

# Gender Representations in *Uncharted 4: A Thief's End*

Bachelor's Thesis

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<p>Videopelit ovat yhä suosituimpia sekä viihteellisenä harrastuksena että urheilumuotona. Onkin tärkeää, että niitä tutkitaan muun muassa sukupuolten representaatioiden osalta. Aiemmat tutkimukset osoittavat varsinkin naispelihahmojen olevan seksuaalisoituja vartalon ja vaatteiden osalta, sekä määrältään aliedustettuja ja toissijaisissa rooleissa esiintyviä.</p> <p>Tämän tutkimuksen tavoitteena oli selvittää, millaisia sukupuolten representaatioita menestyspelistä <i>Uncharted 4: A Thief's End</i> löytyy, ja vertailla niitä muissa videopeleissä ja yleisesti mediassa esiintyviin sukupuolten stereotyyppisiin. Tutkimuksessa keskityttiin kahteen pelin keskeiseen hahmoon, Nathan Drakeen ja Elena Fisheriin, ja aineistona toimivat pelin videokohtaukset. Aineisto kerättiin pelaamalla peli läpi ja hyödyntämällä YouTube-sivustoa. Tutkimusta lähestyttiin multimodaalisesta perspektiivistä, ja aineistoa tarkasteltiin lingvistiksestä, narratiivisesta, sekä visuaalisesta näkökulmasta.</p> <p>Tutkimustulokset osoittautuvat aiempia tutkimuksia huomattavasti positiivisemmiksi. Lingvistiksestä näkökulmasta hahmot poikkesivat lähes täysin stereotyyppisistä, narratiivien osalta naishahmo esiintyi monissa erilaisissa stereotyyppisissä rooleissa, sekä visuaalisesti molemmat hahmot edustavat terveellistä vartaloihannetta ja pukeutuvat tilanteisiin sopivasti. Hahmojen representaatioissa ei siis ollut vastakkaisista sukupuolista huolimatta merkittäviä eroja.</p> <p>Koska tutkimuksessa analysoitiin vain yhtä videopeliä, suurempia yleistyksiä koko peliteollisuuden kannalta ei voida tehdä. Joka tapauksessa yhden pelin kattava tutkimus tarjosi kaivattua positiivisuutta perinteisesti negatiiviselle representaatioiden alueelle.</p>	
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# 1 INTRODUCTION

Video games have been rising in popularity for years now. The U.S. video game market value alone was estimated at over 17 billion U.S. dollars in 2016, and for the entire world the value increased to as high as 75 billion U.S. dollars (Statista n.d.). The business now involves significantly more money, is becoming ever more popular as a casual or a serious hobby, and is also becoming a credible sport in the form of *eSports*. Therefore, it is important and meaningful to research gaming from multiple different perspectives; the present study is concerned with the gender representations seen in video games. The focus is on analyzing one particular video game, *Uncharted 4: A Thief's End*, released in 2016. It was released to critical acclaim, achieving an average score of 93 out of 100, indicating “universal acclaim” on the review aggregator website Metacritic (Metacritic 2018). It was also a commercial success, selling over 10 million copies (VGChartz 2018). These accomplishments make it one of the landmark titles of the current console generation.

A considerable amount of research has been carried out on gender representations in video games, but the present study will focus on *Uncharted 4*'s two primary characters that are husband and wife: the male protagonist Nathan Drake and his spouse Elena Fisher. I will analyze how they are portrayed and whether they fill any common gender stereotypes seen in other video games and other media. In *Uncharted 4*, Elena takes on a larger role compared to earlier games in the series, and appears not only in cutscenes but gameplay sections as well. This makes the game more fruitful for research, as she has a large enough role to be compared to the main protagonist. However, she is unplayable during the main story, which is experienced as Nathan Drake.

The present study is important because it analyzes a very successful game played by a large audience, and positive results could bring some much-needed positivity into a landscape dominated by largely negative and sexist gender representations.

## **2 BACKGROUND**

### **2.1. Previous Studies: Gender Representations in Video Games**

The representation of genders, especially the female gender, has been a problematic issue in the video game industry. In a male-dominated world, there have been many questionable portrayals but the industry seems to be heading in a more positive direction. Kondrat (2015) discovered through her questionnaire that the target audience of video games recognizes the frequent negative representations of mostly female characters in video games. Even though the female player base is growing, most respondents thought that the largely male target audience is the reason behind female gender stereotyping (Kondrat 2015). The replies of the respondents indicated that sexually provocative and seductively dressed female characters were the most common ways of stereotyping females (Kondrat 2015). The replies also indicated that there is an insufficient number of strong female protagonists (Kondrat 2015).

In video games, female characters seem to appear in different, often less significant, roles than male characters. Williams et al.'s (2009) large-scale content analysis study of video game characters found that there are significantly fewer women in video games than men, and they are rarely the action-doers; instead, they appear in secondary roles. Women were “under-represented compared to the population” (Williams et al. 2009: 828). Williams (2006) has proposed the idea of games and gender working as a cycle: this means that as more men appear in games compared to women, men are then more drawn to games, and as those same men grow up, they are more likely to become game developers than the women who perhaps never had a similar incentive to start gaming.

Another content analysis study, by Lynch et al. (2016) also underlines the secondary role of a female in video games. The study analyzed “in-game recordings of video gameplay” from over 30 years and over 500 video games (Lynch et al. 2016: 569-570). The analysis generally found a positive development. While the earliest games from the 1980s featured little sexualization, mainly due to primitive graphics, there was a peak in sexualization during the late 1990s and early 2000s after significant graphical development, but since 2006, this sexualization has been decreasing (Lynch et al. 2016: 576). Lynch et al. (2016: 576) attribute this positive change to “recent feminist discussions” which, amongst other issues, have also highlighted the sexualized representations of

females in video games. However, the study still found evidence of the secondary role issue: while more playable female characters now appear in video games, the number of female characters in primary roles has not increased (Lynch et al. 2016: 577). Lynch et al.'s study actually found a drop in the percentage of primary female characters in recent years compared to earlier years. As primary characters are less often sexualized than secondary or tertiary (Lynch et al. 2016: 576), this has negative implications for the future development of female video game characters.

The trend of a secondary role was also found in a study researching the box art (the cover artwork) of video games. Burgess et al. (2007) analyzed over 200 covers of popular video games released in 2005. The findings were clear: “males were twice as likely to be featured on covers as females were” (Burgess et al. 2007: 423). If a female was featured in a primary status, that status was commonly shared with a primary male (Burgess et al. 2007: 427). According to Burgess et al. (2007: 427), this implies that the female is only seen as vital to the game when there is also a male present. Previous research on the subject by Dietz (1998) discovered that “the most common portrayal of women was actually the complete absence of women at all”. While Burgess et al.'s (2007) study found that the number of women portrayed had increased, the portrayals were often negative. Significantly more women than men were portrayed as not performing any action, or were sexualized (Burgess et al. 2007: 427). On the rare occasion that women were given the most prominent status, their sexuality was heavily overemphasized (Burgess et al. 2007: 427).

Appearance-wise there has been concern over the sexualized woman with a big bust and wide hips. However, a content analysis study by Martins et al. (2009) researched the “female body imagery in video games” and found a preference for the “thin-ideal”. The study researched over a hundred of the top selling games from 2005-2006 (Martins et al. 2009: 827) and compared the body imagery found in the games to actual American women (Martins et al. 2009: 831). The study discovered that a female video game character's chest, waist, and hips are smaller than those of a real-life woman from the sample (Martins et al. 2009: 830). Thus, video games follow the trend of the thin-ideal that has also been found in other media (e.g. Byrd-Bredbenner 2003; Sypeck et al. 2006: as quoted by Martins et al. 2009: 831). Trying to reach the unrealistic body image can cause women discomfort in their own bodies, and can set unrealistic expectations for men (Martins et al. 2009: 831).

One could begin to wonder why these negative portrayals of genders continue to persist. Near (2013) studied the box art of games and found a link between the representations of genders and game sales. Female characters appeared in approximately one third of the covers of the sample and were sexualized in over 60 percent of them (Near 2013: 259). According to Near (2013: 260), cover art that featured solely female characters had a significant negative impact on the game's sales. Even when sexualized, the presence of a female character worsened sales performance if they were prominently featured (Near 2013: 262). Based on Near's research, one could come to the conclusion that there might be a financial motive behind both the under-representation and the sexist representation of females; that it is what the public prefers and has come to expect.

However, there is light at the end of the tunnel. Jansz and Martis' 2007 study found an equal division of powerful leading roles between female and male characters, albeit from a significantly smaller sample. While Jansz and Martis (2007: 147) discovered a positive development in regard to roles, old stereotypes did persist appearance-wise: the male characters were exaggeratedly muscular, while the female characters wore revealing clothing, and had a large bust and buttocks. In any case, Jansz and Martis (2007: 147) dubbed the positive change they found "the Lara phenomenon". Lara Croft, the original powerful woman in video games, undoubtedly paved the way for other strong female characters, such as *Mirror's Edge's* main character, Faith. According to Ciccoricco (2012: 264), Faith is a powerful female character "that is not hypersexualized", and the gameplay designed around her also supports that. In conclusion, while there has traditionally been a large gap in the representation of genders in video games, the industry seems to be going through significant changes and could be heading towards a different, more gender-positive future.

## 2.2. Theoretical Background: Multimodality

A large quantity of previous research on genders and video games has been based on content analysis carried out on various related material such as cover artwork, images of characters, or opening cinematics; however, this is only scratching the surface and not necessarily concentrating more thoroughly on what each game actually has to offer. Therefore, the present study takes a different direction as the aim is to analyze only one particular game as thoroughly as possible. While this makes the scope of the study significantly more limited and generalizations concerning the whole video game industry probably cannot be made based on the findings, it does allow for a considerably more detailed analysis.

As video games are multimodal in nature, having the ability to look at different *modes* of meaning-making instead of solely textual discourse analysis is extremely relevant and important. The word *mode* has been defined in multiple ways, for example the following: “mode is used to refer to a regularised organised set of resources for meaning-making, including, image, gesture, movement, music, speech and sound effect” (Jewitt and Kress 2003: 1-2; as quoted by Bateman et al. 2017: 18). Mode has also been defined as “a socially shaped and culturally given resource for making meaning” with examples such as image, moving image, gesture, and speech given (Kress 2010: 79; as quoted by Bateman et al. 2017: 18). The term *multimodality* then refers to a situation where several modes are combined. It can be viewed as describing “communicative situations” depending on multiple different modes to truly prosper (Bateman et al. 2017: 7). Bateman et al. (2017: 7) list examples of a TV show using “spoken language, pictures and texts”, a book using “written language, pictures, diagrams, page composition and so on”, and more closely connected to the present study, “a computer game might show representations of any of these things and include movement and actions as well”.

In this day and age, studying multimodality is becoming increasingly more important. Kress (2003: 1; as quoted by Lim 2018: 1) describes the literacy of our modern-day media era as containing “human, cognitive/affective, cultural and bodily engagement with the world and on the forms and shapes of knowledge”. The systemic functional approach to multimodality draws from Michael Halliday’s 1978 work who saw language as social semiotic. The systemic functional approach can

then be used to research multimodal texts by looking at the effect of "each semiotic resource" on the meaning (Lim 2018: 3).

A specific multimodal analysis approach for video games has yet to be devised, and as such, the present study will be concerned with three different perspectives: linguistic, narrative, and visual; for the most thorough analysis possible. For the linguistic portrayal, Gaukhar and Mechsherskaya's (2013) gender stereotypes of language use will be considered to help compare the characters' language use to stereotypes. For the narrative portrayal, Wood's (1994) stereotypical media gender roles will aid in analyzing the roles of the characters in the storyline of the game. For the visual portrayal, stereotypical portrayals found in previous studies (specifically Jansz & Martis 2007, and Martins et al. 2009) of gender representations in video games will be considered. The social semiotic approach will be used to the extent of analyzing the purpose and effect of the modes used in the gender representations.

People are exposed to and affected by gender stereotypes from an early age. Boys are encouraged to play with trucks, while girls should play with dolls. According to research, girls "are taught to take less interest in [...] traditionally 'male' activities" such as certain school subjects like mathematics (Harrison & O'Neill 2002: 145). Harrison and O'Neill (2002: 146) also claim that boys might turn down a musical hobby in favor of something seen as more masculine, such as sports. As gender stereotypes are learned early on in life, they carry over to adulthood and are reflected in the media. Tartaglia and Rollero (2015) researched newspaper advertisements and found men to play working roles, while women were often in decorative roles or objectified. Collins (2011) looked for overarching themes in multiple prior analyses and found that "women and girls are under-represented across a wide variety of media" and often sexualized.

## 3 THE PRESENT STUDY

### 3.1. Research Aim and Research Questions

In the present study, I will analyze the portrayal of the characters Nathan Drake and Elena Fisher, the two primary characters in the video game *Uncharted 4: A Thief's End*. The aim is to analyze their gender representations, and to discover whether they follow the gender stereotypes portrayed in other video games and other media. The research questions are the following:

1. How are the genders represented linguistically?

According to Gaukhar & Mechsherskaya (2013: 463), “masculinity is correlated with a spirit, initiative, power, vibe, reason, culture and rationality; while femininity is correlated with substance, nature, pacifism, submission, emotion and instinct”. Also, some research (e.g. Duncan et al. 1990; Hassett & Houlihan 1979; Thorson et al. 1997: as quoted by Decker & Rotondo 2001) has found that men use humor more frequently than women, while some studies have found otherwise. The common stereotype, however, links humor more closely to a man. I will attempt to locate certain linguistic patterns in Nathan and Elena’s interactions, such as who initiates action (initiative and power associated with masculinity), asking for help and apologizing (submissive actions associated with femininity), use of humor and jokes (more strongly associated with males), and showcases of affection and emotion (emotion associated with femininity). This will reveal whether the characters conform to gender stereotypes of language use or not.

2. What are the characters’ roles in the narrative?

Wood (1994: 32-35) discovered that in media, men are generally presented as “confident, competent, powerful” yet as unfit for “domestic and nurturing roles”. Women, on the other hand, “are shown predominantly in their roles as homemakers, mothers, and wives”, while “their career lives typically receive little or no attention” (Wood 1994: 35). I am seeking to discover whether these stereotypical roles are fulfilled in the narrative. In the case of this game, it would mean Nathan going on an adventure while Elena stays at home, holding the fort so to speak. Nathan is the main protagonist of the game, and therefore his importance to the narrative is a given; as such, the focus will be on how Elena’s actions affect Nathan’s adventure and the story. Nathan’s and Elena’s roles in co-operative gameplay sections will also be covered briefly.

### 3. How are the characters portrayed visually in the game?

This includes body build, proportions, and most importantly clothing: Nathan and Elena wear several different outfits in the game depending on where the game chapter is set in. I will attempt to discover whether there are differences between the two characters in, for example, how appropriate for the weather or how revealing the clothing is. Body builds and proportions will be analyzed with the exaggeratedly muscular male stereotype (e.g. Jansz and Martis 2007: 147) and Martins et al.'s (2009) "thin-ideal" female, and the large-busted and large-butt female (e.g. Jansz and Martis 2007: 147), stereotypes in mind.

## 3.2. Data and Methods

*Uncharted 4: A Thief's End* is an action adventure game developed by Naughty Dog and released by Sony in 2016. Nathan Drake is the main protagonist of the game, who repeatedly gets tangled up in the webs of the dangerous treasure-hunting scene. Elena Fisher is his wife and a journalist, who continuously gets mixed up in Nathan's escapades. The premise of *Uncharted 4* is that the couple have now left the dangerous life behind them. Several other characters feature in the game as well, but the present study focuses on Nathan and Elena. When other characters are mentioned, their significance is briefly explained. The game is rated PEGI 16.

The data of the present study mainly consists of cutscenes. The cutscenes were chosen to be analyzed as that is where most of the pivotal story moments occur, and the characters act in them like the developers had intended them to act instead of the player having control over them. Specific cutscenes were chosen on the basis that Nathan and Elena were both featured in them. The data was collected by playing through the game, and watching cutscene compilation videos on the YouTube website.

As multimodality deals with different modes constructing meanings together, a multimodal approach is appropriate for the present study. The cutscenes feature speech as well as image and occasionally music. Considering the several modes of meaning-making used in the cutscenes of the game, and utilizing the three different perspectives described in the research questions will reveal what kinds of gender representations are construed in *Uncharted 4*.

## 4 ANALYSIS

### 4.1. Linguistic Portrayal

Initiative and power are often associated with masculinity (Gaukhar & Mechsherskaya 2013: 463); the supposition would therefore be that Nathan would more frequently initiate action, while Elena's communication would involve less initiative. The analyzed cutscenes produced a different result: Elena initiated action more often with roughly a 60/40 split. In the jungle section of the game (chapters 17-18), Elena leads the way while Nathan is the follower. She uses the radio, arms them with weapons, scouts the surroundings for enemies, and prepares their vehicle.

Elena: "Trade ya." (hands a pistol to Nathan)

Nathan: "Thanks." (hands a radiophone to Elena)

Elena: "Sure."

Nathan: "No, I mean... Thanks for saving me. Again."

Elena: "I almost didn't this time."

Nathan: "Right."

Elena: "C'mon. I got us a ride."

**Extract 1:** Chapter 17 "For Better or Worse". An example of Elena taking initiative.

Nathan at times prefers action over talking: instead of continuing a conversation with Elena, he proposes to play a video game to determine who does the dishes.

Elena: "I'm gonna go ahead and do the dishes."

Nathan: "Stop, I'll do them... No, hold on."

Elena: "You did them last night."

Nathan: "No, you cooked. I clean. It's fine. I mean... at least – at least, uh, let m- let me try to earn it or something. Let me, uh... play you for it."

**Extract 2:** Chapter 4 "A Normal Life". An example of Nathan's action-orientedness.

After Nathan is saved by Elena in the jungle, Elena only discusses Nathan's well-being over the radio while upon being handed the radio, Nathan immediately makes a plan of attack. Thus, Nathan is showing off his capability to also be the leader of the situation.

Elena: "Now we just need to rescue the other Drake."

Sully: "What do you mean?"

Elena: "I'll let Nate tell you." (throws the radiophone over to Nathan)

[...]

Nathan: "Yeah, they're headed to the northern side of the island. See if you can find a place to set down over there. Once we get Sam, we're gonna need to get outta here pretty quick."

**Extract 3:** *Chapter 17 "For Better or Worse". An example of Nathan taking initiative.*

In summary, while both characters are active initiators, Elena's communication involves more initiative and therefore goes against stereotypes.

Submission is more often associated with femininity (Gaukhar & Mechsherskaya 2013: 463), and asking for help and apologizing can be seen as submissive speech acts. The supposition would therefore be that Elena would be more submissive than Nathan and use these speech acts more frequently. Throughout the analysis, only three instances of apologizing were found and none asking for help. Elena apologizes after she spoke with her mouth full of food, while Nathan apologizes after he fails to listen to Elena, and when he is forced to cut a phone call short. Elena less often finds herself in a situation where she would need to apologize, but Nathan strangely never outright apologizes for secretly returning to his old life as a treasure hunter. The characters only ever request assistance when performing an action that requires two persons, such as lifting a heavy beam; directly asking for help never occurs. In conclusion, neither of the characters is submissive to one another and the power balance of the relationship between the characters seems to be equal based on their language use.

Some studies (e.g. Duncan et al. 1990; Hassett & Houlihan 1979; Thorson et al. 1997: as quoted by Decker & Rotondo 2001) have showed males to be more frequent utilizers of humor than females, while others have found evidence on the contrary. Anyhow, the gender stereotype of a man being more humorous than a woman continues to persist. This would mean that Nathan's communication would involve more humor and jokes, while Elena's communication would be more serious and based on facts. The analysis showed that both characters use humor frequently and in equal amounts. Elena occasionally uses humor to tease Nathan as evidenced in the extract below:

Elena: “You can give it another shot. C’mon, double or nothing. My car could really use a good cleaning.”

**Extract 4:** *Chapter 4 “A Normal Life”. An example of Elena’s use of humor.*

Her sense of humor, however, is mainly quite morbid as seen in the following extract where she is talking to Nathan after saving his life in the jungle:

Elena: “I’m glad you didn’t lose a limb or anything. It would’ve been a royal pain getting you out of here.”

**Extract 5:** *Chapter 17 “For Better or Worse”. An example of Elena’s morbid sense of humor.*

After a near-death situation, she plays dead to scare Nathan until she quietly mutters the words “my... hero...”. Nathan is more of a wisecracker, preferring sarcastic and occasionally childish humor. Upon being asked how his day went, Nathan tells the following:

Elena: “At least you got to go for a swim. Did you find any exciting garbage?”

Nathan: “Oh, some... brilliant stuff. It was a, um... early twenty-first century truck we got. Apparently the natives called it ‘a semi.’”

**Extract 6:** *Chapter 4 “A Normal Life”. An example of Nathan’s use of humor.*

As a running gag in the game, Nathan uses chicken clucking noises to tease Elena that she is afraid of playing against him in a video game, showing his preference for childish humor. All in all, both characters use different styles of humor but a lot of it and in equal amounts.

Emotion is more closely associated with femininity (Gaukhar & Mechsherskaya 2013: 463), and therefore the assumption would be that Elena would show more affection and emotion, while Nathan would be more reserved and action-centered. The analysis showed this to be mostly true. Elena initiates every romantic encounter in the game. On the couch while playing video games, she starts to playfully tease Nathan and initiates a cuddling session:

Nathan: “You know – you know, just keep talking... keep talking...”

Elena: “What are you gonna do?”

Nathan: "I'm... I'm warning you..."

Elena: "What are you gonna do?"

Nathan: "I'm warning you."

Elena: "In real life, what can you do? Show me." (grabs Nathan's bicep)

**Extract 7:** *Chapter 4 "A Normal Life". An example of Elena initiating a romantic scene.*

After fully reconciling with Nathan, she climbs on top of him and kisses him. Right before the finale, she tells Nathan to be careful with clear concern, while Nathan smiles confidently and is more focused on the task at hand. Also, after discovering Nathan's lies, she tears up and storms out of the room. Nathan does not display as great a scale of emotion. At one point, he does show regret as he attempts to explain his past missteps to Elena. Also, as Elena plays dead, he starts to panic. However, romantic scenes in the game have to be exclusively initiated by the female character.

All in all, the linguistic representation of the characters mostly goes against stereotypes, and offers positive representations of a male and a female. The game successfully portrays different sides of both characters: a female who takes initiative, is not submissive, has a sense of humor, yet still retains the feminine traits of being loving and affectionate; and a male who is content with not always taking the lead yet is not portrayed as weak, has a sense of humor, and is slightly reserved when it comes to displaying emotion.

## 4.2. Narrative Portrayal

The game's storyline begins with the once-adventurous couple Nathan and Elena settled down living "a normal life". They have a quiet night in, but later Nathan's presumed dead brother Sam returns and tells of a treasure-hunting opportunity. Nathan accepts the offer, and lies to Elena telling her he is going on a regular job instead. This could be seen as the male hero protecting the weaker female from a potentially dangerous task. Elena is then left behind at home. Later, Elena, in her role as a concerned wife, is holding the fort at home and calling Nathan to inquire about his job's progression. It should be noted that Nathan's career is receiving all the attention, while Elena's journalism career is receiving none; instead she is staying at home, passive and as a bystander in the male's adventure, much like Wood's (1994) stereotypes predicted.

Elena: “Okay, well... You know, don’t rush, make sure that you’re safe.”

Nathan: “I will. Always do. Listen, I’m – I’m sorry, I gotta go. Jameson’s calling me over.”

Elena: (audibly sighs) “Okay.”

Nathan: “I love you.”

Elena: “Love you too.”

**Extract 8:** *Chapter 9 “Those Who Prove Worthy”. An example of Elena’s role as a concerned housewife.*

A few chapters later, Elena confronts Nathan about his lies. Nathan’s explanations of protecting her do not satisfy her; instead, she leaves with tears in her eyes. Nathan is upset about the situation but immediately turns his focus back onto the treasure hunt. This raises the question of Elena’s significance in the plot, and what difference altogether it made that she caught Nathan red-handed.

Nathan: “I have to save him. I don’t even care about the treasure.”

Elena: “The look on your face when you walked into this room... If you’re done lying to me, then you should stop lying to yourself. I got a plane to catch. You do what you have to do.”

**Extract 9:** *Chapter 11 “Hidden in Plain Sight”. Elena’s intervention.*

The adventure continues anyway, no matter whether she interrupted it or not. However, Elena is later given a more important role as she saves Nathan from the brink of death in the jungle. If she had abandoned her husband and had not showed up, Nathan might have not survived. Therefore, she had a direct impact on the male hero’s fate. In the subsequent chapters, the two begin to reconcile and play equally important roles in defeating the adversary. Right before the finale, Nathan chases the main antagonist alone, leaving his mentor and father figure Sully and Elena behind. The main narrative thus ends with the male hero saving the day by himself. In the epilogue, Elena takes on a leading role as she has bought a business she and Nathan will run together without telling him. The narrative comes full circle: like Nathan once embarked on an adventure without telling her, she is embarking on one without telling him, but this time they are going to do it together.

In gameplay sections, the player always controls Nathan. Elena is a non-playable character (NPC) always controlled by the artificial intelligence (AI). Like Nathan, Elena drives a car, shoots enemies, and assists in lifting beams and pulling levers, or whatever is required by the puzzle at hand. Both characters can be on the receiving end of violence. As Nathan is a playable character, he

can die depending on the player's actions, while Elena can only die if captured by an enemy and failing to receive help from the player. The violence itself is never highly graphic or brutal on either character.

Despite it not seeming like it at the beginning, Elena is an important character to the narrative and plays a variety of different roles throughout the game. She plays the traditional housewife, the victim, the savior of the male, and the adventurer, showcasing many different sides of the character instead of being limited to one or a few stereotypical roles.

### **4.3. Visual Portrayal**

Nathan Drake is a white male in his mid to late 30s. He has short brown hair and usually sports a five o'clock shadow. Elena Fisher is a white female in her early to mid 30s. She has blonde long hair always worn in a ponytail. Both characters can be considered attractive.

Nathan is quite tall at 6 foot 1 inches, taller than the average American male. He has a healthy slim body build with some muscle. He, therefore, does not conform to the exaggeratedly muscular male hero stereotype (e.g. Jansz and Martins 2007: 147). Instead, he has realistic proportions and has an achievable in-shape build. Elena is of average height for an American female at 5 foot 4 inches. However, she is considerably shorter than Nathan who can thus visually appear as a protector figure for her. If one were to put Elena's stats of 5'4" and 120 pounds into the body mass index (BMI) calculator, she would fall into the normal weight range among American females, and would not conform to the "thin-ideal" (Martins et al. 2009). However, it is her in-game model that is of larger importance than her biography stats. Elena has a petite slim build with a realistically sized bust, hips and buttocks. Therefore, she is realistically proportioned. She is closer to the aforementioned "thin-ideal" than the exaggeratedly proportioned female (e.g. Jansz and Martins 2007: 147), but ultimately does not fit either category. All in all, both characters represent healthy body imagery instead of the harmful unrealistic imagery seen in the majority of video games.

Nathan wears roughly a dozen different outfits during the game. His clothing is always appropriate for the setting. For a diving mission, he wears a diving suit, and for a luxurious auction, he wears a tuxedo. His most frequently worn outfit is a v-neck shirt and a pair of jeans. The neckline of the shirt reveals his collarbones and a part of his chest muscles, and his sleeves are rolled up to reveal his forearms; this is his most revealing outfit in the game. For winter chapters, he sports an appropriate padded jacket and thicker pants. None of Nathan's numerous outfits are sexualized. There are also no shirtless scenes featuring him, not even when the opportunity could be seen to present itself, such as after a shipwreck onto a tropical island.

Elena wears roughly half a dozen different outfits during the game. Therefore, she has approximately a half fewer outfits than Nathan, but this is understandable since she appears in fewer chapters and fewer different settings. She still receives a considerable number of wardrobe changes. As was the case with Nathan, Elena's outfits are appropriate for the setting. Her jungle attire is more revealing with a sleeveless top completely exposing her neck and both of her arms. However, this can be seen as fitting for the tropical setting. Her winter attire, on the other hand, consists of a padded jacket and thicker pants, similarly to Nathan. All in all, Elena's clothing follows a similar pattern to Nathan: she never appears scantily clad in the game, instead wearing clothing appropriate for the setting. Also, as was the case with Nathan, there are no notably sexualized scenes featuring Elena.

#### **4.4. Discussion: The Overall Portrayal**

Uncharted 4: A Thief's End handles gender representations differently to most video games. The linguistic representation of the characters almost completely deviates from stereotypes, the narrative puts both characters in a variety of roles, and visually, neither body-wise nor clothing-wise are the characters sexualized. The female character is portrayed in an equally versatile manner compared to the male protagonist. While the narrative is perhaps the weakest in terms of gender representation out of the three perspectives, the game still manages to give the female character a variety of different roles to fulfill.

Both Nathan and Elena have their own, distinct personalities, which are brought to life by the language, the storyline, and image. Nathan is the slightly goofy wisecracker capable of being a serious

action hero when needed. Elena is not a submissive housewife; instead, she is a multi-dimensional character who is capable of transforming from a noodle-eating goof into a jungle-dwelling adventurer without it seeming out of place. As a mode, the language use of the characters could have been utilized to create walking stereotypes. Nathan could have been the one continuously cracking jokes and always in charge of the situation. Meanwhile, Elena could have been a passive nagger always being saved by the male. The analysis proved otherwise as the dialogue and its delivery have been constructed to create multi-dimensional and distinct personalities for both characters in equal measure. With the highly advanced graphics of today's video games, the language use is then amplified by body language, such as smiling, longing gazes, hugging, sighing, and chuckling; leading to complex and life-like characters representing their respective genders in a positive and realistic fashion.

In the narrative, Elena could have been limited to one or a few stereotypical roles, but she is instead given a variety of roles to play, supporting her multi-dimensional linguistic representation. She is a highly significant character to the point where she could not be removed from the narrative without dramatic consequences. In multimodal media such as video games, the visual side of affairs is extremely important. Both characters could have been sexualized with revealing clothing and sexually charged scenes, not to mention unrealistic bodies. However, the characters have realistically proportioned bodies and wear clothing appropriate for the setting.

While I had positive expectations prior to conducting my research, as evidenced by my motive to bring positivity into a mostly gender-negative landscape, there could have been contradictions in the results, such as visually non-sexualized characters using stereotypically gendered language. However, the analysis points to every mode in the game supporting one another in creating positive gender representations.

## 5 CONCLUSION

In conclusion, the genders are represented linguistically in a way that nearly completely deviates from what is viewed as stereotypical gendered language use. Both characters fulfill a multitude of roles in the narrative with especially the female character given multiple types of anti-stereotypical roles to play. Visually, neither character is sexualized as they represent healthy body imagery and wear appropriate clothing. These findings are remarkably different and extremely positive compared to previous findings concerning gender representations in video games. There was hardly any stereotyping or sexualization in *Uncharted 4* at all, while previous studies have found women exclusively playing secondary roles, being passive as opposed to the active male, being sexualized with overtly seductive clothing, and representing unrealistic body imagery. While the male character is still in the leading role, the female character receives equally memorable character development.

My research contributed very detailed data on one particular video game. Comparing a male and a female character who are a couple in-game, is also a fresh approach. As Jansz and Martis (2007) found more positive results when researching a smaller sample, my analysis on one game also provided positive results. *Uncharted 4* is a big-budget blockbuster game, and if the gender-positive change is to start from anywhere, it has to begin from these important titles that are capable of reaching a broad audience.

While analyzing only one game was a strength in giving me the opportunity to delve into detailed data, it can also be seen as a weakness as not many generalizations concerning the whole video game industry can be made on the basis of analyzing one game. Previous studies have shown that gender representations in video games are still sexualized, and a single game, no matter how successful, will not change that. However, it can be a good example for future video games in handling issues differently, and an example of what an in-depth analysis on one piece of work can achieve.

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