncharted 4* was published, making it plausible to assume that the series’ influence is not insignificant. On the basis of

---

<sup>20</sup> Edward Downs and Stacy L. Smith, “Keeping Abreast of Hypersexuality.”

<sup>21</sup> Pauline Ewa Rajkowska, “Roles of female video game characters and their impact on gender representation,” Thesis, Uppsala University, 2014: 61.

<sup>22</sup> Teresa Lynch, Jessica E. Tompkins, Irene I. van Driel and Niki Fritz, “Sexy, Strong and Secondary,” 13.

these factors, in light of the evidently problematic situation within the video game industry regarding the representation of women, the following research question was formed:

How is the female gender represented through the female secondary characters in the *Uncharted* game series, and how does this representation develop throughout the series?

To answer this question, this study will draw from several feminist theories, including work by Karen Boyle, Laura Mulvey and Luce Irigaray, in order to address the representation of female characters in *Uncharted*. An examination of these theories can be found in Chapter 1. The same chapter also contains an extensive discussion of the methodology. The subsequent chapters revolve around the study's findings and the discussion thereof. Chapter 2 focuses on the female characters and their representation in terms of objectification, sexualisation, and victimisation in *Uncharted 1*, followed by Chapter 3, in which the same method is applied to the characters in *Uncharted 2*. Chapter 4 focuses on the female secondary characters of *Uncharted 3* and Chapter 5 is aimed at the analysis of those in *Uncharted 4*. Finally, the interpretations, implications and limitations of the analysis are discussed in the discussion and the conclusion.

The analysis is expected to show a move towards more empowered female characters and a move away from sexualisation, objectification, and victimisation throughout the series, which is in line with the content analysis by Lynch et al.: physically stronger women, less stereotypical characters, a decrease of focus on sex appeal (or, pleasing the male gaze), and an increase in agency and independence as opposed to, for instance, the stereotypical damsel in distress. Elements of sexualisation, objectification and victimisation for female characters are still expected to be found in all four games, however, despite a general improvement.

## CHAPTER 1 – THEORY & METHODOLOGY

This study employs several relevant theories in order to discuss the pertinent issue of gender representation in video games. Section 1.1 addresses the concept of female objectification through Luce Irigaray's theory of the woman as an object of exchange. Section 1.2 discusses the issue of physical sexualisation and the theory of the male gaze as discussed by Laura Mulvey, followed by section 1.3 which deals with Karen Boyle's theory on the victimisation of and media violence against women. The final section, section 1.4, contains the methodology which was developed using the theories discussed in the theoretical framework.

### 1.1 Irigaray and Objectification

The chapter "Women on the Market" of Luce Irigaray's book *This Sex Which Is Not One* (originally published as *Ce sexe qui n'en est pas un*) opens with a memorable statement: "[t]he society we know, our own culture, is based upon the exchange of women."<sup>23</sup> Irigaray argues that, in patriarchal societies, the "circulation of women among men is what establishes the operations of society,"<sup>24</sup> since all exchange systems in such society revolve around men's needs and desires. Women are reduced to usable objects that are transferred and traded between men as part of a big metaphorical market. In her objectification into merchandise, or even a "possible currency of exchange,"<sup>25</sup> a woman loses her personal qualities and their value, which is instead determined by the value that men estimate her body to have.<sup>26</sup> Irigaray goes on to consider several types of women and their social status, or in other words, their value to the male merchants. She considers that there are three roles that are imposed upon women in a patriarchal society: mothers, virgins and prostitutes. Mothers have a clear use value in their reproductive abilities and general "domestic maintenance," including bringing up the man's children. Mothers are excluded from the actual circulation of women, being instead marked as "reproductive instruments" and "private property" of the father-man.<sup>27</sup> Virgins, on the other hand, are "pure exchange value,"<sup>28</sup> valued on the potentiality of her use, only part of the exchange system among men until her virginity is consumed and she becomes

---

<sup>23</sup> Luce Irigaray, *This Sex Which Is Not One*, trans. Catherine Porter (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1977), 170.

<sup>24</sup> Ibid., 184.

<sup>25</sup> Ibid., 157.

<sup>26</sup> Ibid., 187.

<sup>27</sup> Ibid., 185.

<sup>28</sup> Ibid., 186.

valuable in terms of her use. The prostitute, then, has a somewhat more complicated position in the exchange system. She is condemned and tolerated simultaneously, but in the end her value is determined by men and their desires and relations as well. Her use value lies in the qualities of her female body in combination with the desires of men, and she continues to be circulated among men as an exchangeable product.<sup>29</sup>

Interestingly, Irigaray's theory of the woman as an object for exchange between men can be applied to discuss a well-known and previously mentioned stereotypical trope in video games and the entertainment industry in general: that of the damsel in distress. The term 'damsel in distress' describes the "helpless, passive, gorgeous damsels saved from perilous situations by courageous men who often become their husbands afterwards."<sup>30</sup> The premise of a young and unmarried, beautiful and endangered woman can be linked to the concept of the virginal woman described by Irigaray. An interesting feature of the damsel in distress is the so-called "Smooch (or Sex) of Victory", where the rescued woman kisses or has sex with her saviour in return for her saviour. As Bonenfant and Trépanier-Jobin put it in their comprehensive article on the links between several feminist theories and video game studies, this almost natural procedure in the damsel in distress trope "gives the impression that women are tractable objects and that they must give their bodies to their rescuers as rightful compensation."<sup>31</sup> This then has a clear link with Irigaray's theory, which states that women are passive sexualised objects or commodities that are traded among men and are valued mainly for their bodies and the consumption thereof. Irigaray's theory of women as currency can thus be neatly applied in an investigation of the representation of women in video games, specifically in tracing instances of objectification of female characters.

## 1.2 Mulvey and the Male Gaze

A topic with a strong link to that of objectification and which has been mentioned frequently in the introduction is that of physical sexualisation. Laura Mulvey's theory of the male gaze supports the notion that objectified and sexualised female video game characters are, in fact, part of a long line of objectified women in the entertainment industry.<sup>32</sup> Mulvey's 1975 article "Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema"<sup>33</sup> concentrates on the cinema, with a

---

<sup>29</sup> Ibid., 186.

<sup>30</sup> Gabrielle Trépanier-Jobin and Maude Bonenfant, "Bridging Game Studies and Feminist Theories," *Gender Issues in Video Games*, special issue in *Kinephanos* (2017): 29.

<sup>31</sup> Ibid., 31.

<sup>32</sup> Ibid., 36.

<sup>33</sup> Laura Mulvey, "Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema," in *Feminist Film Theory: A Reader*, ed. Sue Thornham (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1999): 59.

special focus on mainstream Hollywood films and their role in the objectification and sexualisation of the image of the woman. Mulvey describes how two types of pleasure arise from watching films, one of which is through one's identification with the image on the screen. The second type of pleasure is 'scopophilia', which she describes to be the "pleasure in using another person as an object of sexual stimulation through sight."<sup>34</sup> Mulvey goes on to argue that in the world's patriarchal societies it is woman, not man, whose image is subjected to the male gaze and male desire and who is to be looked at and displayed as a sexual object whilst the man participates in the act of looking at her.<sup>35</sup> The woman is strikingly passive in film narratives: while the man represents power and drives the action in the story, the woman's appearance interrupts the flow of the film's action in a "[moment] of erotic contemplation."<sup>36</sup>

According to Mulvey, aside from being the bearer of the action, the man is also the bearer of the spectator's look. As spectators identify with the protagonist of the story, they follow his look and identify with his erotic gaze directed at the female form. Similarly, when the male protagonist gains control over the female character through the subjection of her eroticism (i.e. taking possession of her as she falls in love with him), the spectator participates in his power and thus indirectly controls her too.<sup>37</sup> This identification with the male protagonist's look and perception of the world reinforces the idea that women merely play a passive role in patriarchal societies and they are to be reduced to their "*to-be-looked-at-ness*"<sup>38</sup> as even most mainstream films seem to be made for men. Mulvey's theory of the male gaze can also be applied to video games, especially cinematic games like the *Uncharted* series. The notion of objectification through physical sexualisation, the effect of a woman's appearance on the screen on the flow of the action and her "*to-be-looked-at-ness*" all offer more perspectives to investigate the representation of women in *Uncharted*.

### 1.3 Boyle and Victimisation

The third theory which will be used to answer the research question of this thesis is based on the concept of female violence and victimisation. The victimisation of women in the media has been a topic of research for decades. Back in 1994 Julia Wood described how "[s]ubstantial violence towards women" in media "desensitiz[es] men and women alike to the

---

<sup>34</sup> Ibid., 62.

<sup>35</sup> Ibid., 62-3.

<sup>36</sup> Ibid., 63.

<sup>37</sup> Ibid., 64.

<sup>38</sup> Ibid., 63.



unnaturalness and unacceptability of force and brutality between human beings.”<sup>39</sup> In other words, the representation of women as victims in media has the dangerous effect of normalising violence against women. A theory that can be used to analyse the concept of female victimisation in *Uncharted* is that of Karen Boyle, in her book *Media and Violence: Gendering the Debates*.<sup>40</sup> Boyle’s theory revolves around the fact that women in the media are generally depicted as the subjects of violence rather than the perpetrators of violence, while men are typically portrayed as the aggressors. According to Boyle, violent women are a threat to the traditional conception of women as naturally vulnerable and passive caregivers and, more generally, to the traditional gender division which views men as the dominant sex.<sup>41</sup> As a reaction to this threat, the violent woman is either deemed an unnatural woman or her agency in the crime she committed is denied. Boyle argues that the women whose violence is socially most acceptable are mothers who acted in protection of their children,<sup>42</sup> which can be linked to the stereotypical view that women are naturally nurturing.

Bonenfant and Trépanier-Jobin discuss how Boyle’s theory can be applied to studies into the representation of female characters in video games. They describe how her theory might help explain why the video game industry seems “hesitant to depict women as violent”, frequently depicting them as victims to violence instead.<sup>43</sup> Boyle’s theory thus provides ample resources to investigate whether and in what way female characters in the *Uncharted* series are victimised, and how the games deal with violent women.

## 1.4 Methodology

This study will attempt to answer the research question by analysing the female secondary characters in the four main *Uncharted* games with regard to their objectification, sexualisation and victimisation. Two methods of analysis will be applied, namely close reading and qualitative content analysis. A video game study by Bizzocchi and Tanenbaum defines close reading to be “the detailed observation of a work, based on immersion into the piece sustained over repeated viewing, supplemented by the systematic notation of relevant

---

<sup>39</sup> Julia T. Wood, “Gendered Media: The Influence of Media on Views of Gender,” in *Gendered Lives: Communication, Gender, and Culture* (Belmont, CA: Wadsworth Publishing, 1994): 240.

<sup>40</sup> Karen Boyle, *Media and Violence: Gendering the Debates* (London: SAGE Publications, 2005).

<sup>41</sup> Boyle, *Media and Violence*, 98-100, as quoted in Bonenfant and Trépanier-Jobin, “Bridging Game Studies and Feminist Theories,” 40.

<sup>42</sup> Boyle, *Media and Violence*, 118-9, as quoted in Bonenfant and Trépanier-Jobin, “Bridging Game Studies and Feminist Theories,” 41.

<sup>43</sup> Bonenfant and Trépanier-Jobin, “Bridging Game Studies,” 41.

details, leading to an explication and higher order analysis of the work”.<sup>44</sup> A note could be made on the use of the term ‘viewing’ since, arguably, the purpose of a video game is to be played. For the purposes of this study, however, actually playing the four main *Uncharted* games would not add to the findings. The *Uncharted* games are story-based adventure games, renowned for their cinematics, which revolve around a narrative upon which the player cannot exercise any influence, much like films. On top of that, the interactive elements associated with video games are not relevant to this project since this study focuses on secondary characters which the player cannot control and can hardly (if at all) interact with. It is thus far more practical to follow the narrative by viewing and reviewing edited videos of the games which include all the games’ cutscenes and relevant gameplay, the latter to make sure all important dialogue and character behaviour is included.

The method of close reading will be employed in the investigation of all three concepts discussed above: the characters’ objectification, sexualisation, and victimisation. It will be applied to determine the presence of objectification by following Irigaray’s theory of woman as an object of exchange. The characters’ sexualisation will be investigated using Mulvey’s theory of the male gaze. The examination of their victimisation revolves around Boyle’s theory on violent women and women as victims.

In addition to close reading, the concepts of sexualisation and victimisation will be further researched using qualitative content analysis. In order to provide a clearer picture of the type and degree of physical sexualisation, as well as the presence of violent women and their treatment, this thesis employs parts of the methodology used in Lynch et al.’s content analysis. Lynch et al. focus on the quantitative evaluation of the content, but for reasons of scope and the number of characters discussed in this study, parts of their method will be applied and assessed qualitatively. To analyse a character’s physical sexualisation, they examined four areas of her body, which were the chest, the buttocks, the waist and the legs. The chest was considered sexualised if one or more of the following applied: disproportionate breasts, bare skin between the bottoms of the breasts and the armpits, or accentuation by clothing. For the buttocks similar features applied: exposed skin between the top of the hips and the bottom of the buttocks or accentuation by clothing. For the waist they looked for bare skin in the midriff area and for disproportion between the waist and the hip shape. Finally, legs were sexualised if there was bare skin between the hips and the top of the female characters’ knees. They also looked for any sexualised movements that drew attention to the

---

<sup>44</sup> Jim Bizzocchi and Joshua Tanenbaum, “*Mass Effect 2*: A Case Study in the Design of Game Narrative,” *Bulletin of Science, Technology & Society* (October 2012): 3, doi:10.1177/0270467612463796.

characters' bodies.<sup>45</sup> Lynch et al. can also be used with regard to the concept of violent women in video games. To determine whether a character was depicted violently, Lynch et al. considered them violent "if they engaged in threats of physical force or use of such force against an animate being or group of beings."<sup>46</sup>

For reasons of scope as well as availability, not all the series' female characters will be analysed. This thesis examines the four most prominent ones, namely Elena Fisher (present in all four games), Chloe Frazer (present in *Uncharted 2* and *3*), Kate Marlowe (antagonist in *Uncharted 3*), and Nadine Ross (antagonist in *Uncharted 4*). The discussion will elaborate on this choice more thoroughly. Each chapter is thus structured as follows: it begins with a brief synopsis of the *Uncharted* game on which it focuses, and subsequently deals with the prominent female characters that are present in the respective game by examining them individually in relation to the concepts of objectification, sexualisation, and victimisation.

---

<sup>45</sup> Teresa Lynch, Jessica E. Tompkins, Irene I. van Driel and Niki Fritz, "Sexy, Strong and Secondary," 9.

<sup>46</sup> *Ibid.*, 10.

## CHAPTER 2 – FEMALE REPRESENTATION IN *UNCHARTED 1*

For the analysis of *Uncharted 1* and for screenshots of Elena's physical appearance this study utilised a YouTube video by "Gamer's Little Playground" which "used relevant gameplay, important dialogue and all cutscenes."<sup>47</sup> In *Uncharted 1*, or *Uncharted: Drake's Fortune*, the player plays as Nathan Drake, an explorer annex treasure hunter, who takes his partner Sullivan and journalist Elena Fisher to search for Sir Francis Drake's coffin. It proves to be empty, containing a clue which leads Sullivan and Nate (leaving Elena behind) to the Amazon in search of El Dorado. They encounter the main antagonist, Roman, another treasure hunter, and his accomplice Navarro. They shoot Sullivan (who survives) while Nate flees, running into Elena, who then helps him escape by seaplane. They crash and get separated; Nathan is captured by pirates but is busted out by Elena. After several encounters they find an abandoned German bunker and discover El Dorado is a cursed statue. Elena is captured by Roman and Navarro. The statue's powers kill Roman and Navarro takes it to a ship nearby. A final showdown ensues, in which Nate kills Navarro.

### 2.1 Elena Fisher

In relation to objectification, sexualisation, and victimisation, the protagonist's main love interest Elena is generally, though not entirely, represented quite negatively throughout *Uncharted 1*. In Ch.3 (the game's third chapter) Elena and Nathan crash with a plane and Elena has disappeared when Nate wakes up. The player's objective is to find and save her, effectively turning her into a passive damsel in distress. The roles take a full turn when in Ch.6 Nathan is captured and imprisoned by pirates and Elena single-handedly busts him out. In Ch.11 the roles are reversed again as Elena falls through a rotten bridge and is shown to be physically helpless without Nathan. In Ch.17 Nathan is the damsel again, and Elena pulls him to safety out of a monster-infested pit. Ch.19, however, ends the role switching prevalent in the preceding chapters. Elena is captured by the two male antagonists. Roman reinforces her status of an object of exchange when he sarcastically asks Nathan whether he minds if they "borrow Miss Fisher a little longer,"<sup>48</sup> suggesting that she is in their possession now, but simultaneously implying that she belonged to Nathan first. For the remainder of the narrative

---

<sup>47</sup> "Uncharted: Drake's Fortune All Cutscenes (Nathan Drake Collection) Game Movie 1080p 60FPS," YouTube video, 1:55:36, "Gamer's Little Playground," November 18, 2015, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=n0z588yNnqo>.

<sup>48</sup> Ibid., 1:41:35.

Elena remains in possession of Navarro and Roman, unable to physically free herself and awaiting her rescue by the male protagonist, therefore almost perfectly embodying a damsel in distress. When Elena is rescued by Nate in Ch.22, the original ‘ownership’ is restored.

In addition to such distinct objectification, Elena’s depiction tends to be sexualised as well. There are several instances where Elena’s appearance interrupts the flow of the action. In Ch.3 she pulls Nathan away from a group of chasing mercenaries. The sexuality associated with her appearance is underlined when Nate pushes Elena up against a wall in order to hide from the mercenaries. The final chapter, Ch.22, offers a moment of “erotic contemplation”<sup>49</sup> as well when a kiss between the two is interrupted by Sullivan. Although her presence is not overly sexual and she does not exclusively appear to provide the protagonist (and the player) with some “erotic contemplation”, several moments support Mulvey’s idea that a woman on screen is frequently objectified and a way to visually please the male spectator. The variables adapted from Lynch et al. regarding the degree and type of physical sexualisation paint a similar picture. Her character appears in three different outfits, of which the first is in a notably non-sexualised diving suit, illustrated by Figure 1 (see Appendix). Figure 2 and Figure 3, however, show a prominent change as her shirt has permanently crawled up her stomach, exposing and therefore sexualising her waist.

Finally, Elena is significantly victimised, though she is frequently depicted as the aggressor of violence as well. She is portrayed as violent in most chapters (following Lynch et al.’s definition) as she supports Nathan during most gunfights and punches him in Ch.3 in retribution for leaving her behind. Ch.21 is also significant as Elena kicks a mercenary out of the helicopter she is being held captive in. Despite her clear ability to be violent, nothing supports Boyle’s idea that she would therefore be an unnatural woman even though she generally inflicts violence to protect herself or an otherwise perfectly capable Nathan instead of an obviously vulnerable person. Nevertheless, one major instance of victimisation is very substantial. In Ch.19, when she is captured by the antagonists, she is roughly pulled back by her hair and punched in the stomach for trying to escape. This manifestation of violence is portrayed more violently than the violence she inflicts herself, especially in combination with her apparent helplessness, putting focus on her role as vulnerable victim.

---

<sup>49</sup> Mulvey, “Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema,” 63.



### CHAPTER 3 – FEMALE REPRESENTATION IN *UNCHARTED 2*

For the analysis of *Uncharted 2* and screenshots of Elena and Chloe this study made use of a YouTube video by “Izuniy.”<sup>50</sup> *Uncharted 2: Among Thieves* starts with Nathan and Harry Flynn. Flynn wants Nate and Chloe Frazer to help steal an artifact in Istanbul for a client (main antagonist Lazarevic), which contained clues of Shambhala’s location. Flynn betrays Nathan, and Sullivan and Chloe bail him out of prison. After an encounter with Lazarevic they find a clue that leads them to Nepal. There Chloe and Nate encounter Elena. After another confrontation with the antagonists Chloe is taken prisoner on a train. Nathan gets shot trying to rescue her and wakes up in a Tibetan village where he learns Shambhala contains a legendary magical stone. Elena appears in the village but Lazarevic attacks it. Nathan and Elena find the entrance to Shambhala, but Flynn and Lazarevic arrive too, holding Chloe. After several fights the magical ‘stone’ is found, Flynn kills himself and injures Elena with a grenade and Nathan kills Lazarevic and destroys Shambhala. It ends with a scene in the Tibetan village.

#### 3.1 Elena Fisher

Moving to *Uncharted 2*, not much seems to have changed regarding Elena’s representation. Similar to *Uncharted 1*, there are a number of instances in *Uncharted 2* where Elena is depicted as an object of exchange. In Ch.6 Elena remarks on her own status as such object when she tells Chloe, Nathan’s new love interest, how she was “last year’s model”.<sup>51</sup> Much later, in Ch.24, she and Chloe are captured by Lazarevic who tries to make Nathan choose which one gets shot. In doing this, Lazarevic reinforces their depersonalised status as objects that he can ‘steal’ from another man and play around with. The damsel-in-distress trope occurs in *Uncharted 2* as well. In Ch.11, Elena saves Nathan and herself by punching Flynn who keeps them at gunpoint. Not a minute later, however, she passively waits for Nate to pull her up an obstacle and save her in return. Ch.22 then contains another heroic scene when Nate depends on Elena to catch him and pull him up while a bridge collapses; a similar situation as in *Uncharted 1* Ch.11, but with reversed roles. Ch.24, as mentioned above, shows Elena as a typical damsel in distress. Similarly, the last two chapters show how a wounded Elena has to be protected and carried away from danger by the male protagonist.

---

<sup>50</sup> “Uncharted 2 – 60FPS All Cutscenes Movie 1080p HD (PS4) – Nathan Drake Collection,” YouTube video, 3:18:33, “Izuniy,” October 7, 2015, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Tsxx-9bEpP8>.

<sup>51</sup> Ibid., 1:07:31.

Elena does, however, appear to be slightly less sexualised in *Uncharted 2*. Following Lynch et al.'s variables, neither of her outfits (Figure 4 and 5) show sexualisation, unlike her second and third appearance in *Uncharted 1*. It is worth mentioning, however, that she appears to be wearing more makeup and her clothing is visibly tighter, especially around her chest and legs. There is also still some sexualisation in connection with Mulvey's theory. In Ch.16, when Nate awakens in a Tibetan village, Elena kisses him on the cheek, creating a quiet moment to observe her from a sexual perspective. In Ch.22, when Elena climbs up ahead of Nathan, he remarks: "Nice view," to which she replies with an incredulous sigh,<sup>52</sup> and Elena's "to-be-looked-at-ness" is accentuated as the camera angle shows her buttocks prominently. Finally, they share a kiss in Ch.26, which can be interpreted as a "smooch of victory" that she owed Nathan after being rescued.

Elena's representation in terms of her victimisation, on the other hand, seems not to have changed. Like in *Uncharted 1*, Elena is casually depicted as a violent character. She supports Nathan in shootouts, punches Flynn in his face in Ch.11 to protect herself and Nate and holds an antagonist at gunpoint. Strikingly, however, Elena seems to be actively kept away from violence in Ch.18, when Nathan sends her to the Tibetan village's children while the men fight Lazarevic's men. On top of this, she is victimised quite prominently in the final two chapters when she is rendered unconscious by Flynn's grenade. The moments in which she is violent outnumber the moments where she is victimised, but the one instance of victimisation reinforces the view of women as weak and vulnerable, similar to the situation in *Uncharted 1*.

### 3.2 Chloe Frazer

Chloe Frazer, the protagonist's second love interest, generally resembles Elena, though the two women differ greatly considering their sexualisation. Chloe's physical appearance, following Lynch et al.'s variables, shows far more sexualisation already. Figure 14 and Figure 16 (see Appendix) show sexualisation of her waist through bare skin and her buttocks through accentuation by her tight trousers. Noteworthy is also her sensual swaying of the hips when moving. Chloe additionally exhibits more sexual and seductive behaviour and an awareness of her sex appeal. This is expressed in Ch.1, when seducing Nathan into having sex with her whilst she had been sleeping with Harry, and Ch.2, when she suggests using her body to distract the enemy. There are also some cutscenes that create moments of erotic

---

<sup>52</sup> Ibid., 2:28:22.

contemplation where Chloe kisses or hugs Nathan sensually after a fighting scene. On top of this, the sex scene in Ch.1 can be interpreted to be a moment where the male protagonist gains control over a sexually attractive female character through the subjection of her eroticism, as discussed in section 1.2 above. The erotic charge of their intimacy caters to the desires of Nathan and the assumed male player and reduces Chloe to her sexuality.

In terms of her objectification, Chloe's representation does resemble that of Elena. Elena's "last-year's model" remark implies Chloe's role in the men's exchange system as well. The same can be said when Elena and Chloe are both in hands of the antagonists in Ch.24. Chloe's status as an object of exchange is emphasised even further when she is physically passed on from one antagonist into the possession of the other. Unlike Elena, however, she can be argued to represent Irigaray's concept of the prostitute, based on her representations in Ch.1 and Ch.2. She is also portrayed as a damsel in distress several times. In Ch.6 Chloe is trapped in a powerless lift, which calls for the male protagonist to rescue her as she waits passively and helplessly. In Ch.11 she is taken on a train by the antagonists and Nathan wishes to go save her, though it is revealed she was not actually a prisoner. Like Elena, however, she is regularly the rescuer as well, like in Ch.5 where she blows up an armoured truck that was chasing Nate.

Lastly, Chloe is also similar to Elena regarding the non-markedness of her many violent portrayals, aiding in gunfights and attacking enemies. Unlike Elena, however, apart from some shoving and dragging, Chloe is not substantially victimised.

## CHAPTER 4 – FEMALE REPRESENTATION IN *UNCHARTED 3*

For the analysis of *Uncharted 3* and screenshots of Elena, Chloe and Kate this study made use of another YouTube video by “Gamer’s Little Playground.”<sup>53</sup> In *Uncharted 3: Drake’s Deception* Nathan and Sullivan meet the two antagonists, Kate Marlowe and her accomplice Talbot. Marlowe, Sullivan and Nate are shown to have a history. Their common goal is to find the lost city of Ubar, which Drake had supposedly found. Nate and Sullivan track down Marlowe together with Chloe. After an incident Chloe is forced to stay home. A clue leads Sullivan and Nathan to Yemen. Once there, they meet with Elena, who helps them get around. Nathan is drugged by Marlowe, revealing that Sullivan knows where Ubar is located, causing him to be captured. In a chase after Talbot, Nate is caught by another accomplice and taken on a ship. He manages to sink it, wash ashore, and find Elena, who helps him get on a plane which crashes above the desert. After some time him and a sheikh save Sullivan and find Ubar. During a confrontation with Talbot and Marlowe the latter dies in quicksand and the former is killed by Nathan. In the end Nathan and Elena reunite.

### 4.1 Elena Fisher

*Uncharted 3* shows a great change in the treatment of Elena. Although Elena admittedly appears less in the third game than in the preceding games, none of the few scenes that feature Elena depict her as a damsel in distress or an object of exchange as discussed Irigaray’s theory. Instead, Ch.16 shows how Elena creates a plan to rescue Sullivan and arrives on scene just in time to heroically get Nathan on an ascending airplane. Her value is in no way reduced to that of her body or exchangeability. She is also briefly depicted as violent, wielding a shotgun against a swarm of monstrous insects in Ch.11, whereas there is not a single scene in which she is victimised.

With regard to Mulvey’s theory, Elena’s appearance is only used to break the flow of the game’s action one time in Ch.15, when the scene right after Nathan’s escape from a sinking ship shows him resting his head on Elena’s lap and holding her hand romantically. Her physical appearance is notably non-sexualised as well. Figures 6 and 7 show how both her outfits exhibit no sexualisation. It can be mentioned, however, that her breasts are still contoured quite prominently, and her top clothing is still as tight as in *Uncharted 2*.

---

<sup>53</sup> “Uncharted 3: Drake’s Deception Game Movie (All Cutscenes) 1080p,” YouTube video, 3:03:42, “Gamer’s Little Playground,” July 2, 2014, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Y-JWFa3FioY>.

## 4.2 Chloe Frazer

Chloe appears far less in this game as well, and a number of changes are noticeable. Firstly, she is not portrayed or referred to as an object of exchange. She is also never a damsel in distress, though interestingly, nor does she act as the rescuer of such damsel instead. Most significantly, Chloe's hypersexualisation in *Uncharted 2* seems to be reduced enormously. Her appearance provides no interruptions to the flow of action and her "to-be-looked-at-ness" is emphasised only once in Ch.4 when her codename is revealed to be "Bright Eyes", putting focus on her attractiveness. Her physical appearance is also generally much less sexualised than in *Uncharted 2*, illustrated by Figures 17 and 18 which only show her buttocks to be lightly accentuated by the tightness of her clothing.

Chloe is never victimised either. Her violent behaviour is somewhat more complicated: she is depicted violently as she helps out during shootouts, yet in Ch.9 she actively avoids and prevents violence when a mutual friend has been drugged and is acting out. This behaviour differs notably from that in *Uncharted 2* where she never shied away from violence.

## 4.3 Kate Marlowe

Kate Marlowe is the first female antagonist of the series, and her representation is ostensibly different from that of Chloe and Elena. In terms of the concept of objectification, Kate is not depicted to be in possession of a man, neither as a product for exchange or as Irigaray's mother role, which would mark her as one man's private property. Instead she is a powerful and fearless adversary, commanding the men who work for her. There is, nevertheless, one scene in which she does resemble a damsel in distress. In Ch.22, when Nathan confronts Marlowe and Talbot, she seems to depend on Talbot's protection, and when she is helplessly stuck in quicksand she depends on either Nathan or Talbot to save her from the perilous situation.

Considering her sexualisation, there is hardly any focus on her sexuality and "to-be-looked-at-ness": the only time her appearance does suggest seductiveness is in Ch.2 when she is seen to be flirting with Sullivan during a flashback of 20 years earlier. In line with Lynch et al.'s variables, the three outfits in which she appears are also scarcely sexualised. Figure 20, which shows Kate during the flashback in Ch.2, reveals some bare skin between her knees and hips. Figure 19 and 21 show very minimal physical sexualisation through some bare skin at her chest, and the shape of her breasts is slightly emphasised through the tightness of her attire.



A sharp contrast to the representations of Elena and Chloe is evident in the treatment of Kate's violence. In *Uncharted 3*, Kate is never victimised. She is, however, sporadically portrayed as a violent woman. Unlike with Elena and Chloe, however, Kate's violent behaviour is treated as condemnable. Ch.3 is most significant in that regard. In this chapter, which is situated in the aforementioned flashback, Nathan is still a child. During a confrontation with Kate she is clearly in control yet chooses to roughly strike the child across his face. Sullivan, then still on Kate's side, is shocked at her behaviour and keeps her from striking Nate again, exclaiming how "[h]e's just a kid."<sup>54</sup> According to Boyle, as is mentioned in section 1.3, the most acceptable form of female violence is in protection of a child. Inversely, the act of female violence considered most unnatural is that against a child.<sup>55</sup> This act should therefore, according to Boyle, depict Kate's action as unnatural behaviour, which Sullivan's reaction suggests is the case. What is noticeable, though, is that she prefers to have somebody else inflict violence for her, which underscores her passivity.

---

<sup>54</sup> Ibid., 19:05.

<sup>55</sup> Boyle, *Media and Violence*, 118-9, as quoted in Bonenfant and Trépanier-Jobin, "Bridging Game Studies and Feminist Theories," 41.

## CHAPTER 5 – FEMALE REPRESENTATION IN *UNCHARTED 4*

For the fourth and final game of the *Uncharted* series this study made use of another video by “Gamer’s Little Playground”.<sup>56</sup> Screenshots of Elena and Nadine were taken from this video as well. *Uncharted 4: A Thief’s End* sees Elena and Nathan as a married couple. Their normal life is interrupted when Nate’s brother, Sam, shows up and needs Nate to help him find the legendary treasure of pirate Avery to save his life. Nathan lies to Elena and goes to Italy with Sam and Sullivan to steal a new clue. There they encounter the antagonists, Nadine Ross, former mercenary turned treasure hunter, and Rafe, their old partner, who search the same treasure. They find the clue and go to Scotland where they find the next clue which leads them to Madagascar, but Rafe and Nadine find it too. They discover Avery founded the legendary pirate colony Libertalia, which they locate, yet Nadine and Rafe beat them there. After many more confrontations Nathan is rendered unconscious and found by Elena. Together they save Sam from the antagonists, but he runs to find the treasure. Nathan has to follow him alone. At the treasure, a fight ensues between Nate, Sam, Rafe and Nadine, in which Nadine escapes and Rafe is killed. The epilogue shows Nate and Elena’s life years later.

### 5.1 Elena Fisher

*Uncharted 4* depicts Elena’s gender most positively in comparison to the other games. Elena is depicted as a violent woman without being deemed unnatural for it when she supports Nathan during fights, and she is never the victim of violence. She is also never depicted as a damsel in distress. There is an argument to be made of her status as an object of exchange, in line with Irigaray’s theory: the first appearance that Elena makes, in Ch.4, presents her as Nathan’s wife, in his home, which alludes to the social role of mother discussed in Irigaray’s work. In their interaction there is an emphasis on domestic chores and on their sex life, which will be discussed further below. When Nate sets off on his adventure, he lies about it to Elena and leaves her behind, which produces an image of her as a passive wife who has to stay at home. Her status as object is later overturned quite definitively, however. In Ch.11 she manages to track the men down and confront them, and in Ch.17 she saves Nathan’s life after he had fallen off a cliff. In Ch.22 she decides and acts on buying a

---

<sup>56</sup> “Uncharted 4: A Thief’s End All Cutscenes (Game Movie) Full Story 1080p HD,” YouTube video, 6:24:17, “Gamer’s Little Playground,” May 9, 2016, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=rOeDXkdDCQ&t=2s>.

business for her and Nate to run, clearly driving the action. In short, Elena is portrayed as the opposite of an object of exchange or damsel in distress.

Elena's appearance does seem to cause an interruption of the flow of the action, be it rarely. In Ch.20, right after a hectic scene in which Nate and Elena escape a room of exploding boob traps, Nathan as well as the player are given an opportunity for "erotic contemplation" in a romantic scene where the two kiss on the ground. The same can be said of Ch.4, in which the two share an intimate moment on the couch. Her physical appearance in *Uncharted 4* is the least sexualised in all four games, however. Figure 10 shows very minimal bare skin on her chest while Figures 8, 9, 11, 12 and 13 illustrate her loose, comfortable and unrevealing outfits, and the shape of her breasts is never emphasised by the tightness of her clothing.

## 5.2 Nadine Ross

Rather than an object of exchange or a damsel in distress, Nadine represents a powerful and independent woman who uses, but does not depend on, the men she commands. In Ch.9, when the floor she and her men stand on (whilst keeping Nate and Sam at gunpoint) collapses, she manages to grasp the ledge and, unlike Elena, Chloe, and Kate, is not helpless or passive and pulls herself up while commanding her men to shoot the brothers. There is only one scene that does evoke the image of an object of exchange. In Ch.15 Nadine is grabbed and held at gunpoint by Sam, using her as leverage to convince Rafe and Nadine's men to drop their weapons. This suggests she is passed on from Rafe to be owned temporarily by Sam. A similar scene occurred in *Uncharted 2* when Elena and Chloe were thus 'stolen' from Nate and temporarily in the antagonist's possession.

Nadine's appearance never stops the flow of the game's action to introduce a moment of eroticism to please the spectator. On the contrary, her appearance in a scene incites and drives the action as she typically triggers a fight and represents a challenge to the player. There is some physical sexualisation, but, like with Elena, only minimally. Nadine's first appearance (Figure 22) shows her in a smart attire which reveals some bare skin on her chest, while the rest of her outfits in Figures 23 to 25 show no physical sexualisation.

Lastly, Nadine is portrayed as the undergoer as well as the perpetrator of violence, though she can hardly be said to be victimised. Perhaps most striking about Nadine is her role as the first and only female character whom Nathan (or the player) can actually fight against. According to Boyle, a woman's victimisation should reinforce her vulnerability and passiveness. When Nadine is the subject of violence, however, she always retaliates with

physical violence herself, or she is the one to initiate the skirmish. In fights, Nadine proves to be undefeatable: in Ch.6 she attacks Nathan in order to steal an artifact and ends up defenestrating him effectively. Much later, in Ch.15, she even keeps her own in a fist fight against Sam and Nathan simultaneously. She does not leave a fight unscathed, taking punches and falls the same way her adversaries do, but her behaviour negates the concept of her vulnerability and passivity effectively. Unlike Kate, Nadine's violence is also not treated as unnatural or unnecessarily cruel.

## DISCUSSION

The analysis above of the four main *Uncharted* games and their most prominent female secondary characters seems to confirm the expectations mentioned in the introduction, the first of which is the expectation to find manifestations of objectification, sexualisation, and victimisation in all four games. The degree of those three variables does differ between the games, especially when comparing the first two games with the final two. The second prediction that was made states that, in spite of the presence of those manifestations in all games, their existence and degree would prove to have decreased between the first and the last game, in addition to an increase in positive female gender portrayals.

In *Uncharted 1* as well as 2, Elena is substantially objectified and victimised as well as evidently sexualised, though not exceptionally so, and less so in *Uncharted 2* in terms of her physical appearance. She is overtly treated as an object of exchange between the games' male characters, following Irigaray's theory, and her grave victimisation stresses her female vulnerability, as is discussed in Boyle's theory. There are, however, some positive notes about her representation, as she is not entirely dependent, exhibits violence that is not deemed condemnable or unnatural and manages to reverse the roles and become the male hero's saviour occasionally.

The more substantial difference between the first two games is embodied by Chloe Frazer, who is portrayed as a sensual femme fatale who does not shy away from using her physically sexualised body to distract the enemy or to cater to Laura Mulvey's concept of the male gaze. In the transition from *Uncharted 2* to *Uncharted 3*, however, Chloe's portrayal undergoes a transformation. She is far less sexualised and never victimised or objectified. The same features apply to Elena, though a note can be made of their general presence in the game: neither of them appears in more than five or six chapters of the entire game and, in addition to negative gender portrayals, they hardly display any positive gender representations either. The female character who features the most in *Uncharted 3*, Kate Marlowe, is also victimised nor objectified and hardly sexualised, yet her acts of violence are portrayed problematically. When she strikes a child (which is an especially condemnable act, corroborated by the male characters' reactions), her portrayal supports the notion that violent women tend to be seen as unnatural women since they diverge from the vulnerable and nurturing stereotypes, as argued by Boyle. Nevertheless, Kate, Chloe and Elena's depictions



are not predominantly negative with regard to the other analysed variables, which is a stark contrast with the preceding games.

*Uncharted 4*, in line with this study's hypothesis, displays the smallest degree of sexualisation, victimisation, and objectification of all the games. Although Elena's presence is sporadically used as a way for the game to introduce some eroticism and break the flow of action, she is generally depicted as a strong and independent woman who acts as the hero's rescuer and is never objectified or victimised (whilst in contrast with *Uncharted 3*, she does feature in most of the game's chapters). The powerful antagonist Nadine is also victimised nor notably sexualised, and even though she does briefly represent Irigaray's object of exchange, her positive portrayals of the female gender vastly outweigh the negative ones.

In other words, the differences between the first game in 2007 and the final game in 2016 are quite substantial. The analysis carried out in this study suggests that the representation of women in the *Uncharted* series underwent a transformation in the positive direction; that is, less sexualisation, victimisation, and objectification as well as more strength and independence. This does not only support the studies discussed in the introduction (including the content analysis of Lynch et al.) which showed a contemporary improvement in terms of the sexualisation of many types of female video game characters; the findings might also imply that a general improvement of the status of women in video games is taking place in the mainstream video game industry, considering the importance and enormous popularity of the *Uncharted* franchise, and the fact that the analysed characters were 'merely' secondary characters, which, as is mentioned in the introduction, tend to be sexualised and stereotyped even more than female primary characters.

This thesis does have some limitations. There are, of course, more aspects to gender representation than the concepts of objectification, sexualisation, and victimisation alone. For reasons of scope and relevance, however, this thesis chose to focus on those three variables. In addition, since this study was qualitative and focused on one video game series exclusively it is not prone to broad generalisations regarding the position of women in video games in general. Future research could focus on an analysis of female secondary characters through additional feminist theories and concepts surrounding gender representation, as well as the inclusion of more types of video games, to work towards a more comprehensive image of the status of women in games.

## CONCLUSION

This study analysed the treatment of the female gender and the development of said treatment in the four main games of the *Uncharted* series in terms of the concepts of objectification, sexualisation, and victimisation, drawing comparisons between the characters as well as the individual games. By applying the feminist theories by Irigaray, Mulvey and Boyle as well as the variables used in Lynch et al.'s content analysis, several conclusions can be drawn from the findings. Firstly, each and every one of the analysed characters is to some degree subject to objectification, sexualisation, and/or victimisation. Secondly, although all three of those concepts are present in all four *Uncharted* games, women are generally represented more positively and less negatively in the later games than in the first two games. They are sexualised less prominently and seem to cater to the male gaze far less; they are depicted as objects of exchange (described in Irigaray's theory) and damsels in distress less frequently whilst reversely functioning as the rescuers of male damsels in distress; their vulnerability is hardly emphasised either by victimising or objectifying them; and although one female character is once portrayed as an unnatural woman with regard to her violent behaviour, the female characters' ability to inflict violence upon their adversaries generally represents their strength and invulnerability, especially in the last game.

In short, the video game industry might be on the right track in terms of gender representations, as the internationally bestselling game franchise of *Uncharted* seems to illustrate. There are, naturally, still a good number of checkpoints to reach, but the first objectives towards positive female gender representation in video games seem to have been completed.

## BIBLIOGRAPHY

- “2020 Videogame Industry Statistics, Trends & Data.” WePC, accessed March 10, 2020.  
<https://www.wepc.com/news/video-game-statistics/>.
- Avis, Jade. “Lara Croft – Pixelated Object or Feminist Icon?” *BrightONLINE student literary journal* no. 6 (November 2015). <http://arts.brighton.ac.uk/projects/brightonline/issue-number-six/lara-croft-pixelated-object-or-feminist-gaming-icon>.
- Bizzocchi, Jim, and Joshua Tanenbaum. “*Mass Effect 2*: A Case Study in the Design of Game Narrative.” *Bulletin of Science, Technology & Society* (October 2012).  
doi:10.1177/0270467612463796.
- Bonenfant, Maude, and Gabrielle Trépanier-Jobin. “Bridging Game Studies and Feminist Theories.” *Gender Issues in Video Games*, special issue in *Kinephanos* (2017): 24-53.
- Boyle, Karen. *Media and Violence: Gendering the Debate*. London: SAGE Publications, 2005. Quoted in Bonenfant and Trépanier-Jobin, “Bridging Game Studies,” 36-40.
- Downs, Edward and Smith, Stacy L. “Keeping Abreast of Hypersexuality: A Video Game Character Content Analysis.” *Sex Roles* 62 (2010): 721-33.
- Fox, Jesse, and Wai Yen Tang. “Sexism in online video games: The role of conformity to masculine norms and social dominance orientation.” *Computers in Human Behavior* 33 (April 2014): 314-20.
- Han, Hye-Won, and Song, Se-Jin. “Characterization of Female Protagonists in Video Games: A Focus on Lara Croft.” *Asian Journal of Women’s Studies* 20, no. 3 (2014): 27-49.
- Horrell, Kirsty R., and Schott, Gareth R. “Girl Gamers and their Relationship with the Gaming Culture.” *Convergence: The International Journal of Research into New Media Technologies* 6, no. 4 (2000): 36-53.
- Irigaray, Luce. *This Sex Which Is Not One*. Translated by Catherine Porter. Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1977.
- Jayanth, Meg. “52% of gamers are women – but the industry doesn’t know it.” *The Guardian Online*, September 18, 2014.  
<https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2014/sep/18/52-percent-people-playing-games-women-industry-doesnt-know>.
- Lynch, Teresa, Tompkins, Jessica E., van Driel, Irene I., and Fritz, Niki. “Sexy, Strong and Secondary: A Content Analysis of Female Characters in Video Games Across 31 Years.” *Journal of Communication* 66 no. 4 (2016): 1-21.

- Mikula, Maja. "Gender and Videogames: the political valency of Lara Croft." *Continuum: Journal of Media & Cultural Studies* 17, no. 1 (2003): 79-87.
- Mulvey, Laura. "Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema." In *Feminist Film Theory: A Reader*, edited by Sue Thornham, 58-69. Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1999.
- Roberts, Katherine. "A sociological exploration of female character in the Metroid videogames series." *The Computer Games Journal* 1, no. 2 (2012): 82-108.
- Schleiner, Anne-Marie. "Does Lara Croft wear fake polygons? Gender and gender role subversion in computer adventure games." *Leonardo* 34 no. 3 (2001): 222-24.
- "Uncharted 2 – 60FPS All Cutscenes Movie 1080p HD (PS4) – Nathan Drake Collection." YouTube video, 3:18:33. "Izuniy," October 7, 2015, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Tszx-9bEpP8>.
- "Uncharted 3: Drake's Deception Game Movie (All Cutscenes) 1080p." YouTube video, 3:03:42. "Gamer's Little Playground," July 2, 2014, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Y-JWfa3FioY>.
- "Uncharted 4 All Nadine Fights Scenes Vs Nathan Drake." YouTube video, 12:24. "Izuniy," May 8, 2016. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=C7Bva1r1jzU>.
- "Uncharted 4: A Thief's End All Cutscenes (Game Movie) Full Story 1080p." YouTube video, 6:24:17. "Gamer's Little Playground," May 9, 2016, [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=\\_rOeDXkdDCQ&t=2s](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=_rOeDXkdDCQ&t=2s).
- "Uncharted 4: A Thief's End – number of players (PlayStation) – gamstat." Gamstat, accessed April 29, 2020. [http://gamstat.com/games/Uncharted\\_4/](http://gamstat.com/games/Uncharted_4/).
- "Uncharted: Drake's Fortune All Cutscenes (Nathan Drake Collection) Game Movie 1080p 60FPS." YouTube video, 1:55:36. "Gamer's Little Playground," November 18, 2015, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=n0z588yNnqo>.
- Webster, Andrew. "Naughty Dog's president on how games changed since the first PlayStation: 'they're barely recognizable'." The Verge, accessed May 3, 2020. <https://www.theverge.com/2019/12/2/20977931/playstation-games-uncharted-crash-bandicoot-naughty-dog-last-of-us-anniversary-evolution>.
- Weisberger, Mindy. "The Bizarre History of 'Tetris'." Live Science, accessed May 3, 2020. <https://www.livescience.com/56481-strange-history-of-tetris.html>.
- Wood, Julia T. "Gendered Media: The Influence of Media on Views of Gender." In *Gendered Lives: Communication, Gender, and Culture*, 231-244. Belmont, CA: Wadsworth Publishing, 1994.

## APPENDIX

### Elena Fisher

#### Uncharted 1



Figure 1 (Elena Ch. 1)



Figure 2 (Elena Ch. 1)



Figure 3 (Elena Ch. 3)

#### Uncharted 2



Figure 4 (Elena Ch.6)



Figure 5 (Elena Ch. 16)

### Uncharted 3



Figure 6 (Elena Ch. 9)



Figure 7 (Elena Ch. 15)

### Uncharted 4



Figure 8 (Elena Ch. 4)



Figure 9 (Elena Ch. 9)



Figure 10 (Elena Ch. 11)





*Figure 11 (Elena Ch. 17)*



*Figure 12 (Elena Ch. 22)*



*Figure 13 (Elena Epilogue)*

## **Chloe Frazer**

### Uncharted 2



*Figure 14 (Chloe Ch. 1)*



*Figure 15 (Chloe Ch. 2)*



*Figure 16 (Chloe Ch. 3)*

### Uncharted 3



Figure 17 (Chloe Ch. 4)



Figure 18 (Chloe Ch. 8)

### **Kate Marlowe**

### Uncharted 3



Figure 19 (Kate Ch. 1)



Figure 20 (Kate Ch. 2)



Figure 21 (Kate Ch. 11)



## Nadine Ross

### Uncharted 4



Figure 22 (Nadine Ch. 6)



Figure 23 (Nadine Ch. 9)



Figure 24 (Nadine Ch. 15)



Figure 25 (Nadine Ch. 21)