Effects of Hypermasculine and Heteronormative Elements in Video Games on Gender Role Beliefs Among Young Adult Males and Comparisons to Sex-Positive Media

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Abstract

In the past few decades, there has been increasing research done on how media can affect hypermasculine and heteronormative culture among young adults, which was followed by a shift in mainstream media (television, books, etc.) representations of such elements. Yet, antiquated and androcentric artifacts remain ubiquitous in video games and have been proven to generate beliefs associated with traditional gender roles among young adults, a demographic that constitutes over a third of the gaming community. In particular, men may internalize inflexible mindsets on masculinity and sexuality as a result of video game play. Despite this and the prominence of gaming as a pastime among young adult men, video games are still not as widely studied as television or other forms of media. I researched media portrayal of gender roles and of LGBTQ populations within video games and their impact on young adult male gamers' perceptions of gender roles and LGBTQ populations. I then examined ways that television, a more well-researched form of media, has evolved in the past few decades to become more representative and accepting of different expressions of masculinity, especially as it pertains to sexuality. I found unhealthy social modeling to cultivate heteronormative and hypermasculine culture among male gamers. I also found that in television—a much more widely studied form of media than video games—elements of sex-positivism, entertainment-education, the separation of sexuality and masculinity, and depictions of tolerance and inclusivity of queer communities not only run counter to the traditional masculine ideology that characterizes current video games, but also do so without compromising on their popularity as programs. Future research should examine why the gaming industry has not modernized similarly, as well as how sex-positivism can be implemented into unique parts of gaming culture, such as online chatrooms and multiplayer interactions within virtual environments.

Introduction

Cultivation theory founder George Gerbner first coined the term "symbolic annihilation" in 1976 to describe how minorities are virtually erased from existence when they are not represented in media. Such is the case in video games, where a vast majority of main characters fall into two categories: the large-bosomed femme fatale woman or the heterosexual, brawny, stoic man. Such characterizations of men and women not only perpetuate the erasure of sexual minorities, but also of heterosexual men and women who do not fall into the archetypes listed above. In many cases, men who express their masculinity different than the norm are often characterized as queer, an analogy synonymous with deviance in Western culture.

During adolescence and early adulthood, young adults form their concepts of gender roles. By marginalizing anything that exists outside of the previously mentioned stereotypes, video games effectively annihilate such exceptions—creating an environment mentally and socially unhealthy even for the populations who exist within the conventional norm.

Over the past two decades, the video gaming industry has grown into a multibillion-dollar entertainment industry and a hallmark pastime for Americans aged 24 and below, particularly for American men. If the contents of video games continue on the heteronormative and hypermasculine course on which it is currently charted, current and future young men are doomed to a fate entrenched in outdated and unhealthy views of gender.

The vast majority of characters in ESRB Teen, Mature, and Adult video games contain overt stereotypes that model hypermasculine and heteronormative behavior. Although video games have begun to include more equal representations of gender and sexuality, these stereotypes still follow a reductive trend that relegates women to an objectified role, where they exist primarily as objects of sexual desire. Men are no better off, and especially in hardcore

games, are given a narrow range of muscular and stoic characterizations. This is then contrasted with the queer men who exist as negative role models, facilitating homophobia within male gamers as they seek to develop their own identity as men in a world that emasculates those who are not heterosexual. Yet, television has proven that sex-positive depictions of gender and sexuality can exist within media without compromising on their popularity as programs. Popular American television programs such as *Teen Wolf* and Latin American telenovelas such as *Simplemente María* (Simply Maria) and *La fea más bella* (The Prettiest Ugly Woman) contain positive depictions of both female independence and the LGBTQ community, which contrasts strongly with the hypermasculinity and heteronormativity that endure in adult and teen-oriented game content.

Background

Over the past few decades, video games have emerged as a prominent mode of entertainment for American men. According to an annual survey published by the Entertainment Software Association [ESA] (2021), an organization which advocates for video game companies, 67% of American adults and 76% of Americans under 18 played video games in 2021 (p. 4).

In 1994, as a result of the increased popularity of video games, the ESA founded the Entertainment Software Rating Board [ESRB] to provide ratings to video games based on the maturity of content. According to the ESRB website (https://www.esrb.org), such ratings range from an "E," meaning recommended for everyone, to an "A," meaning recommended only for those 18 and older. Ratings take into consideration elements such as violence and strong language. According to the ESRB's ratings guide, games may be rated "A" (for adults 18+), "M" (for mature audiences 17+), or "T" (for teens 13+) if they contain more graphic violence, stronger language, more suggestive themes, and more use of drugs or alcohol than video games

rated "E" and "E 10+" (for everyone 10+)[1]. Because of the nature of the ratings system, games that are rated "A," "T," or "M" are more likely to contain sexual and violent content. How these topics are portrayed can thus be a marker of the social values that gamers are exposed to.

The extent to which video games pervade as forms of media in American culture lends itself to video games' powerful influence on people's beliefs, attitudes, and values regarding gender. This article will primarily focus on the effect of gender stereotypes on *male* populations, as they are affected differently by character presentations in media than females. This disparity can, in part, be attributed to identification theory. Cristoph Klimmt et al. (2010) describes identification as the temporary feeling of being one with a story's protagonist by use of personal affective and cognitive processors. Because video games are more interactive than other forms of media, players are more likely to take a personal perspective and take a temporary identity of the game character. For example, gamers playing shooter games may define themselves as braver than they would outside of games. Klimmt et al. proved the existence of identification by studying a sample of male German university students aged between 19 and 31 years, who were compared to find implicit-cognitive traces of identification. They were told to either play a military first-person shooter (*Call of Duty 2*[2]) or a street racing game (*Need for Speed: Carbon*[3]) for 10 minutes. Using an Implicit Association Test [IAT], researchers looked for associations between "military" and "me," or "car-racing" and "me," respectively. A second study was also performed to test robustness of the previous experiment. The IAT in this experiment contained 4

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[1] ESRB ratings will not be cited in this article. They can be located via the ESRB game search tool on their website (https://www.esrb.org). In the event that there are multiple different ratings or content descriptors for the same game (this can occur due to many reasons, such as the game having different graphics qualities across different platforms or releases impacting the graphics quality of violent scenes), this information will be included in the discussion of the game rating.

[2] *Call of Duty 2* is ESRB rated "T" with content descriptors of "Blood," "Mild Language," and "Violence."

[3] *Need for Speed Carbon* is ESRB rated "E" for the GameBoy Advance and Nintendo DS with a content warning for "Mild Violence." It is ESRB rated "E 10+" for the GameCube, Macintosh, Windows PC, PlayStation 2, PlayStation 3, Wii, Xbox 360, and PSP with a content warning for "Violence."

categories: gun, speed, me, and furniture ("furniture" was picked as a neutral word in opposition to "me"). All participants were asked to sort words that were clearly related to either "military" or "car-racing." These terms could be sorted into one of two groups: furniture/military or me/car-racing; during another round, the groups were furniture/car-racing and me/military (which round came first was random per participant). All words not sorted into the correct category based on objective associations to either "military" or "car-racing" were not used in subsequent data analysis. The IAT effect was then calculated[4]. For the first experiment, the IAT effect for the shooter game group was M = +27.63 ms and for the racing game group it was M = −58.82 ms (the positive and negative signs were arbitrary measures of whether the IAT effect leaned towards ones' association with themselves and shooters [+] or racers [-]) (p<.001) (p. 329). In the second experiment, which studied a sample of male German university students aged 19-32, the IAT effects were seen to be M=+31.26 ms (shooter game group) and M=-45.49 ms (racing game group), again with p<.001, indicating the presence of a significant, causal relationship between game genre and cognitive association of character concepts with the players' self (p. 331). Identification to video game characters likely provides different experiences for male and female audiences; while male gamers would be more likely to see a formulaic, hypermasculine male protagonist as a dramaturgical guide on how to express masculinity, women gain little concept of femininity from such a protagonist; men are indeed overrepresented as playable characters in video games. Jared Friedberg (2015) writes that among the top ten most critically acclaimed and bestselling video games, seven have male protagonists and two have female protagonists (one has a customizable protagonist, where the gender is variable). By focusing on

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[4] The IAT effect represents the strength of implicit association. It is calculated by taking the difference in the compatible category round (when the game category the participant was in and "me" were in the same option) and the incompatible category round (when the game category the participant was in and "me" were in separate options). If the IAT effect has a large absolute value, it suggests that the participant struggled to assign a word to an option only if "me" and the category it is related to were in different options (in other words, "me" held strong association with concepts largely associated with another category).

male protagonists, the video game collective creates a divide in the effects they have on male and female gamers, necessitating the need to assess the effect video games have on shaping gender role beliefs among the two genders separately.

The extent to which video games pervade as forms of media in American culture lends itself to video games' powerful influence on people's beliefs, attitudes, and values regarding gender. Elizabeth Behm-Morawitz and Dana Mastro (2009) note that according to social cognitive theory, video game characters may become blueprints for people to learn socially acceptable attitudes toward gender roles, gender-based conduct, and other beliefs. Exposure to these concepts is called "modeling," wherein behavior and beliefs are learned from a "mediated model," such as a video game character (p. 810). Even a single instance of being exposed to a model can impact the beliefs have toward demographics sharing characteristics with that model. However, the type of model is also important in determining how they interact with audiences. Julee Tate (2014) writes that there are three types of models: positive, negative, and transitional. Positive models imply to audience members that their behavior should be replicated, such as a hero or heroine. Negative models imply to audience members that their behavior should be eschewed, such as a villain or thief. Transitional models exist between the two, and exist in characters that are growing and transitioning toward being either a negative or positive role model (pp. 52-53).

Though measurable *short-term* effects on gender role perceptions after a single instance of play can be explained by social-cognitive theory, the influence extended exposure to models has on *long-term* gender role perceptions is better explained by cultivation theory. Drs. Greg Blackburn and Erica Scharrer (2019) note that cultivation theory posits that television messages that remain consistent over many different shows and channels are eventually absorbed in a

cumulative and slow process by television viewers. When they studied populations that gamed, Blackburn and Scharrer noted this same pattern in gamers, finding that those who consistently played violent video games (which are more associated with masculine tropes) were more likely to hold hypermasculine beliefs in categories such as aggression, toughness, dominance, and restrictive emotionality—regardless of gender identity. In other words, while a single instance of modeling has the potential to generate short-term changes in gender beliefs, repeated modeling has the potential to cultivate long-lasting gender beliefs by portraying women as less cognitively capable than men and by perpetuating hypermasculine and heteronormative beliefs that limit male gender expression.

1.1 Female Gender Stereotypes and Male Audiences

The oversexualization of women in video games lends itself to women being considered as accessories to a primarily male-dominated narrative. When Christina Glaubke, Patti Miller, McCrae Parker, and Eileen Espejo (2002) surveyed 1716 video game characters across 70 different video games, they found that 17% the characters surveyed were females. Among these females, half of all female characters were categorized as props or bystanders (meaning they could not commit actions and could only speak), nearly 20% modeled unhealthy body proportions, 21% had exposed breasts, 13% had exposed buttocks, and 20% had exposed midriffs (pp. 15-17). Since 2002, gender representation has remained similar. As mentioned previously, Friedberg (2015) noted that among the ten most popular and critically acclaimed story-based video games, seven have male protagonists. He also found that while women are present, they are still sexualized (though to a lesser extent than historically) and exist as side characters who drive the protagonist forward. Friedberg writes that "Women drive the story forward not by the actions they take, but through the violence or harm done to them or the

unconditional support that they offer the protagonist. Their role is secondary to the protagonist, but their disposition is what helps engage the protagonist in the events of the story" (p. 34). In video games, women are necessary, yet are subservient to men. Based on cultivation theory, this general trend will lead to similar androcentric beliefs among male gamers. These characters— especially because the sexualization of women, though abating, has yet to fully stop—do little to challenge the bigoted media portrayals of women.

The *Tomb Raider* series' Lara Croft is an example of how positive qualities are overshadowed by an emphasis on sexual characteristics. Shira Chess and Adrienne Shaw (2015) note that Lara Croft's transformation since her conception has trended from a scantily-clad, hourglass figure to a woman wearing realistic archaeologist's clothes with more realistic body proportions (p. 216). Behm-Morawitz and Mastro (2009) write that female characters such as Croft are "strong, bold, intelligent, and independent" (pp. 809-810). It would seem, at least at a superficial level, that Lara Croft is a strong representation of what an independent and powerful woman ought to be. Yet, Croft exists in conjunction with sexual characteristics that overshadow any such positive modeling. When sexuality is a defining feature of a female character, normative characteristics such as strength and intellect often become irrelevant and the character becomes relegated to a sex object. Behm-Morawitz and Mastro found that among a sample of 328 undergraduate students from a Southwestern U.S. university that played a *Tomb Raider: Legend (2006)* scene, those that played a scene where Lara Croft was sexualized held statistically significantly lower views on female cognitive capability than those who played a scene where Croft was not sexualized after playing the scene (pp. 809-810, 817). During the experiment, students were randomly assigned to three groups: no video game, sexualized *Tomb Raider* scene,

and the non-sexualized *Tomb Raider* scene[5]. The two latter groups were asked to play isolated from other subjects for 30 minutes, then all groups were asked to complete a questionnaire. Behm-Morawitz and Mastro found that exposure to sexualized female video game characters can affect people's beliefs about women. Beliefs on the cognitive capabilities of women were statistically significantly worse among those who played the sexualized Croft scene compared to those who played the non-sexualized scene (p=.04) (p. 817). Though Croft had empowering qualities such as physical strength and independence, these were ultimately overshadowed by the portrayal of her sexuality.

In fact, both scenes examined contained the exact same character, game elements, and playstyle. Subsequently, though Croft could be described in both scenes as independent, physically strong, and cognitively capable, she was not evaluated as an equal to men. So long as her curvy body was her primary characteristic (Behm-Morawitz and Mastro (2006) write that Croft's appearances in *Tomb Raider: Legend (2006)* are primarily of a sexualized nature, and the scenes they deemed non-sexualized were much sparser (p. 813)) throughout the game, nothing else was relevant to the gamer's evaluation of Croft in comparison to men. Perhaps, by definition, a female character created by men represent what the latter idealizes. If prominent sexual characteristics represent what male gamers idealize in a woman, the treatment of women as sex objects in video games will continue—and more importantly—will teach younger gamers to do the same until they too believe that a woman is defined foremost by the size of their breasts and the depth of their neckline.

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[5] A pilot study determined that the two scenes contained no statistically significant differences in player interpretations of the game's treatment of Croft except that participants rated the clothing as more scantily clad (p<.001), more revealing (p<.001), and more sexualized (p<.001) in the sexualized scene. The sexualized scene saw Croft wearing a torn nightdress, and the non-sexualized scene saw her wearing winter attire (Behm-Morawitz & Mastro, 2009, pp. 813-814).

Though the fact that video games can cultivate such negative attitudes towards women is tragic in its own right, the harms video games pose to gender perceptions among male gamers extends further; the treatment of women as sex objects in video games can even desensitize male audiences to sexual violence victims. Alessandro Gabbiadini, Paolo Riva, Luca Andrighetto, Chiara Volpato, and Brad Bushman (2016) studied an Italian student sample of 154 aged 15-20, male and female, where each participant was randomly selected to be exposed to thirty minutes of one of three categories of games: violent-sexist, violent only, or non-violent. The violent-sexist video games were *Grand Theft Auto [GTA] San Andreas*[6] and *GTA Vice City*[7], both of which were rated as having both sexual and violent content. The violent only games were *Half Life 1*[8] and *Half Life 2*[9], both of which were rated as violent, but had no warnings for sexual content or violence against women. The non-violent video games were classic pinball game *Dream Pinball 3D*[10] and first-person physics puzzle game *Q.U.B.E. 2*[11] (pp. 4-5). After 30 minutes of game time, players were shown one of two pictures of a female domestic abuse victim. Among men from the sexual-violent video game group, there was a greater prevalence of hypermasculine gender beliefs and a lower level of empathy for the female violence victims. This also had statistically significant increases based on the level of identification the player felt with the *GTA* character. On the other hand, in the violent-only and non-violent categories, empathy for the sexual violence victim did not demonstrate a statistically significant decrease from the control group (non-violent category), even when its relationship with the masculine

[6] *GTA: San Andreas* is ESRB rated "M" or "A" based on console, with content descriptors of "Blood and Gore," "Intense Violence," "Sexual Content" (Sometimes listed as "Strong Sexual Content"), "Strong Language," and "Use of Drugs."
[7] *GTA: Vice City* is ESRB rated "M" with content descriptors of "Blood and Gore," "Strong Language," "Strong Sexual Content," and "Violence."
[8] *Half-Life 1* is ESRB rated "M" with content descriptors of "Blood and Gore," "Intense Violence," and "Language."
[9] *Half-Life 2* is ESRB rated "M" with content descriptors of "Blood and Gore" and "Intense Violence."
[10] *Dream Pinball 3D* is ESRB rated "E 10+" with content descriptors of "Mild Blood" and "Mild Suggestive Themes."
[11] *Q.U.B.E. 2* is ESRB rated "T" with a content warning of "Language."

gender norms and identification were accounted for, suggesting that the sexual-violent games not only exacerbated masculine beliefs among men, but also caused a decrease in empathy for sexual violence victims as a result (Gabbiadini et al., 2016, pp. 9-10).

Looking at the content of *GTA San Andreas* and *GTA Vice City*, it becomes painfully obvious why this phenomenon was observed. Gabbiadini et al. (2016) write that women within *GTA* are treated not as people, but as sex objects. Women are portrayed not only as the vapid, promiscuous, and exiguous caricatures as described by Glaubke et al. nearly fifteen years prior, but also as compliments to hypermasculine ideology. In fact, Gabbiadini et al. note that "after paying a prostitute for sex, players can kill her and get their money back. Rather than being punished for such behaviors, players are often rewarded" (p. 2). Even after a single half-hour instance of playing *GTA*, the modeling of such hypermasculine and sexually predatory behaviors already demonstrate a noticeable effect on male gamers, particularly those who identify greatly with the *GTA* main character. Thus, the *GTA* series implies to such an audience that masculinity means not only violence and sexual aggression, but also apathy for the women that are victims of violence and sexual aggression.

GTA was not a series that appeared in Friedberg's (2015) aggregation of popular video games, likely leading to the disparate judgement of sexuality within video games by Gabbiadini et al. and Friedberg. However, *GTA* is comparable in popularity and critical acclaim to the aforementioned list. As of December 2021, *GTA: San Andreas* sold 27.5 million units and earned a Metascore of 93 according to the VGChartz website (https://www.vgchartz.com) and the Metacritic website (https://www.metacritic.com), the same metrics for popularity and critical acclaim Friedberg used in his assessment; as a comparison, *Tomb Raider (2013)*[12], a game that

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[12] *Tomb Raider (2013)* is ESRB rated "M" with content descriptors of "Blood and Gore," "Intense Violence," and "Strong Language."

Friedberg included in his list, sold 11.0 million units and earned a Metascore of 86. The *GTA*

series remains among the highest rated and most popular video game series to have ever existed,

suggesting that sexism within game narratives will continue to persist well into the future and be

cultivated in younger male gamers for generations to come.

1.2 Male Gender Stereotypes and Male Audiences

While the characteristics that define females in the *GTA* series provides male gamers with

problematic characterizations of women, such games also create inflexible male gender roles. In

Friedberg's (2015) analysis of popular story-based video games, nine out of ten of the games he

analyzed used violence as way of moving the game plot forward, not dissimilar to the *GTA*

scenes studied by Gabbiadini et al. (2016), where "the mission was to destroy a rival criminal

gang" (p. 5). Friedberg notes that violence as a plot device not only forces the player into

adhering to traditional ideals about physical strength and masculinity, but also causes other game

themes to center around violence. For example, *Dishonored*[13] sees the main character Corvo's

lover murdered and himself framed, which drives the narrative forward as his primary call to

action: revenge on those who have wronged him. Friedberg notes that the trope of "having

something forcefully taken away from [the protagonist]," the subsequent loss of power/control,

then the quest to regain power/control, is exceedingly common, as are topics associated with

masculinity, such as power, violence, revenge, and control (pp. 31-33). Through the perpetration

of violence, control, and power as means to establish masculinity, video games develop an

interchangeable relationship between masculinity, the aforementioned themes, and identity.

These themes have also been proven to result in heightened adherence to masculine

norms. The Masculine Role Norms Inventory Revised [MRNI-R] is an index developed to

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[13] *Dishonored* is ESRB rated "M" with content descriptors of "Blood and Gore," "Intense Violence," and "Sexual Themes," "Strong Language," and "Use of Alcohol."

measure level of endorsement of traditional masculine norms via 39 questions, measured from 1, for strongly disagree, to 7, for strongly agree (Blackburn & Scharrer, 2019, p. 315). Blackburn and Scharrer (2019) note that established characteristics of hegemonic masculinity according to the MRNI-R include:

Avoidance of Femininity (eschewing traits and activities associated with women), Negativity Toward Sexual Minorities (holding homophobic and/or hetereosexist views), Self-reliance (demonstrating independence, autonomy), Toughness (displaying physical and emotional strength or resilience), Dominance (taking charge/exhibiting power), Importance of Sex (being driven by sexual desire and conquest), and Restrictive Emotionality (suppressing emotions that may be considered weak, exhibiting stoicism). (p. 311)[14]

In their study of a population containing 175 males, 73 females, and 2 transgender Americans aged 18-24, Blackburn and Scharrer (2019) found that while video game exposure itself does not correlate with high scores on the MRNI-R and Auburn Differential Masculinity Index [ADMI], another metric for measuring adherence to masculine norms, for young adults, time spent playing *self-described violent* games did, amongst all genders and sexual orientations. Furthermore, violent video gaming was found to be correlated with hypermasculine beliefs in aggression, toughness, dominance, and restrictive emotionality regardless of gender identity (pp. 318-320). Respondents were surveyed in three categories: self-reported video game use (a noteworthy subcategory being self-reported *violent* video game use), demographic, and masculinity index questions. Blackburn and Scharrer found that the specific categories among the MRNI-ADMI tests that demonstrated a positive correlation to violent video game use were Avoidance of

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[14] Unless otherwise noted, further mentions of specific characteristics of Blackburn and Scharrer's definition of traditional masculine ideology refer to this definition.

Femininity (α=.16, p<.05), (physical and mental) Toughness (α=.19, p<.01), Dominance (α=.17, p<.01), Aggression (α=.21, p<.01), Importance of Sex (α=.15, p<.05), and Restrictive Emotionality (α=.20, p<.01). However, two categories, Negativity Towards Sexual Minorities (α=.08, p>.05) and Self-Reliance (α=.13, p>.05), did not show this correlation, and while all those playing violent games scored higher than their non-gaming and non-violent gaming counterparts, sexual orientation and gender were statistically significant predictors of high MRNI scores, with male and heterosexual participants having higher scores (p. 315).

Again, the ever-popular *GTA* series elucidates likely causes for this relationship. Gabbiadini et al. (2016) write that the *GTA* male characters have always been "hypermasculine, dominant, and aggressive men" (p. 2). Perhaps because this characterization is so adherent to traditional masculine ideology as specified by the MRNI-R, Gabbiadini et al. also found that the violent-sexist group (the participants who played one of the *GTA* series games) scored highest on the MRNI-R. While there were spectrums of identification with the character across all three genres, only the sexual-violent genre saw a conditional effect of lower empathy for female violence victims for male participants who identified more with the playable character. This suggests that playing violent-sexist video games decreases empathy for female violence victims and creates a relationship between decreased empathy and expressions of identity (pp. 8-9). In this case, identity becomes synonymous with masculinity. In reference to the theoretical frameworks of cultivation theory and social cognitive theory, Gabbiadini et al.'s study demonstrates that even a single instance of modeling from a violent video game can significantly alter gender beliefs in the short-term to be more adherent to traditional masculine norms.

What is alarming about masculine norms in violent video games is how common it is to see themes that connect identity to dominance. In *Dishonored*, as well as the *GTA* scenes

mentioned earlier, the identity of the character is by definition synonymous with their dominance over their rivals and/or enemies. Through their chiseled facial features, their bulky build, and their overt heterosexuality, it is clear that these protagonists are shining paragons of what it means to be masculine-presenting. For young men looking for ways to express their masculinity, such a collective agreement among video games regarding what defines masculinity cultivates the implication that men who fall outside of such boundaries—men who are sensitive, forgiving, or even kind—are not truly men.

2. LGBTQ Stereotypes and Male Audiences

Historically, the placement of sexual minorities as a contrast to masculine identity has been commonplace in video games. Adrienne Shaw and Elizaveta Friesem (2016), who studied representations of queer communities in 351 video games from 1986-2016, noted an instance of this in *Dragon Quest III*[15], a Japanese game that was released for international audiences in 1996. In the game, if the male protagonist refuses a sexual advance from a female non-playable character [NPC], she will exclaim "'Hmph! What?! Not another homosexual…'" (p. 3881). In this case, homosexuality appears to illustrate what lies opposite to the masculine norm of the Importance of Sex as defined by the Blackburn and Scharrer. Beyond this, the agitation which the female NPC remarks with implies a negative connotation for queer populations. Another example of the contrast between masculine identity and homosexuality exists in the bishonen, described by TV Tropes (n.d. a), which aggregates and described media archetypes, as "usually tall, slender with almost no fat and little to no muscle, and no body or facial hair. Large, expressive eyes are almost a given" (para. 1). Shaw and Friesem (2016) write that the term bishonen means "beautiful boy" in Japanese and is an aesthetical trope in Japanese video games wherein the male character has an ambiguous sexuality (p. 3881). This again suggests that

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[15] *Dragon Quest III* is ESRB rated "T" with content descriptors of "Mild Violence" and "Suggestive Themes."

queerness and masculinity are mutually exclusive, as the bishonen stereotype falls directly against the masculine norms of Avoidance of Femininity and Toughness as defined by Blackburn and Scharrer. Because of their opposition to masculine ideology juxtaposed with their ambiguous sexualities, the bishonen implies that non-traditional presentations of masculinity (the lack of body hair and muscles and adherence to feminine beauty standards such as thinness) entails homosexuality.

Past scholarly work on queer representation in television supports this analysis. The historically negative connotation that sexual minorities have in popular media is related to the concept of stereotypes. Richard Dyer (1999) defines a stereotype as a reductive social type that is used to point out the "dramatic, ridiculous, or horrific quality" attributed to the groups they represent (p. 299). In other words, stereotypes use fictional characters as negative models, separating traits commonly associated with deviance from what is considered normal. In the above examples, both the *Dragon Quest III* character and the bishonen archetype illustrate negative qualities about individuals who do not subscribe to traditional masculine ideology.

The separation of normalcy and homosexuality is also extremely common in traditional media, for example in paranormal literature. Evie Kendal and Zachary Kendal (2015) state that in Stoker's *Dracula*, for instance, female sexual desire, incest, sex outside of social statuses and marriage (all considered deviant in the late 19th century) are demonized because of its juxtaposition with the Count. Furthermore, the vampire bite, a vampire's form of reproduction, has also been associated with homosexual culture in other depictions of vampires, as they may bite both men and women to reproduce (p. 35). Though E. Kendal and Z. Kendal note that the association between homosexuality and inhumanity has lessened over time, the comparison of inhumanity and deviant sexuality has permeated into video games. Shaw and Friesem (2016)

note that the 1995 game *Gabriel Knight: The Beast Within*[16] draws comparisons between

werewolf communities and homosexuality (p. 3881). In both of these cases, elements of

stereotyping are prominent: the dramatic and horrific quality (as mentioned by Dyer) of inhuman

entities become associated with homosexuality. Though this example is extreme, it emphasizes

how often homosexuality becomes likened to deviance from humanity in media.

Other, less extreme, though no less harmful, stereotypes for LGBTQ men also exist. Dyer

(1999) notes that common stereotypes include "the butch dyke and the camp queen, the lesbian

vampire and the sadistic queer," and the list goes on (p. 297). Regardless of whether or not such

stereotypes are true, Dyer asserts that if these demeaning stereotypes are defined by the majority

with pejorative intent, such stereotypes will always reject the queer community as anything but

normal. If the majority solely defines the minority as is the case with LGBTQ stereotyping,

queer communities will always be seen as something that "falls short" of heterosexual

communities (p. 300). In other words, LGBTQ stereotypes consist of negative models that use

the assumption that queerness and masculinity are irreconcilable to encourage adherence to

traditional masculine ideology among heterosexual communities. In American culture, an

accusation of queerness becomes an accusation that one has lost sight of what it means to be a

man, or even human.

Modern-day representations tread a gray area between acceptance and stereotyping.

Bishonen have become ways for video games to explore sexuality, but still imply some form of

difference between who the average heterosexual man is versus who the average queer man is. In

2012 video game *Fire Emblem: Awakening*[17], a strong example of this is the priest Libra, who is

noted as belonging to the bishonen archetype by TV Tropes (n.d. b) due to his feminine voice

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[16] *Gabriel Knight: The Beast Within* is ESRB rated "M" with content descriptors of "Mature Sexual Themes," "Realistic Blood and Gore," and "Strong Language."

[17] *Fire Emblem: Awakening* is ESRB rated "T" with content descriptors of "Alcohol Reference, "Fantasy Violence, "Mild Language" and "Mild Suggestive Themes."

and "ridiculous" levels of attractiveness ("Fire Emblem"). The following is an excerpt from *Fire Emblem: Awakening* where Chrom, the main character, meets Libra:

> Chrom: Your love for my sister is clear. I would be honored to be joined by such a
>
> formidable woman of the cloth.
>
> Libra: …Man, sire. Man of the cloth.
>
> Chrom: You're a… …You're not a woman?
>
> Libra: No, sire. Women are clerics. I am a priest. Well, technically a war monk, if you
>
> care to split hairs…
>
> Chrom: Oh. Yes, well, I'm… I didn't mean to imply… Well, this is rather awkward.
>
> (Intelligent Systems, 2012)

Though Libra has feminine qualities, he is never treated negatively by his comrades because of it. When Chrom mistakes him for a woman, and later when this occurs with another male character Virion, the blame does not lie with Libra for looking feminine, but rather with Chrom and Virion for their presumptiveness. Furthermore, if Libra remains unmarried for the entire playthrough, his ending states "Many an unfortunate child found joy in the small orphanage Libra built after the war. People believed the kind, beautiful priest to be an incarnation of Naga [a female god], and he was courted by women and men alike" (Intelligent Systems, 2012). In this case, Libra's relationships are a secondary element to his story; the focus lies on his charity and his impact on orphans.

However, the execution of Libra's sexuality leaves more to be desired. A significant aspect of *Fire Emblem: Awakening* gameplay is marriage, where characters who spend enough time with each other can eventually get married. Across all of the eligible partners for Libra, none of them are men, so as far as the main gameplay is concerned, Libra remains heterosexual;

if he gets married to any of the other (female) characters, the ending in the previous paragraph would never even occur. Even if players pick the male avatar, they are unable to wed Libra, despite the fact that the female avatar can. This fits into a trend as indicated by Shaw and Friesem (2016): explicitly LGBTQ playable characters are rare (of which Libra is one), yet among these characters, even fewer are illustrated in acts of same-sex romanticism (p. 3880). Beyond this, Libra is still a bishonen. He still exhibits feminine traits and contrasts strongly with masculine ideology as specified by Blackburn and Scharrer. Though Libra is never written off to be less than a man, nor are his feminine characteristics mentioned in a disparaging way, his character design still implies that queer men look, sound, and act differently than normal men.

3. Solutions: Sex-Positive Depictions of Sexuality and Gender in Media

Over the past few decades, television has adopted a more sex-positive outlook on gender norms and LGBTQ stereotypes. Sex-positivism is characterized by inclusive representations of gender identity and sexuality. As heavily stereotyped media has already been proven to cause adherence to traditional masculine norms in video games, sex-positive media will likely foster inclusivity and tolerance for diverse expressions of sexuality and masculinity among audiences.

In fact, in Shaw and Friesem's (2016) discussion of homophobia and transphobia in video games, they write that "Casual homophobia and transphobia in game texts [such as the aforementioned example from *Dragon Quest III* where a female character conflates refusal of sexual acts with homosexuality] demonstrate that it is not difficult for game makers to see the relevance of LGBTQ content in these texts. The challenge moving forward is to see if casual inclusivity is as possible as casual offensiveness" (p. 3885). The following two subsections follow two genres of television, telenovelas and paranormal drama, that have incorporated inclusive elements into narratives where sexuality and gender identity are not foci. Both of these

genres have historically lacked positive representations of queer populations and gender identity, but have since not only redefined their portrayals of sexuality and gender to be more sex-positive, but also done so while remaining popular in the mainstream culture. This is important because the video game industry, like all media, is primarily profit-driven; the ability for sex-positive media to remain largely profitable suggest that the same can be true in video games.

3.1 Entertainment Education and Latin American Telenovelas

Historically, the Latin-American soap-operatic genre of the telenovela has maintained a dramatic tone. Tate (2014) writes that telenovelas of the past contained stock characters, including "a noble and wealthy hero, a tender and poor heroine and their envious antagonists" (p. 52). Yet, the tone of telenovelas has shifted drastically in recent decades; some have become less dramatic and even comedic. Character archetypes, such as that of the "tender and poor heroine," have also evolved to illustrate female characters with more self-efficacy. Following this trend, homophobia, a historically taboo topic in telenovelas, has also been discussed within telenovelas in greater and greater detail.

One of the first telenovelas to deviate from this stock characterization was *Simplemente María* (Simply Maria), which broadcast in Peru from 1969-1971. Tate (2014) writes that *Simplemente María* follows a maid, who after taking English classes and obtaining a Singer sewing machine, designs and markets her own clothing, eventually becoming a successful designer. Mexican telenovela writer and director Miguel Sabido took note of some trends connected to the show: increased sales of Singer sewing machines and English language instruction, as well as changes in attitudes of Peruvian employers towards service workers such as maids, resulting in more flexible work schedules that allowed them to pursue further education (p. 53). Notably, *Simplemente María*'s titular María marks a strong contrast with the

stock heroine Tate mentions. Rather than being helpless, María demonstrates self-efficacy, independence, and resilience, traits not unlike those traditionally associated with masculine ideology as defined by Blackburn and Scharrer. Even though *Simplemente María* deviated from such stock imagery, or perhaps because of it, the show became among the most popular Peruvian network shows. Arvind Singhal, Rafael Obregon, and Everett Rogers (1995) write that *Simplemente María* was at the time of release the longest running and most popular telenovela in Latin America and as of 1994 remained Latin America's most popular telenovela ever broadcast (p. 3).

   Simplemente María became the first among the entertainment-education telenovelas. Tate (2014) writes that after noticing the success of *Simplemente María* and the effects it had on Peruvian citizens, Miguel Sabido went on to work with Stanford psychologist Albert Bandura, who developed the aforementioned social cognitive theory, to create telenovelas that addressed social issues facing Latin American populations. This type of media, both meant to entertain and educate, was later dubbed "entertainment-education." Entertainment-education has indeed proven to be effective in spreading social messages. The first soap opera Sabido developed aired in 1975-1976 and was called *Ven Conmigo* (Come with Me). The purpose of this entertainment-education telenovela was to improve adult literacy rates in Mexico. The results suggest that they did, as 600,000 more Mexicans registered for adult literacy classes in 1976 than in 1975, an increase of 63% from previous years (p. 53). While Sabido continued entertainment-education in Latin America—educating on topics such as family planning and contraception—entertainment-education has since spread to at least 75 other countries. Since this era, telenovelas have adapted to target younger audiences, such as introducing more humorous tones, as well as introducing

topics such as rape, domestic violence, premarital sex, and homophobia, all for the purpose of changing beliefs on traditionally taboo topics (p. 54).

La vida en el espejo (Life in the Mirror) (1999) was the first Mexican telenovela to outright discuss homophobia. In *La Vida*, a gay supporting character has a relationship with another man, and gains support from his family. Acceptance from not only his friends and family, but also his own self, implies and models tolerance for viewers (Tate, 2014, p. 55). *La vida*'s legacy can be traced to the many numbers of queer characters in telenovelas following it. Unfortunately, many of these characters, such as Jaro from *Velo de novia* (Wedding Veil) (2003-4) are stereotypical gays: they are effeminate in dress and demeanor, and work in fashion or other fields associated with queer men. They also exist primarily for comedic break in otherwise melodramatic sequences (p. 56). These are in line with queer archetypes that suggest an incompatibility of queerness and masculinity, do not model any form of serious inclusion, and exist primarily as perpetuations of comedic breaks. As described by Dyer, these characterizations facilitate heteronormative and hypermasculine culture by distancing heterosexual men with queer, effeminate men.

However, by the late 2000's, telenovelas shifted to become more comedic than dramatic, and more inclusive of queer people. Gay men have since had representations ranging from effeminate to hypermasculine, and their societal marginalization has become a focal point of many subplots. In recent years, there have been shifts towards recognizing the social discrimination that many queer people face. Telenovelas such as *La fea más bella* (The Prettiest Ugly Woman) (2006-2007) and *Y Yo amo a Juan Querendón* (I Love Juan Querendón) (2007-2008) contain characters that are not only gay, but whose presentations exist within a spectrum of feminine to masculine and are described with positive relationships with other men, with

elements of inclusion and tolerance in mind, and where masculinity is separated from sexuality. Characters that are homophobic eventually learn to challenge their own preconceived notions on sexuality, or alternatively are satirized by the telenovela as old-fashioned and provincial.

In *La fea más bella*, gay man Luigi Lombardi is the stereotypical gay. He is effeminate, wears sequined halter tops, and works as a fashion designer; he even refers to himself with feminine terms, such as "chiflada," meaning a nutty woman (Tate, 2014, pp. 56-57). Though this proves to be problematic in ways similar to the bishonen (which suggests that masculinity and queerness are incompatible), the show ultimately does model various representations of masculinity: though Luigi could be defined as effeminate and a stereotypical gay, his two partners (from different moments throughout the telenovela) illustrate physical characteristics more in line with traditional masculinity. Furthermore, their relationships with Luigi are taken just as seriously as a heterosexual relationship would be: with tender moments, flowers, and visits at work (p. 57). Beyond this, *La fea más bella* directly tackles themes of homophobia and the family. According to Tate (2014), in a parental confrontation, Luigi exclaims:

> 'No me volví, nací gay. Y no por eso soy menos hombre. Debe de ser vergonzoso para un macho como tú tener un hijo como yo'. ([the translation is] I didn't become, I was born gay. And that doesn't make me less of a man. It must be shameful for a macho like you to have a son like me.). (p. 57)

In later scenes, Luigi's mother tells him that she realized that everyone has the right to be who they are, and both she and Luigi's father call Aldo, Luigi's partner, "hijo," meaning son (p. 58). While there are some elements of stereotyping present in Luigi, the show ultimately promotes inclusivity by illustrating queer narrative. Through their representation of Luigi's parents, *La fea más bella* demonstrate that anyone, even with strongly held homophobic beliefs, have the

opportunity to become tolerant and inclusive of LGBTQ communities. Though many of Luigi's scenes exist for comedic effect, scenes such as the above emphasize that Luigi does not exist purely as a caricature of gay men, but as a queer character who, along with his parents, model lessons on inclusivity and tolerance.

Though *La fea más bella* broke away from the traditional taboo surrounding sexual minorities, it ultimately became among the most popular telenovelas. Univision (2007) states in a press release that the finale of the show reached over nine million people in America, making the network America's most viewed channel for all adults (not just Hispanic populations) 18-34 and 18-49 for the entire night (para. 1).

Y Yo amo a Juan Querendón also promotes tolerance and emphasizes that queer men and heterosexual men do not have to be as exaggeratedly different. While the gay main character Gáytan Pastor is not particularly masculine, he also does not follow traditional media queer stereotypes: he is not as flamboyantly effeminate as Luigi, nor is he a fashion worker; in fact, he works at a food distribution company (Tate, 2014, p. 58). Rather, his sexuality is solely determined by his flirtations with other men, and says nothing about his presentations of masculinity. As with Luigi, Gáytan and his partner, Heriberto, engage in behaviors heterosexual couples would also have, such as dates and flirtations. During the final scene, their wedding, Heriberto introduces Gáytan to his father, who proceeds to chase the two of them around the reception with a gun. While this may seem to be a model of homophobia, the characterization of the scene is comedic. Heriberto's father is implied to be a negative model of antiquated attitudes associated with the past, and therefore implies that homophobia would make oneself a laughingstock—in contrast, Heriberto and Gáytan's friends, family, and colleagues all attend the wedding and are nothing but supportive (Tate, 2014, p. 60).

The bulky Heriberto and the titular Juan also illustrate a divide between sexuality and masculinity. Both are characterized by Tate (2014) as masculine, but are portrayed in different ways when Gáytan flirts with them (pp. 58-89). Heriberto, who originally rejects Gáytan, comes to question his own sexuality. When he confides in Yvonne, a friend of Gáytan, she and Gáytan have a discussion where he discusses his awakening and his internal struggles that he had experienced, even to the point of seeking therapy (pp. 59-60). This moment is notably marked by drama, rather than humor, and serves to educate audiences by humanizing, rather than demeaning, queer communities. On the other hand, though Juan is also the target of Gáytan's flirtations, his character educates audience members on different aspects of sexuality. Tate writes that although Juan was aware that Gáytan was attracted to him, the former continued to befriend the latter, leading to touching scenes regarding the friendship that had blossomed between a gay and straight man: one example of this was when Gáytan drank himself into a stupor after his mother died; when Juan sees him, he supports Gáytan by bringing him to bed and watching him sleep with sympathy and affection. Moments like these do not discredit Juan's masculinity, but rather illustrates his charm (p. 59). Juan and Gáytan's friendship models positive behavior for straight men. Rather than distancing himself from a perceived deviant, Juan positively models acceptance and tolerance for straight, male audience members.

Between Luigi, Gáytan, and Heriberto, Latin American telenovelas demonstrate that sexuality is not necessarily related to masculinity. They rise above not only the cultural stigma surrounding LGBTQ populations, but also reject traditional stereotypes of queer men as defined by Dyer. Rather, Luigi, Gáytan, and their lovers demonstrate that sexuality has nothing to do with masculinity. Even Luigi, who refers to himself with feminine terms, defends the fact that he is no less of a man because he is gay. Furthermore, both *La fea más bella* and *Y Yo amo a Juan*

Querendón address what it means to be accepting of LGBTQ peoples. For male audience members who are not queer, both telenovelas model tolerance and inclusivity for sexual minorities.

3.2 Paranormal Drama and *Teen Wolf*

As previously mentioned, historical depictions of paranormal romance often compare inhumanity with deviant sexuality. In *Dracula*, the juxtaposition of incest, female sexual desire, and sex outside of marriage and the Count imply that inhumanity belies sexual deviance (E. Kendal & Z. Kendal, 2015, p. 35). In video games such as *Gabriel Knight: The Beast Within*, homosexuals and werewolves are likened as well, with similar implications (Shaw & Friesem, 2016, p. 3881).

In addition to deviant sexuality, paranormal drama also includes many examples of gendered power imbalance. In *Dracula*, E. Kendal and Z. Kendal (2015) note that Mina and Lucy, the main heroines, have a sexuality tied solely to childbirth, as sexual desire was not characteristic of 19th century Western canon women. Therefore, the connotation of their imprisonment by the Count is described best as a form of reproductive and "sexual theft" (p. 35). The immoral behavior here does not come from the sexual assault of another human, but rather the attempt to impregnate her, a woman who already belongs to a man. Power imbalances have also persisted into modern era paranormal drama, though in these instances the immorality does in fact come from the sexual assault of another person. Further examples may be found in the *Twilight* book series. E. Kendal and Z. Kendal (2015) write that perhaps one of the most common tropes in paranormal romance is that of the underlying threat of violence, which increases tension between the lovers, with the powerful (predominantly male) lover needing to

restrain himself, as physical and sexual violence are a part of his nature (p. 30). E. Kendal and Z. Kendal note the following quote from *Twilight: Eclipse*:

> He still had my chin – his fingers holding too tight, till it hurt – and I saw the resolve in his eyes. "N –" I started to object, but it was too late. His lips crushed mine, stopping my protest. He kissed me angrily, roughly, his other hand gripping tight around the back of my neck, making escape impossible. . . . Acting on instinct, I let my hands drop to my side, and shut down. I opened my eyes and didn't fight, didn't feel . . . just waited for him to stop. (p. 27)

Bella, who is clearly not giving consent, becomes submissive to all of Jacob's whims, one of the many examples of power imbalances in *Twilight*. Though fictional, *Twilight* and *Dracula* reflect androcentric views on sexuality, implying that sexual relationships are more often based off of the man's desire rather than the woman's. This passage models an unbalanced sexual relationship that, when cultivated over time, further rape myths, even to the point of eroticizing male dominance over women, in line with the masculine norms of Dominance and Importance of Sex as defined by Blackburn and Scharrer.

Yet, even though the supernatural drama genre has been rooted in homophobic stereotypes and gendered power imbalances, the *Teen Wolf* television series demonstrates that sex-positivism is possible without compromising on popularity. According Nielson (2014), *Teen Wolf* was the sixth most watched Social TV Series in 2014, with an average audience of 2,631,000 viewers per episode (par. 3). According to Forbes and Shareablee (2017), *Teen Wolf* was among the most interacted with fantasy/sci-fi TV series between January 1 and June 30 of 2017, with over 35 million interactions across platforms such as Facebook, Twitter, and Instagram (Chart 1).

In opposition to the utter lack of consent illustrated repeatedly in *Dracula* and the

Twilight series, E. Kendal and Z. Kendal (2015) write that the *Teen Wolf* series utilizes a sex-

positivist approach, where "consent is never implied for sexual activity but must be actively

sought, and ambivalence, like explicit resistance, is recognised as a distinct lack of consent," in

many of the modeled relationships, for example, in the following scene:

Heather: Stiles, I just turned 17 today. And you know what I want for my birthday?

Stiles: A bike?

Heather: To not be a 17-year-old virgin . . . Have you never done it before either?

Stiles: Turned 17? No, not yet. No.

Heather: Stiles?

Stiles: Yeah, maybe that other thing too.

Heather: Do you want to? I mean would you be ok with that?

Stiles: [mocking] Would I be ok with that? I believe so, yeah. [pause] [seriously] No

yeah, very. (pp. 30-32)

While in the above excerpt, Stiles implies that men are always willing to consent to sex, in line

with Desire for Sex, a component of Blackburn and Scharrer's definition of traditional masculine

ideology, this scene is important for a few reasons. Firstly, Heather propositioning Stiles, rather

than vice-versa, implies that women can enjoy intercourse just as much as men can. Rather than

female sexuality being tied to male whim (the *Twilight* series) or reproduction (*Dracula*), female

sexuality here is compared to female recreation, just as male sexuality has been historically tied

to male recreation. Heather's active proposition to Stiles also represents another way in which

Teen Wolf embraces sex-positivity; this time through equal gender representation. In *Teen Wolf*,

female characters rescue the male characters just as often as vice-versa, and do so through

physical strength rather than words (which is often depicted in other media where a woman saves a man); they use bow, ninja skills, and even their werewolf forms (E. Kendal & Z. Kendal, 2015, pp. 37-38). Both male and female characters in this show are also illustrated as physically strong and intelligent, and beyond this, male characters "cry and seek emotional support without being emasculated" (p. 37). Such a characterization of male characters creates an implication contrary to what is suggested by Blackburn and Scharrer's definition of traditional masculine ideology, particularly the characteristic of Toughness. Secondly, this scene positively models consent, rather than dominance.

In fact, *Teen Wolf* even moves beyond modeling positive depictions of consent to actively criticize failure to seek consent. When Matt kisses Allison without her permission, she states that this is "'not ok'" (E. Kendal & Z. Kendal, 2015, p. 33). In other words, Allison is encouraged to speak out when she has been touched without her permission. Rather than eroticizing sexual assault as in *Dracula* and the *Twilight* series, this moment not only models consent-gathering through criticism of a failure to do so, but also implies, contrary to video game media such as *GTA* and *Tomb Raider*, that women exist as independent entities separate from male sexual desire.

Furthermore, *Teen Wolf* discusses sexuality and gender norms in a more positive light than historical paranormal media. Danny, the gay lacrosse goalkeeper, has relationships that "are also taken as seriously as any of the heterosexual characters in the series and the full range of romantic experiences is shown: he has boyfriends, has his heart broken, finds new love in the gay werewolf Ethan, and goes through all the same awkward dating rituals with him as Scott and Allison did with each other" (E. Kendal & Z. Kendal, 2015, p. 36). Just like in Gáytan and Luigi's relationships, *Teen Wolf* normalizes queer relationships by emphasizing the seminaries

they share with heterosexual couples. Stereotyping is also absent here: Danny is neither used to illustrate horrific elements of being queer, nor does is his presence tied solely to comedic relief. Notably, his physical appearance is rather bulky, implying that he is in line with traditional masculine traits as defined by Blackburn and Scharrer, such as Toughness. Danny is also not the only queer character, suggesting, along with the depth of his relationship, that the show truly values queer narrative beyond a tokenistic or comedic standpoint. Beyond this, sexuality is seen not as a means to illustrate the supernatural, but as an independent characteristic that varies both in human and inhuman populations. Queer characters are not solely confined to werewolves, nor are werewolves solely confined to queer characters, rebuffing the historic comparison in the supernatural drama genre between inhumanity, deviance, and queerness. Rather, sexuality is illustrated to be unrelated entirely to masculinity; Stiles even questions his own sexuality from time to time, and while nothing comes of this, it indicates that sexuality is separate from masculinity or femininity, and to question one is not to question the other (E. Kendal & Z. Kendal, 2015, p. 37).

Stereotypes on gender and sexuality have defined supernatural drama for centuries. In particular, Dyer (1999) writes about queer stereotyping that:

[It] seems probable that gayness is, as a material category, far more fluid than class, gender or race—that is, most people are not either gay or non-gay, but have, to varying degrees, the capacity for both. However, this fluidity is unsettling both to the rigidity of social categorization and to the maintenance of heterosexual hegemony. What's more, the invisibility of gayness may come creeping up on heterosexuality unawares, and fluid-like, seep into the citadel. It is therefore reassuring to have gayness firmly categorized and kept separate from the start through a widely known iconography. (p. 300)

For much of the lifespan of supernatural drama, stereotypes have been built to divide right and wrong, with straight, dominant, hypermasculine men on the former side, and inhuman, queer men on the latter. Yet, *Teen Wolf* abandons such ideology, modernizes the genre, and models sex-positivism. Categories previously known to exist as either right or wrong have been abandoned in favor of individuality: men and women are invited to express their sexual orientation, strength, intelligence, and emotionality in whatever way they deem most fit for themselves, rather than for social norms.

4. Conclusion

In both the case of the telenovela and of paranormal drama, recent decades have seen a shift in portrayals of queer communities and masculinity. *Simplemente María, La fea más bella, Y Yo amo a Juan Querendón*, and *Teen Wolf* refute not only past stereotypes of masculinity in relation to queer populations, but even past representations of masculine ideology itself, all the while remaining popular programs that proved capable of enrapturing audiences. Who is to say that *GTA*, a series that markets itself on vulgarity and violence and is thus deeply rooted in traditional constructs of masculinity, cannot follow suit?

Yet, video games are still situated within a patriarchal industry. Though females constitute approximately half of gamers as of 2014, they only represented approximately 22% of the gaming industry at that time (Chess & Shaw, 2014, p. 209). Despite the fact that the two largest age groups that game are those who are under 18 (20%) and those who are 18-34 (38%) (ESA, 2021, p. 2), the insensitivity and blatant disregard with which video games treat women and sexual minorities are no better than how sexual minorities and women have been treated in 19th century media like Stoker's *Dracula*. As a medium, video games have stagnated in their androcentric representations of masculine and heteronormative stereotypes, which, sadly, can be

connected to tangible consequences within the video game community. Chess and Shaw (2014) note multiple instances of this, including the harassment campaign against feminist video game scholars and critics known as #GamerGate as well as the Penny Arcade rape joke incident, where male members of the gaming community defended distasteful rape jokes simply because the authors were not purposefully trying to alienate women (thus implying lack of regard for the implications of their sexual violence joke in regards to women, who are more likely to be the victim of such crimes (p. 209). These events elucidate an implied consequence regarding the video game cocktail of cultivation, hypermasculinity, and heteronormativity: perhaps the video game community is simply not ready to modernize itself in a way that is beneficial to the individual gamer identity.

Regardless of whatever research is being done into the harmful effects of these overtly hypermasculine and heteronormative narratives, video games that incorporate antiquated values continue to sell. One need only look at *GTA*. As mentioned previously, *GTA: San Andreas* sold 27.5 million units in its lifespan and has earned a Metascore of 93, despite the fact that it alienates women, queer communities, and sex violence victims—all while promoting hegemonic, hypermasculine culture. This is reflective of the toxically masculine community described in the previous paragraph: a community that defends rape jokes and harasses feminist scholars, all the while ignoring the voices of who are actually marginalized by these burlesques. Such a tacit approval of hegemonic masculinity by a large proportion of gamers will do nothing but deter fundamental change in the gaming industry.

Future research should examine the unique drivers of the video game industry and gaming communities. Understanding how gamers originally began to play titles such as *GTA* and what drives them to continue playing such titles can bring to light whether or not the

oversexualization of a woman is truly what attracts audiences in video games (in other words, if attractiveness is necessary for a riveting game with compelling narrative to sell well). It is possible that gamers who are unaware of the consequences playing games with sexual and violent content, such as the *GTA* series, are primarily drawn to other parts of the narrative rather than the sexual and violent content itself.

Another area of further research is understanding what drives game developers to include heteronormative and hypermasculine elements in their narratives, which may delineate where, if anywhere, elements of entertainment-education can coexist with current game narratives. Just as how traditional media's portrayal of sexuality and masculinity can be used as a model for video games' portrayal of such elements, so too can the environment that fostered sex-positivism in traditional media be used as a guidepost to make the video game industry more conducive to inclusive and tolerant ideals.

Explorations of other unique parts of gaming culture—online chat rooms, voice chats, gambling systems, etc.—can also be evaluated to illustrate other ways in which video games differ from traditional media. Because of video games' potential for increased interactivity and increased integration with the internet, video games have the potential for not only different user-to-media interactions, but also additional user-to-user contact, both qualities that existed in much lesser degrees in traditional media.

Video games, like other forms of media, are not inherently discriminatory. While there may not be a simple solution for the plethora of representation issues in video games, studies of representation in television prove that the video game industry has the potential to modernize itself. Though representation is a multilayered issue, scholarly work is no stranger to the complex and multifaceted.

Let us get to work.

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