

THE LIMITS OF FANTASY:
A comparative study of the representations of
gender, ethnicity and class in the console
fantasy role-playing games *Lost Odyssey* and
Final Fantasy XIII

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<p>Tiivistelmä – Abstract</p> <p>Peliteollisuuden suosio kasvaa jatkuvasti. Ihmiset pelaavat yhä enemmän, joten on aiheellista tutkia itse pelejä. Niitä on tutkittu monelta eri näkökannalta, kuten millaisissa rooleissa mies- ja naispelihahmot ovat toisiinsa verrattuna, miten hahmot kuvataan ja miten ne vastaavat todellisuutta. Tässä tutkimuksessa tarkoituksena oli tarkkailla pelien keskustelukohtauksia ja havainnoida miten pääpelihahmojen sukupuoli, etnisuus ja luokka rakennetaan kahdessa japanilaisessa konsoliroolipelissä <i>Lost Odyssey</i> ja <i>Final Fantasy XIII</i>. Tutkimuksen perustana käytettiin identiteetin intersektionaalisuutta. Tutkimuksessa verrattiin edellä mainittuja pelejä keskenään ja tutkimustuloksia verrattiin olemassa oleviin tutkimustuloksiin. Tämän tutkimuksen tuloksia voidaan mahdollistavan lisätutkimuksia aiheeseen liittyen.</p> <p>Tutkimuksessa keskityin pääpelihahmojen ulkonäköön, vaatetukseen, ääneen, käyttäytymiseen ja rooliin. Analyysia varten pelien elokuvamaisista kohtauksista otin esimerkkejä, jotka toivat hyvin esiin miten pelihahmojen identiteetit on rakennettu. Tutkimuksen vertailevan luonteen takia molemmissa peleissä keskityin samoihin asioihin, jonka jälkeen tutkin, että minkälaisia yhtäläisyyksiä peleissä esiintyi.</p> <p>Tulokset osoittivat, että ulkonäkö ja ääni ovat oleellisia hahmojen identiteettien luomisessa. Lisäksi oli selkeää, että molemmat sukupuolet ja eri yhteiskuntaluokat olivat tasapuolisesti edustettuina peleissä. Voidaan kuitenkin havaita, että peleissä esiintyy vähemmän eri etnisten ryhmien edustajia. Tutkimuksen rajallisuuden takia tutkimustuloksia ei voida soveltaa kaikkiin konsoliroolipeleihin, saati muihin peligenreihin, vaan lisätutkimusta tarvitaan.</p> <p>Tutkimuksen tuloksia voidaan soveltaa jatkotutkimuksessa. Tutkimusaihetta voi laajentaa roolipelihahmojen identiteettien analysointiin ja kenties eri roolipelien vertailuun.</p>	
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1. Introduction

Technological developments have revolutionised our lives, especially in the industrial countries. Machines perform the bulk of tasks that in the past we had to do manually. Moving from one location to another takes less time nowadays than before as transportation has also developed enormously. All these developments have resulted in us having more spare time on our hands. We have a vast array of leisure activities to choose from, one of which is playing video games. There is no question that the video game industry is huge and keeps on growing. Even though the recent economic situation has influenced the gaming industry as well, the total money spent on the games industry in the US alone amounted to almost \$21 billion in 2012 according to the Entertainment Software Association (2013 Sales, demographic and usage data 2013), an American association which takes care of public affairs of companies that publish computer and video games.

It is clear that people spend a lot of time playing video games. Some play games only occasionally while others play them daily. In the past video games were mostly considered to be the interest of teenage boys; however, nowadays it is known that the demographic of the video game audience is much more versatile. In fact, according to ESA, the average player is 30 years old. 32% of the players are under 18 years old, an equally large percentage is formed by the players of 18-35 years while 36% are 36 and above. Female players are also quite common as 45% of players are reported to be female. (ibid) Based on this it is easy to state the player spectrum is quite wide, thus the games reach a versatile audience. Thus there is a vast array of games available to suit the various demands of the market.

Many, both researchers and laymen alike, have argued that the game content influence players' attitudes towards various aspects of life. For example, Dietz (1998), Dunlop (2007), Jansz and Martis (2007), Miller and Summers (2007) and Mou and Peng (2009) argue that the underrepresentation of gender and ethnicity in video games portrays the world in a misleading way. The studies of these researchers and others will be discussed in more detail in this thesis in Chapter 3. Some believe that the underrepresentation of gender and ethnic groups lead to young gamers having a skewed view of the role of women and ethnic equality (for example, Dietz 1998, Children Now 2001, Burgess et al 2007). However, I think that while some games in certain game genres do have questionable portrayals of people in general; however, I would not go so far as to blame

games on racism and inequality. After all, racism and inequality have existed long before video games were invented. This would appear to suggest that the video games portray the attitudes we have or have had. Therefore, it is important to understand the different types of video games and how they reflect reality. In this study I will focus on a specific type of video games, namely console fantasy role-playing games.

I am familiar with the field of console role-playing games, thanks to my childhood hobby. I remember being around six years old and watching my ten-year-old brother Tapio play *Final Fantasy III* (a game belonging to the same game series discussed in this thesis). I could not understand a word of English; however, my dear brother translated everything to me. From that moment on I was hooked on the interesting characters and storylines of role-playing games. During the years I have accumulated an expertise and understanding of fantasy role-playing games that many others may not have. Thus, I decided to analyse games more in depth in this thesis. My specific area of interest in this study is how gender, ethnicity and class are portrayed in the two console role-playing games *Lost Odyssey* and *Final Fantasy XIII*. This interests me as I am a female gamer, something that was considered to be a rarity in the past. I would argue that my sex and expertise allow me to examine the subject from a different point of view. After all, some of the studies that will be represented in Chapter 3 have been conducted by researchers who themselves admit that they do not have the skills required for playing the games. Therefore, I have an advantage that these researchers did not have. In this study gender, ethnicity and class are examined in conjunction with each other as they are often considered to be linked. The intersecting nature of gender, ethnicity and class would be difficult and perhaps even counter-productive to examine on their own.

I have studied the topic of gender and discourse in the Japanese console role-playing game *Lost Odyssey* in my bachelor's thesis (Ekman 2010); however, due to the narrow scope of the thesis, the topic is far from thoroughly covered. The limitations of the bachelor's thesis meant that I was able to discuss only a few points; therefore, I will continue with the topic in this study. I will apply my bachelor's thesis as a basis for this thesis and extend on it. This study will also consider the other studies conducted on video games represented in Chapter 3. While these studies focused on a small section of many games of various genres, I will focus on the complete storyline of only two games of the fantasy role-playing genre. This study has a comparative nature in order to

discover whether some conclusions can be drawn based on the two games. Furthermore, in this study I focus on all of the playable main characters instead of only one or two characters in order to reach more extensive results. I believe that focusing on only one or two characters would not serve the purpose of this study. After this study the groundwork will exist, thus it would then be feasible to focus on only one or two characters.

I will begin by introducing the main concepts used in this study, namely gender, ethnicity and class. These three intersecting aspects of identity (gender, ethnicity, class) will be the main focus in this study, thus the concept of intersectionality will be introduced in this section. This will be followed with an overview of the field of discourse analysis and multimodality. The third chapter is dedicated to game research and how researchers have approached gender and ethnicity in video games. Also the issue of class in video game research will be discussed in Chapter 3. After this, the games analysed in this thesis will be introduced in Chapter 4. This will be followed by the introduction of the research question of this thesis. In this section also the process of data collecting will be discussed. In Chapter 5 first the protagonists of the two games will be described and discussed after which the characters will be compared in order to find their similarities and differences with regard to gender, ethnicity and class. This will be followed by a closer examination of the adult female characters of the *Lost Odyssey* and *Final Fantasy XIII*. After the data analysis section, the results will be discussed in Chapter 6 in light of the previous game studies introduced in Chapter 3 and the research question of this thesis. The results will be discussed in Chapter 7. The final chapter will address the limitations of this study and suggestions for future research topics on the subject will be given.

2. Gender, Ethnicity, Class, Intersectionality and Discourse

In this chapter central concepts of this thesis, such as gender, ethnicity and class will be discussed. It is important to discuss them, even though at times it might seem like stating the obvious. Once the multileveled nature of gender, ethnicity and class construction has been approached, the intersectional nature of them will be discussed. This will be followed by an examination of how reality is reflected and created through discourse. Finally, the importance of multimodality in understanding the world around us will be briefly considered.

These concepts are crucial for this study as the purpose is to focus on the intersecting aspects of gender, ethnicity and class of the main game characters in *Lost Odyssey* and *Final Fantasy XIII*. These aspects of identity are portrayed through discourse. Furthermore, the multimodal nature of video games (appearance, voice and role are all relevant) requires the incorporation of a multimodal perspective.

2.1 Gender and sex

There are aspects we register automatically and unconsciously when we meet new people. One of these is sex, which we use to categorise the people we come in contact with. Often one perceives a person to be either a man or a woman. However, doing so oversimplifies the issue of being a man or a woman. Holmes (2009:2) states that recognising the difference between sex and gender is one of the key points sociologists make. To begin with the differentiation, our biological sex is determined when we are born according to the different sex organs we have; however, even then there are exceptions. For example, some of us are born with both sets of sexual organs, in which case the sex of a person might be decided for them by others (by the parents or a doctor).

Paltridge (2006: 32) explains that gender is a social construction, while sex can be altered only through surgical operations. Also McIlvenny (2002) differentiates between gender and sex in a similar manner as Paltridge. He (2002: 6) clarifies that people “do” gender while sex is a question of “being”. While the gender lines are starting to blend, McIlvenny claims that people are still confined to gender stereotypes. He criticises that still “men ‘do’ masculinity by ‘doing’ masculine things” (ibid). This means that we ourselves create and influence our gender, for example through clothing, behaviour and speech. It is understood that gender is a social construction as gender is influenced very much by our surroundings in how we are treated and what is expected of us as a member of certain a gender category. This means that we act according to the expected gender norms our societies dictate, as acting differently could possibly exclude us from a group.

Thus far it has been established that sex is biologically determined whereas gender is socially constructed. However, there are people who disagree with this. For example, Dozier (2005: 298) argues that sex is not only a physical attribute but also socially

constructed as people are forced to be one or the other. Sex is considered such an integral part of our identities in our society that it is hard for us to even try to ignore it. The social construction of sex begins at birth as one of the first questions people ask new parents is whether the baby is a boy or a girl.

2.2 Ethnicity and race

The terms ethnicity and race are often used as synonyms; however, they do have some differences. Healey (2011: 15) defines ethnicity through cultural characteristics, such as dress, language and dialect, religion and traditions. Examples of ethnic groups in Finland are the Finland-Swedes and the Sami people. They have their own traditions and language which the majority in Finland do not speak fluently. The sizes of ethnic groups vary as there is no clear-cut mould for ethnic groups. Furthermore, a group of people might have incorporated various traditions from several other ethnic groups in which case categorising their ethnic group would be challenging. McAll (1992: 4-5) clarifies that ethnicity is defined through how people categorise themselves as being a part of certain ethnic groups or outside those groups. Thus, McAll (ibid) argues that it is important how people realise their beliefs as this is how people signal that they belong to specific ethnic groups. This would imply that ethnicity, as well as gender, is a social construction.

Healey (ibid) explains that race, in contrast, is determined mainly through physical characteristics, such as skin, hair and eye colour. Examples of racial groups in Finland are Caucasian Finns and immigrants from Africa. Physical appearances distinguish these two racial groups, as one group has light skin while the other has dark skin. Furthermore, as Healey (ibid) points out, ethnic groups can have particular physical traits, such as the Sami people who tend to have dark hair and eyes. Nevertheless, categorising people into racial and ethnic groups is also challenging as people are all individuals with different traits. For example, we all have various tones of skin and eye colour and the shapes of our eyes may differ within certain racial and ethnic categories. It would be difficult to decide which trait is the most salient in the process of categorisation. In addition, racial groups may have cultural characteristics that distinguish them from the rest of the population, religion being one such characteristic. This would seem to suggest that the boundaries between ethnic and racial groups are not clear-cut.

Despite the fact that defining and labelling race and ethnicity is somewhat challenging, we tend to do it. As Healey (2011: 25) points out, race is one of the first aspects people notice. Healey argues that, like gender, race is a social construct. According to him (ibid), our social conventions rather than scientific concepts define race. In the past racial definitions were used in order to justify unequal treatment of certain racial groups. The importance of race prevails to this day because people believe it is important and thus reinforce its importance. For example, the skin colour of Barack Obama was highlighted when he became the President of the United States. His abilities as the President are not affected by his skin colour, it is his mind that is important; however, the way people regard skin colour make it a salient part of his presidency. The same logic applies to ethnicity, as it is also a social construct. Members of an ethnic group distinguish themselves from others through, for example, clothing. At the same time others recognise and reinforce the ethnic categories through certain convention and interaction.

The definitions of race and ethnicity are difficult to distinguish, thus sometimes they overlap. Furthermore, sometimes race is treated as a social construct, while it should be acknowledged as a scientific category. After all, from a scientific point of view, race is determined through physical characteristics. In addition, ethnicity is determined through cultural characteristics. In short, one is born with the physical characteristics while ethnicity is something that one learns from one's family and surroundings.

2.3 Social class

Social class is another aspect present in societies which is a social construct. As Liu states (2011: 2-9), class can be signalled through various ways, such as living in a certain neighbourhood or favouring certain product brands. Thus it is not necessary to verbalise one's educational background or income level. He further clarifies (ibid) that one is socialised to one's class from birth through our surroundings. In a sense we learn our place in the social scale and once we are a member of a certain class, we act accordingly, are treated by others in a certain manner. This results in a social construct of class. Liu (ibid) points out that class is connected with other aspects of identity, such as gender and race. Liu does not use the term "intersectionality"; however, he does discuss the interconnected forms of identity, such as gender, race and social class. Nevertheless, while Liu (ibid) discusses the connectedness of gender, race and class, he states that class differs from the other two in a noteworthy way. Liu (ibid) argues that

class is more difficult to recognise and address due to its invisible nature, whereas race and gender have strong visual clues. As McAll (1992) clarifies, there are many definitions of class. Some view class to be a synonym for economic status while some see it as a classification of people based on criteria people themselves are not aware of (McAll 1992: 11-30). Despite the point of view, the consensus seems to be that the higher classes have the most power and resources, the lower classes have the least opportunities but must work hard to make a living and the middle classes are there in between.

2.4 Intersectionality

There are many layers to how identities are constructed. Above gender, ethnicity and class were discussed. It was also discussed how these aspects are portrayed and reinforced through discourse practices. However, addressing these aspects of identity completely separately would be difficult and perhaps even misleading. After all, one could argue that it is oversimplifying a phenomenon if it is argued that a person acts or speaks in a certain manner, because this person is a woman or a man. It rarely is so straightforward. This is an issue that Crenshaw (1994) has approached through analysing racism and sexism directed at women of colour. In her work, she has focused on the intersections of race and gender categories in order to explain the multiple dimensions of violence against black women. (For example, women are the victims of domestic violence more than men.) Intersectionality helps identify the various dimensions how our “social world is constructed” (Crenshaw 1994: 95).

Lutz et al (2011: 2) clarify that intersectionality succeeds in recognising the differences among women. This is an important distinction as the category “women” is influenced by many other variables, such as ethnicity and class. Lutz et al (2011: 8) note that intersectional allows the examination of “different social positioning of women (and men)” and how people reconstruct this social positioning through interaction. They acknowledge that there exists the risk of treating gender, race and class superficially. However, if one is careful to remember that these are separate aspects of identity that intersect, intersectionality should greatly advance the field of women’s studies. (Lutz et al 2011: 8-9) Davis (2011: 43) explains that there is much debate on how intersectionality should be understood, whether it should be used to analyse identity, individuals or societal and cultural discourses. Davis (2011: 44) argues that it is not necessary to define intersectionality as suitable for only one analysis methodology as

the success and appeal of intersectionality is actually due to its versatility and possibilities. Moreover, Davis (2011: 46) argues that feminist studies favour the theory of intersectionality as it enables the analysis of almost any “social practice, any individual or group experience, any structural arrangement, any cultural configuration.” Furthermore, the nature of intersectionality allows the exploration of new and critical insights of a specific phenomenon. This is how we become aware of the fact that the world around us is not as simple as we might have conceived it to be. (Davis 2011: 51-52).

Christensen and Jensen (2012: 109) explain that intersectionality allows the analysis of gender in relation to other categories, such as ethnicity and class discussed also in this study. Furthermore, intersectionality acknowledges various power structures and how these structures influence the positioning of people. However, it is cautioned that one should be aware that various categories, such as gender and ethnicity, are not identical and thus do not “function according to identical logics” (Christensen and Jensen 2012: 111). This means that one should be careful of oversimplifying issues even though various categories intersect. Furthermore, the authors point out that including too many categories into analysis is problematic as then the study becomes too extensive. Thus the researcher must decide on a manageable number of categories relevant to the study in question. The authors discuss that the field of intersectionality has received some criticism, due to it focusing on minorities. It is suggested that the majority groups should be included in analysis as well as it would improve the understanding of power relations between majority and minority groups. (Christensen and Jensen 2012: 112) Christensen and Jensen conclude that “the method of intersectionality must be related to power relations, in particular locations and contexts.” (2012: 121). This suggests that multimodal discourse analysis supports intersectionality well, as both methods recognise the multileveled construction of reality and acknowledge the importance of location and context.

2.5 Discourse and multimodality

The purpose of this study is to analyse how gender, ethnicity and class are constructed and portrayed in the two fantasy role-playing games examined in this study. In order to do this, one will focus on how the main characters interact with each other, what roles they have in addition to their physical attributes. In short, the focus is on discourse in the games. The nature of video games underlines the importance of multimodality. As

video games rely on visuality, sound and text, they are multimodal. Therefore in this section discourse and multimodality will be briefly discussed.

Discourse is an essential part of our everyday lives even when we are not aware of it. Through it we create and reproduce our social reality. Moreover, as Paltridge (2006: 9) puts it, through discourse we “achieve certain communicative goals”. For example, I might simply point at a window and ask “May I?” and the people witnessing my gesture and hearing (and, more importantly, understanding) my speech act understand my goal and either agree or deny my request. Thus I use language, voice and gestures to achieve a communicative goal. Discourse has been the focus of an enormous number of studies and will most likely continue to interest researchers as long as there are people.

Discourse as a word is quite short; however, defining discourse in a concise and exhaustive way is challenging as it has a multitude of levels. I would define discourse as language use in speech and writing; however, this definition excludes some important aspects of discourse. To begin with, there are different perspectives when discussing discourse. As Bucholtz (2006: 44) explains, one perspective of discourse analysis focuses on linguistic units and how they are used to build larger linguistic units, while another analyses language use in social contexts. To clarify, the former view focuses on sentences and linguistic forms while the latter view looks beyond the sentences and analyses the function of language use. However, these two perspectives are not exclusive, as they often overlap in the study of discourse. (ibid)

Bucholtz (2006: 45) defines discourse analysis as “a collection of perspectives on situated language use”. This means that there is no single correct way to analyse discourse. This can be seen in the various approaches to discourse analysis, such as Critical Discourse Analysis, Feminist Critical Discourse Analysis, Multimodal Discourse Analysis, just to name a couple. All of these focus on language use in some social context; however, all of these have some special focus. For instance, Critical Discourse Analysis focuses on the connection between language and power (Weiss and Wodak 2003: 12). In this study more importance will be placed on the function of language as the purpose is to see how the game characters interact with each other and create their gendered, ethnic and class identities.

Paltridge (2006: 9) explains that discourse analysis focuses on how people use language as a means to an end in order to communicate their beliefs and ideas. As was discussed above, discourse is more than words, thus discourse analysis considers also the effect of images, written text and nonverbal communication. In this study, the focus of analysis will be on the function of language in creating the gendered, ethnic and class identities of game characters. This does not mean that I regard linguistic form to be any less significant, but for the purposes of this study the functions of language use are more pertinent. As reality is created and reasserted through discourse in social context, there are a multitude of variables that should be acknowledged. To begin with, one has to be aware of, for example, gestures, language use, voice and appearance. Thus it can be argued that the multimodal nature of discourse should be taken into account. In this study gender, ethnicity and social class will be discussed according to the appearance, dress, role and speech style of the characters.

2.5.1 Discourse, gender, ethnicity, social class and power

“The biological category of sex” had been the focus of discourse and gender research in the past; however, present-day studies appreciate that gender is socially constructed (Paltridge 2006: 31-32). As McIlvenny (2002: 2) explains, before it was commonly accepted that women and men communicated in a certain way because they were women or men. Nowadays it is understood that biological sex is not the only variable in creating gender identities as gender is signalled through, for example, interaction, behaviour and clothing. The construction of a person’s gender image is most often unconscious; however, at times it is very deliberate and carefully implemented. An example of this could be transvestites as they dress and behave the way the opposite sex is expected to according to the rules of our society. I would argue that in the process of creating fictional characters, their gender image is also thoroughly considered and designed. The same applies to other aspects of identity, such as ethnicity. When fictional characters are also given voice and appearance, as is the case in modern-day video games, the process is even more complicated. Then one must consider all of the different variables in order to create believable characters that players can identify with.

McAll (1992: 6-8) as well as Healey (2011:84) state that ethnicity and social class often go hand in hand. If one belongs to an ethnic minority group, it is likely that one also belongs to a lower social class. This is logical as it is in the best interest of the majority group to keep the power to themselves rather than give it to others. This can be seen all

around the world as the less desired jobs are often given to, for example, immigrants while people in power positions belong to the majority groups. One form of power is visibility in media. It is suggested that minimal media exposure of some ethnic groups leads to people thinking that these groups are less important than the ones highly visible. This is often considered also in game research, which will be further discussed in Chapter 3. The aspect of social class and power will be discussed in this thesis in connection with character analysis.

As I have pointed out elsewhere (Ekman 2010), there are researchers who state that “the use of voice has not been sufficiently researched within gender” studies (Kroløkke and Sørensen 2006: 90). As was employed in my bachelor’s thesis, I will utilise the pattern of gender voices identified by Kroløkke and Sørensen (2006). Table 1 below describes the characteristics of voice “agreed upon in a Euro-American context” (ibid). The table allows for inference that a high voice and a weak breath are feminine characteristics while a low voice and a noticeable breath are masculine characteristics.

Table 1. Sounds of Gender (Kroløkke and Sørensen 2006: 90)

	<i>Women</i>	<i>Men</i>
Pitch	high	low
Timbre	light	dark
Resonance	easy	forceful
Breath	weak	strong

3. Game Research

Video games have been researched in a multitude of ways. The aim of this chapter is to present how gender, ethnicity and class have been researched in video games. First the overall field of game research is briefly discussed. This will be followed by a more in depth account of studies on gender in video games. I will also briefly present the results of the study I conducted on the topic of gender in video games (Ekman 2010). As I intend to study how ethnicity is portrayed in video games, the topic of previous research on ethnicity in video games will be discussed in short. Finally a brief account on the study of class in video games is discussed. The sections on ethnicity and class in video

games are more limited due to the fact that ethnicity and class have been less studied than gender. This may be because the games simply do not have enough ethnic or class variation for a thorough analysis as is also noted by some of the researchers discussed in chapter 3.2 (for example, Dietz 1998, Miller and Summers 2007). To conclude, the studies on gender and ethnicity on video games presented in this chapter will be summarised. In addition, a table summarising these studies will be available at the end of this chapter.

The popularity of video games has prompted a multitude of researchers to take interest in gaming. Jenson and de Castell (2010) give an overview of the practices and tendencies in video game research. They (2010: 51) criticise that the field of game research keeps repeating itself as there is a vast number of similar studies with inconsequential results. This lack of progress in gender studies in video games is due to three main problems in the research of gender in video games that Jenson and de Castell identify. The first one is the tendency to mix gender and sex, which results in gender studies that actually do not focus on gender. The second issue is the undermining the importance of gender, as many studies first focus on gender and then argue that it is not relevant. This in turn is said to prevent critical discussion on the topic of gender in video games. The third problem is the common practice of focusing on the game play patterns of female players in the name of gender equity. By focusing on these game play patterns, some believe that the number of female employees in the game industry as well as the games designed for girls increase. (ibid)

Other researchers have focused on the people playing the games instead of the actual games. For example, many have researched how gamers interact with each other while they are in the same physical space (e.g. Vuorinen 2008) or while playing online in separate locations (e.g. Ducheneaut et al. 2006). In this thesis I will not focus on gamers but on the main game characters and how their gender, ethnicity and class identities are constructed. In the next section some of the existing studies conducted on gender, ethnicity and class in video games will be discussed.

3.1 Research on gender in video games

Gender issues in video games have interested many researchers for quite some time. The topic has been approached from various perspectives as can be seen below. This suggests that there is no consensus on how gender in video games should be studied or

what the results indicate. In this section the aim is to discuss in some length a selection of the work conducted on gender in video games.

One of the earlier studies on gender in video games was conducted by Dietz (1998: 425-442), who is often cited by other researchers. It seems that in a sense Dietz set the tone for this field of research. She was worried about the effect media has on boys and girls, which is why video games were chosen as an area of interest. Dietz studied the 33 most popular *Nintendo* and *Sega Genesis* video games of the spring of 1995. The sample included various game genres, such as sports, adventure, puzzle and combat games. In the data analysis process the chosen video games were played, the instruction booklets were read, and content analysis was used to analyse the portrayal of women and the use of violence in the games. The study focused on whether there were female characters in the games, what their role was (sex objects or prizes, victims, heroes or in feminine roles) and if violence was central in the games. The results showed that in only 15% of the games women were the heroes or action figures. However, Dietz (1998: 433) points out that it was common that there were no female characters in the games or they had a very minimal role. In fact, 41% of the games that included characters had no female characters at all. Dietz summarised that of the female characters present, they were “*damsels in distress*”, “*visions of beauty*” or “*evil/obstacles*” (ibid: 435). 28% of the time the female characters were categorised as sex objects. As a part of her focus was on the violence in video games, she discovered that in 21% of the games violence was directed at women (ibid: 425). Dietz (1998: 438) argues that these representations of women can have a harmful effect on how women are viewed in real life. She (ibid.) claims that the games suggest that women are somehow inferior to men and they are often objectified.

The results of Dietz’s (1998) study are worrisome with regards to the position of women in games; however, one should keep a critical mind when viewing the results. To begin with, it is not mentioned how long the researcher played the games. Based on the study it appears that quite some time was spent on playing the games; however, a more accurate description of the duration of gameplay would assure the reader of the validity of game content description. Furthermore, it seems that the focus of the study was somewhat lopsided. Dietz (1998: 435) describes how the female characters can be “*evil/obstacles*”; however, there is no mention how often the male characters were evil or obstacles. Furthermore, there is a lack of further examination of violence directed at

human characters and if there is any difference whether it is directed at male or female characters. This raises the question whether certain issues were raised and others ignored because that would allow the validation of certain predetermined impressions.

The study of *Children Now* (2001) examined ten top-selling games in the U.S. for *Dreamcast*, *Game Boy Advance*, *Game Boy Color*, *Nintendo 64*, *PlayStation*, *PlayStation 2* and personal computers from January to May in 2001 (May to June for *Game Boy Advance*). The focus was on violence, gender and race issues in video games. The aspect of gender in the video games is discussed here, whereas the topic of race will be covered below in chapter 3.2 *Research on ethnicity in video games*. The first level of each game in the *Children Now* study was played through, which was crucial for data collection, due to the fact that the data for the research was based on the player experiences in addition to the game manuals. The content was coded by two experienced coders. (*Children Now* 2001: 28) Of the sample of 1716 characters, 64% were male and only 17% were female. Half of the female characters were categorised as props or bystanders. 11% of female characters were considered to be hyper-sexualised while 35% of male characters were hyper-muscularised. Revealing clothing was seen to accentuate female sexuality, with the females (20%) twice more likely to have revealing clothing than men (8%). (ibid: 10-14) The study (ibid: 27) concludes that video games tend to underrepresent women and reinforce incorrect stereotypes, which may have a negative impact on people.

The *Children Now* study (2001: 16) clarifies that in 2000 45% of computer and video game players were in fact female. Thus it is important to create games directed at female players as well. The report (2001: 29) entails a section that focuses on games suitable for girls. There is a list of criteria for games considered to appeal to girl players. The list is as follows: female player-controlled characters, cooperative play (ability to work cooperatively with other players), ability to create something, a reality-based environment, puzzle-type activities, presence of positive feedback, availability of help, slow or variable pace, predictable and easy to follow game play and clearly explained rules. The games were considered not to appeal to girl players if the games contained the following elements: violence, killing and/or a theme of good vs. evil. Since the list of criteria suitable for girls includes elements such as slow or variable pace, predictable and easy to follow game play and clearly explained rules, it seems that girls are seen as somewhat slow-witted. I would think that slow game pace and easily followed game

play would only bore players, thus alienating them even more. Furthermore, I would think that clearly explained rules would benefit both male and female players in completing the games. That criterion might be seen to imply that female players lack the ability of logical thinking. In addition, it is curious that games that have a theme of good vs. evil are considered to be unsuitable for girl players. People are used to a theme of good vs. evil already from childhood, as most of the fairy tales I am familiar with are based on the composition of good surmounting evil. If I were to play a video game containing the elements of the *Children Now* list, I would be bored right from the beginning.

Following the footsteps of Dietz (1998), Beasley and Standley (2002) conducted a study on the roles of female game characters in video games for *Nintendo 64* and *PlayStation* using content analysis. They compiled a random sample of 48 games, which were categorised according to type of games. These categories were team sports, individual sports, storyline, combat, classic video game, board game/game show, television/movie based and other. These games were played from the beginning for 20 minutes. The authors explain that playing the games longer would require more skills than they themselves had, which is why the timeline was set at 20 minutes (Beasley and Standley 2002: 238-283). Beasley and Standley (ibid) describe that 20 minutes is sufficient time to give an idea what types of characters would be in the game. Their reasoning seems sound; however, it leaves room for criticism as well. For example, like any story, a game evolves and changes as it progresses. This is their appeal which keeps players interested. A game may require anything between five hours to over a hundred hours of gameplay before it is completed. A multitude of character development can take place during that time. Thus it is important to analyse a sample of longer gameplay in order to reach more valid results.

In Beasley and Standley's study, every character seen during gameplay was coded according to gender and species and type of clothing. The clothing was categorised into sleeve length, neckline and lower body clothing. They conclude that female characters were underrepresented in video games (only 13.74 % of all characters, while male characters represented 71.52%). According to Beasley and Standley (2002:287), the absence of female characters was most apparent in games of team sports (only 8.54% female characters), while the biggest percentage of female characters was in individual sports games (27.36%). In my opinion this only reflects reality, as even in real life

fewer female team sports are, for example, televised. The sports news is filled with news about ice hockey or football which are considered to be male dominated. Individual female sports achievements are more common in sports news, female tennis players are a good example of this.

The results of Beasley and Standley's study indicate that the female characters' clothing revealed more skin and accentuated their gender more prominently than in the case of male characters. Furthermore, the female characters had low-cut clothing and naked arms more often than male characters had. 39.02% of female characters had long sleeves, while the rest had short or no sleeves at all. The equivalent figure for long sleeved men was 34.89%. Low neckline was seen on 85.71% of female characters, whereas only 14.29% of male characters had a lower neckline. The female characters' cleavage was also a point of interest. 2.82% of female characters were considered to be flat, 56.34% average and 40.85% voluptuous. (Beasley and Standley 2002: 286-289) This result will be discussed below in conjunction with the study of Martins et al (2009). Beasley and Standley (2002: 289) argue that these results imply that females in video games are underrepresented and portrayed in a more derogatory way than their male counterparts. They are worried of the consequences this misrepresentation of women might have on gamers' attitudes. Even though their study does make some valid observations, it does have some weaknesses that also the researchers acknowledge. They included every character they saw in the game, regardless of the characters' importance in the actual game (2002: 290). The issue of gameplay time limitations was already discussed above. It is true that it would have required too much time and effort in order to complete all 48 games; however, the first 20 minutes hardly gives a sufficient view of the game. I believe that a smaller sample with longer gameplay might give a more comprehensive understanding of the representation of gender in video games. Thus one gets a more comprehensive impression on how the various characters are portrayed and how they evolve during gameplay.

Burgess et al (2007) employ content analysis in their study for gender in video games as well; however, they have taken a slightly different approach than the researchers discussed above. They examined the covers of 225 video games for *X-Box*, *PlayStation 2* and *Nintendo Gamecube* and analysed the portrayal of female and male characters in them. The characters categories were human and non-human, which in turn were coded according to gender, and if possible, if the cover had primary (i.e. more important and

salient) characters. The parts of the characters visible in the video covers were analysed as well as how they were portrayed in relation to others. Men were classified based on muscularity (muscular, super-muscular and normal/indeterminable) and women based on chest size (busty, super-busty and normal). They discovered that 173 of 225 covers contained human characters, which were mostly men (90.2% portrayed men while only 42.7% portrayed women). In addition, men were portrayed as the primary character five times more often than women. Furthermore, the researchers claim that the portrayal of women was unequal and that they were objectified. With regard to chest size and muscularity, 49% women were busty or super-busty, whereas 25.7% of men were muscular or super-muscular. (Burgess et al 2007: 422-426)

These results appear to support the findings of Beasley and Standley (2002) as also Burgess et al (2007: 427) report that women were underrepresented, had far more sexualised representations than men and were less active. In addition, it seemed that the activity men were showcasing had something to do with violence. Burgess et al (2007: 428) report that despite the fact that women were portrayed in a less violent manner, it was not a positive result with regards to the role of women in games. This was due to the fact that action often means violence, which, in turn, means power. All this implies that nonviolent women are in fact powerless. The physical attributes of the characters raised concern among the researchers, as well. They argue that the muscularity of men can be explained by the fact that in order to finish the tasks they need to be strong. Furthermore, they argue that the physical attributes of women have not been developed with the same purpose. In fact, they found that having a large bust was the most essential attribute for female characters, as they had skinny arms and legs, thus lacking in muscularity. It was discussed that having that large breasts and sexualised appearances were not required for defeating a foe or accomplishing a task; however, they were essential attributes in portraying female game characters. (Burgess et al 2007: 426-428)

Burgess et al (2007: 429) were worried that the unrealistic portrayal of game characters affects the body image expectations of players, among other things. From their point of view the results do sound alarming; however, even they acknowledged that the game covers did not represent the whole game. It is true that the cover of any product is designed in order to catch the eye of a prospective buyer and offer information of the type of product; however, I would argue that it hardly gives a comprehensive picture of

the contents. Thus, a more comprehensive study on the role of characters in games is required in order to reach more conclusive results.

The impact of video games on gamers' self-esteem is also a concern to Miller and Summers (2007), who also favoured content analysis in their research. They point out that research conducted by Beasley and Standley (2002) was lacking due to the short amount of time of the gameplay (Miller and Summers 2007: 736). Miller and Summers were right to point out that game characters change during the game, thus a few minutes of gameplay hardly gives a comprehensive picture of the phenomenon. They wanted to see whether there was some difference in gender portrayal of game characters in gaming magazines. For this reason they chose to examine three gaming console magazines (*Xbox*, *PlayStation* and *Nintendo Power Magazines*), focusing on 49 video game articles from 2003 to 2005. They argue that game magazines offer sufficient data for research purposes, as the game articles present the skills and roles of game characters. Furthermore, the fact that the characters are presented in the articles suggest that they are important enough to be influential in the games. The six coders analysing the data identified the role of the characters, their skills and traits. They discovered that there were five times more males than women in the articles (1 female/5.3 males). Moreover, they discovered that the male characters were represented as muscular and powerful, while the females were sexy and attractive, which complied with the findings of Beasley and Standley (2002) and Burgess et al (2007). The male characters were the heroes in 58.1% of the cases, while the corresponding figure for female characters was 34.6%. In addition, they discovered that 83.9% of the male characters used weapons, while only 43.4% of the females did the same. They discovered clothing differences as well, with the female characters wearing more revealing clothes. (Miller and Summers 2007: 737-738)

The findings of Miller and Summers (2007) are convincing, especially when one considers how they support the results of other studies (Beasley and Standley 2002, Burgess et al 2007). However, their study once again had the same limited scope of research as the others. This is acknowledged by Miller and Summers (2007: 740). The gaming magazines had their own limitations, thus not all information of the game characters could be presented in the articles. Moreover, neither the researchers nor the coders played the actual games. Some elements such as muscularity and clothing can be analysed through articles and images; however, some aspects require more. For

instance, the role of a character in a game can be best analysed when seen how the different characters interact with each other. Playing the games for a sufficient amount of time offers more information about the game characters than just articles and images provided by a third party. In this case it is the writer and editor that choose what to present in the articles and they might have some biased view of what should be present in a game article.

While also deciding on content analysis, Jansz and Martis (2007) took a different approach in their research. Not only did they focus on gender issues in video games, they made a special point in analysing race in them. The racial aspect of their study will be discussed below in chapter 3.3. Jansz and Martis chose to analyse 12 video games that have a story line as it offered a better chance for analysing the role and position of the characters. (ibid: 144). Furthermore, in games with a story line the characters have a possibility for development in both role and position. However, they admit that they did not have the resources for a truly in-depth coding and analysis of the games. Thus they chose to focus on the introductory films of the games. They justify their choice of data by claiming that the introductory films give an outline of the games, their characters and storyline (ibid.). They criticise the work of Beasley and Standley (2002), saying that such a brief gameplay time is not informative enough for analysis. I agree on that; however, I would argue the same for the data used in the study of Jansz and Martis. To begin with, they did not specify what they mean by an introductory film. In my experience, the introductory film can be anything from half a minute to over 20 minutes. Obviously the amount of data available differs greatly depending on the length of films. It might be unintentional; however, Jansz and Martis (2007) fail to report the duration of each introductory film. Furthermore, the introductory films do not necessarily present all the important characters in the game as then it would ruin the element of surprise of the game. For example, I have found that in many games the villain in the beginning of the game becomes an important ally in the end.

Jansz and Martis (2007) focused on the following aspects of the human characters in the introductory films of the games: “Gender”, “Race” (which will be discussed below), “Role and position” and “Appearance”. The findings showed that 60% of the characters in the 12 games were men, which supported the results of other game studies. However, Jansz and Martis point out that there was an equal occurrence of male and female leaders (six of both genders) in the games. More interestingly, they report that they

found no female supportive characters that were in an inferior position. In addition, 43% of men with supporting roles were in a submissive position. They report that 60% of the male characters had accentuated muscles, 77% of female characters had large breasts and emphasised buttocks. However, having accentuated behinds was not limited to the female characters, as 25% of the male characters were reported to have larger bottoms. As in the studies before on video games, Jansz and Martis discovered that the female characters were dressed in a way that emphasises their sexual appeal. (Jansz and Martis 2007: 145-147)

Even though the findings showed that the male characters dominate video games, Jansz and Martis saw a change in the role of female characters in video games. They argue that there is a demand for strong and competent female characters, a phenomenon they label the “Lara phenomenon”, named after the powerful and fearless female adventurer Lara Croft in the game *Tomb Raider*. (Jansz and Martis 2007: 147) The occurrence of strong female characters could be partly explained by the fact that the games analysed in the study of Jansz and Martis (2007) had actual story lines, an aspect that is likely to appeal to female players.

Like many other researchers, also Dunlop (2007) was concerned what kind of message video games were sending to adolescents. She (2007: 99) argues that even those not playing video games are affected by the content of games. The point of interest in her study was the role of women and ethnic minorities in video games (the aspect of ethnic minorities will be further discussed below in chapter 3.2). The sample of her study included the 20 top-selling *Xbox* and *PlayStation 2* games in the U.S. in June 2002. To begin with, the content of the video game covers were analysed, with the focus being on the body images and level of activity of the characters presented in them. In addition, two coders played the games and categorised them according to the following labels: no female characters, female characters as hyper-sexualized objects or trophies, females as the victim, females as the hero, games with no characters and characters presented as animals with no human characteristics. Furthermore, the race of each playable character was determined through product description or an evaluation of the skin colour and clothing of the characters. (Dunlop 2007: 102-103)

Dunlop (2007: 103) reports that nearly half of the game covers (9/20) had dominant males while there were no dominant females. Furthermore, she (2007: 104) describes

how the games examined had mainly male heroes and female victims, whereas no female heroes could be found. In addition, Dunlop (ibid.) argues that the female characters were hyper-sexualised and the males were hyper-muscular, which according to Dunlop might have a damaging effect on the body images of young players. The underrepresentation of powerful females sends a wrong message about the role of women in the modern society, according to Dunlop (2007: 105-106). Dunlop does make some valid points; however, the game categories (e.g. females as the victim, female characters as hyper-sexualized objects or trophies) do imply some biased view of the content of the video games even before analysis. If the categories were defined as such, also the coders were led to think that there is something wrong with the representation of women in the games from the beginning. In a sense certain findings were expected and the study was designed in order to reach these findings. This impression is further fed by the fact that Dunlop gives only a few numerical results. In addition, there was no mention how long each game was played.

The portrayal of gender and racial stereotypes in video games interested Mou and Peng (2009), which prompted them to conduct a small scale study on 19 top-selling games selected from the top 100 games in the 21st century for *PlayStation 2*, *Xbox* and *GameCube* (the racial aspect of the study will be discussed below in Chapter 3.2). The researchers focused on the game trailers, introductory sequences and game covers. They (2009: 925) justify their choice of data by claiming that the game trailers and covers offered a typical representation of the games. They are important elements of the games as these, together with the introductory sequences, form an effective marketing element for the games. In addition, they influence the buying decisions of consumers, thus they are designed in order to give a brief overview of the games. Type, sex, race, position, role, occupation and attire as well as body of all the characters were coded. The results showed that 57.9% of the games had both male and female characters while 31.6% contained no female characters at all. In addition, all leading characters in the game trailers were male, while 43.3% of the supporting characters were female. Furthermore, 58.3% of the female characters in the trailers were seen to be unrealistically thin. In the introductory sequences all the leading characters were male, of the supporting characters 40% were female and 83.3% of the female characters were unrealistically thin while most of the males were considered to be normal or bigger. Moreover, one third of the female characters were seen to be portrayed in revealing attire whereas the male characters were well covered. Of the characters portrayed on the game covers,

84.6% were male while 15.4% were female. (Mou and Peng 2009: 926-928) Based on these results, Mou and Peng (2009: 928-929) concluded that gender representation was not equal in the games studied. Furthermore, they (ibid.) argue that stereotypical depictions of gender roles were prevalent in the game samples. The lack of leading female characters raised concern as did the clothing and body images of the female characters. Mou and Peng (ibid.) argued that the portrayal of gender roles in video games might influence the gender role perception of young gamers detrimentally.

The studies discussed above have, like most of qualitative research, relied mostly on the perceptions and evaluations of the researchers and coders rather than on purely numerical data. By this I mean that they have certain western definitions of sex appeal and what is considered to be attractive. The game characters have been categorised according to these intangible parameters, which are understandably very difficult to translate into numbers. However, Martins et al (2009, 2011) devised a way to mathematically compare the appearances of video game characters with real people. In 2009 they conducted a study on the appearances of female game characters. In 2011 they turned their attention to the musculature of male game characters. In both studies Martins et al (2009, 2011) analysed the content of 133 top-selling video games in March 2005 to February 2006 in the U.S. for *Xbox 360*, *Xbox*, *PlayStation 2*, *PlayStation*, *Nintendo Gamecube*, *PlayStation Portable* (as the name suggests, a portable system), *Nintendo Gameboy Advance* (a portable system), *Nintendo Dual Screen* (a portable system) and *PC*. This enabled the researchers to obtain a very versatile sampling frame, as the game characters for each system was bound to have certain differences due to technical limitations such as screen size. The bigger the screen size, the higher amount of detail can be designed in the game characters. Martins et al used the same sampling frame and methodology in both studies (2009, 2011).

In the studies of Martins et al (2009, 2011) an experienced player played the 133 games for 30 minutes. The gameplay was recorded and each adult human character was retained for analysis. In 2009, Martins et al coded 368 adult female characters, of which they could use 134 characters in their analysis. The researchers (2009:828) report that the 234 female characters could not be used for analysis as the screen shots of them were so small that they could not be reliably measured. In 2011, Martins et al (2011: 45) report recording 3122 adult male characters; however, only 1074 of these characters could be accurately measured. The height, head width, chest width, waist width and hip

width of the 134 female and 1074 male characters were measured in inches. In order to compare the fictional characters with a realistic model, they used the data of *Civilian American and European Surface Anthropometry Resource (CAESAR)*. The *CAESAR* data was collected in 1998 and it contains the anthropometric data (i.e. measurements of the human body) of 6,000 Americans. Of this data, a mean for both adult females and males was calculated, thus resulting in comparison samples for the game characters. These figures were then used to create 3-D models in order to compare the game characters (Total Video Game Sample, Highly Rendered Females/Males and Minimally Rendered Females/Males) with the real-world example. The game character samples were extrapolated up or down to fit the height of the real-world sample. For the females the reference height was 64.48 inches (163.8 cm) and for men the height was 69.55 inches (176.7 cm). (Martins et al 2009: 828-829, 2011: 45-46)

The results of the measurements in the studies of Martins et al (2009, 2011) are quite surprising if one considers the findings of the other abovementioned studies. Martins et al found that female game characters had larger heads, smaller chests, waists and hips than the real-world sample. The highly rendered characters were thinner than the minimally rendered. The findings are surprising as many of the studies conducted on gender issues in video games have criticised the games for having female characters with oversized chests. Now Martins et al (2009) discovered that in fact on average the female characters have smaller chests than an average American woman. With regards to male characters, they discovered that the male game characters had larger heads, chests, waists and hips than the real-world sample. They discovered that the highly rendered characters were smaller than the minimally rendered ones. (Martins et al 2009: 829-830, 2011: 46-47) They (2011:47) reported that they were surprised that the male video game characters were “blockier” than the real-world sample. They had expected to discover that the male game characters conform to the V-body type, which means wide chests and small waists and hips.

As was mentioned before, I studied how gender was constructed in the console role-playing game *Lost Odyssey* in my bachelor’s thesis (Ekman 2010). I recorded and transcribed eight cutscenes from the game and analysed them. The language was considered as well as the visual and audio aspects. The conclusion was that the appearances of the characters play a huge role in creating gendered characters, which was to be expected. The female characters tended to have more revealing clothing than

male characters, which conforms with the results of the above-mentioned studies. However, there are also some differences. Both genders were equally represented in *Lost Odyssey* and also women have important and powerful roles. Another more interesting phenomenon was the use of voice in constructing the character identities. Voice had a huge impact on how masculine or feminine the characters were, regardless of their sex. It is clear that the study has many flaws and shortcomings, which is one reason why I approach the subject again in this thesis. A couple of years have passed since I completed the bachelor's thesis and I would like to think my expertise and insight on the subject has grown during this time. Furthermore, more effort can be put into studying the topic this time as my previous thesis had certain constraints, one of which was length.

3.2 Research on ethnicity in video games

While many researchers have focused on gender in video games, they have made some reference to ethnicity as well. However, ethnicity and race in video games are much less studied than gender. A brief overview of the studies will be given below.

Already in 1998, Dietz (425) discovered that the most of the characters in the sample games were Anglo. The *Children Now* study (2001) made a more comprehensive analysis of race in video games. It is reported that in the sample of 70 video games, 56% of human characters in the sample were white, 22% were African-American, 9% were Asian/Pacific Islanders, 2% were Latino, 0.2% of characters were Native American and multi-racial. However, it was not reported what the remaining 9.8% consists of. The report further specifies that 61% of female characters were white, 11% were Asian/Pacific Islanders, 4% were African-American and 1% was Native American. The sample included no Latinas. Once again it is not specified what the remaining 23% consists of. However, it is specified that 87% of game heroes were white and 83% of African American males were portrayed as competitors in sports games. In addition, 86% of African-American female characters were victims of violence. (*Children Now* 2001: 20-23)

The research by Miller and Summers (2007) focused on gender issues; however, they did try to incorporate an ethnic interest as well. However, this was not possible due to the lack of characters from ethnic minorities in their sample (ibid 2007:737). In Dunlop's study (2007: 104) ethnicity was studied and she reports that the sample in her

study included only a few playable black characters, who were either athletes or criminals. In addition there were only a few Hispanic, Asian, Native American, Middle Eastern, East Indian characters; however, these characters were not playable. Dunlop (2007:105) argues that the invisibility of any ethnic group in the video games is very damaging as it implies that ethnic groups are less important. The more visible one is, the more powerful one appears to be.

Martins et al (2009: 828) mention that in their sample of 134 adult female characters, 98 were White, which is why they did not include a racial aspect in to their research. It is true that it is hard to analyse the role and position of ethnic minorities in video games when there are no data available that can be used for analysis. Jansz and Martis (2007) tackled this problem by intentionally choosing video games that included characters from different races. The characters were categorised in certain racial groupings based on their appearance and spoken language. Characters were categorised into the following groups: “White”, “African descent”, “Latino/a” and “Asian” (Jansz and Martis 2007: 145). Jansz and Martis discovered that about 70% of the characters were White, with 75% of leading characters being from this group. Of the supporting characters 60% were White. Furthermore, five out of six leading women were White, while the corresponding figure for men was four out of six. This implies that the different races are underrepresented in video games. It seems that the White male is the most active and important character in most of the games.

In the study on the portrayal on gender and race in video games conducted by Mou and Peng (2009) race was also coded. They discovered that in the game trailers 74% of the leading characters were white. The remaining four leading characters were black; however, it is noteworthy that all of them were in a basketball game. Nevertheless, it was shown that there was no significant difference in the role presentation of the white and minority characters in the game trailers and introductory sequences. Of the human characters on the game covers 84% were white, 4% Hispanic and 12% black. Mou and Peng report that white male characters dominate video games, with the exception of sports games, which are dominated by black characters. They conclude that minority characters were greatly underrepresented in the sample. However, they point out that there was no significant difference in the racial background of the villains. (Mou and Peng 2009: 927-929) This is important to mention as one might assume that the villains

especially would come from minority groups as they might be seen to represent the dangerous and unknown “other”.

Leonard (2003) takes a more argumentative approach to discussing race in video games. According to him, the games offer valuable insights into the discourses of race in the modern society. He also claims that video games offer a safe environment to discuss and address various societal misconceptions and problems. It can be argued that the games disseminate and reflect the stereotypical notions of race. Leonard asserts that video games enable players to enter imaginary worlds, where they can act out their hidden desires. He claims that race is a crucial aspect of this. Video games enable players to safely dominate the weaker characters (often of a racial minority). In addition, players can experience the *other*, they can try how it feels like to be a member of a different race. It is no secret that the African-Americans dominate several sports, such as basketball. Thus through playing sports games one can be the mysterious *other* and be successful at it. Furthermore, Leonard argues that black women are used as exotic sexual objects in video games, thus enabling players to safely experiment with such fantasies. (Leonard 2003: 1-7) I agree with Leonard on the point that video games offer a platform for various functions, such as discussing inequality, stereotypes and dealing with anxieties, just to name a few. However, I find it somewhat a far-fetched idea that the casual gamer would have a motive such as experiencing the other when choosing to play video games.

3.3 Research on class in video games

It appears that social class is not as a popular study topic as it was in the past, at least if one looks at the number of studies conducted presently on social class. In fact, it appears that the studies on social class in video games are near non-existent. However, social class is often present in the studies even though it is not explicitly stated. As was discussed in section 2.4, gender, ethnicity and social class intersect. Therefore, it can be said that gender and ethnicity influences one’s place socially. Having a minority background tends to mean that one belongs to the lower classes. Thus it can be argued that while video games studies have not focused on class, they have approached it almost unintentionally through analysing ethnicity and the role of women. Many of the studies discussed above criticised the lack of ethnic variety and the role of female characters and ethnic minorities in the game. One could deduce from this that the studies presented above conclude video games to be sending a message that people of

ethnic minorities are less visible, and thus, less important. However, I believe that social class should be more closely studied in order to get reliable results.

3.4 Summary of the studies on gender, ethnicity and class in video games

In this section a brief summary of the results of the video games studies discussed above will be given. A common thread for the video game studies presented in Chapter 3 was that they all employed content analysis in some form. The nature of content analysis and multimodality of video games resulted in the studies focusing on the clothing and physical appearance of the game characters. This is natural as the video games rely heavily on the visual aspects in character portrayal. At the end of this chapter the studies discussed in this section will be summarised in a table for clarity.

The results of Dietz' study (1998) implied that women were often objectified and inferior to men. It was also discovered that most of the characters were Anglo. (Dietz 1998: 425- 438) A similar approach was adopted by the *Children Now* study, which reported that the female characters had much more revealing clothing than their male counterparts and were underrepresented in video games. From the ethnic study perspective, it was reported that of the game characters 56% were white, 22% African-American, 9% Asian/Pacific Islanders, 4% Latino, 0,2% Native American or multiracial. 61% of the female characters were white, 11% Asian/Pacific Islanders, 4% African-American and 1% Native American. Furthermore, 87% of the heroes in the games were white while 83% of the African-American males were competitors. (*Children Now* 2001: 10-27)

The studies of Beasley and Standley (2002) and Burgess et al (2007) supported previous findings, as also they discovered that the female characters showed much more skin than male characters and were not nearly as numerous (Beasley and Standley 2002: 286-289, Burgess et al 2007: 422-427). Miller and Summers (2007) discovered that the female characters were five times less likely than male characters to appear in the game magazine articles. In addition, also in the game articles the female characters had more revealing clothing. Miller and Summers tried to incorporate an ethnic perspective into their study; however, the lack of ethnic characters in their sample prevented that. (Miller and Summers 2007: 737-738)

Jansz and Martis (2007) supported the view that the male characters had the majority and the female characters had clothing that accentuated their sexual appeal. However, they also discovered that there were as many female leaders as there were male leaders in the games. They discovered an inequality in racial diversity in the games, as 70% of the characters were white. Furthermore, 5/6 leading female characters were white and 4/6 of leading male characters were white. (Jansz and Martis 2007: 145-147) Dunlop (2007) concluded that the games lacked powerful females. Furthermore, the males were hyper-muscular while the females were hyper-sexualised. Dunlop reported that the study sample contained only a few playable black characters, who were either criminals or athletes. There were some Hispanic, Asian, Native American, Middle Eastern and East Indian characters; however, none of these were playable characters. (Dunlop 2007: 104-106) Mou and Peng (2009) discovered that the female characters were underrepresented and there were stereotypical gender portrayals. With regards to race, it was discovered that 74% of the leading characters were white. Furthermore, 84% of the human characters were white, while 12% were black and only 4% were Hispanic. Nevertheless, it was reported that there was no significance in the racial background of the villains in the games. (Mou and Peng 2009: 926-929)

All of the previously mentioned studies relied mostly on subjective observations while Martins et al (2009, 2011) established a way to mathematically evaluate the physical appearance of video game characters. In both of the studies they had the same methodology and sample; however, in the 2009 study they focused on the female characters while in the 2011 study the sample consisted on the male characters. 30 minutes of 133 games was played while all the adult characters were retained for analysis. The characters were measured and then compared to the measurements of the average American. The results implicated that the female video game characters, in fact, had smaller chests than the average American woman. Furthermore, the male characters were wider than the real-world sample. It was expected that male characters would have the V-body type. Ethnicity was not addressed in these studies as 98 out of 134 were White, which, according to the authors, would not have resulted in meaningful analysis of the position of ethnic minorities in the games. (Martins et al 2009: 828-830, Martins et al 2011: 45-47)

None of the studies discussed here specifically focused on class in video games; however, class was also addressed almost accidentally as gender, ethnicity and class are

intersecting aspects of identity. Therefore the references to class in video games have to be inferred. As Dunlop (2007: 105) points out, the fact that ethnic groups are virtually invisible in video games leads people to thinking these groups are less important and powerful, an issue associated with the lower classes. In addition, Dunlop (2007: 104) discovered that the few playable black characters tended to be criminals, which once again is an issue associated with the lower classes. However, Mou and Peng (2009: 927-929) argued that the racial background was not a factor if a character was a villain or not. One could deduce based on the results of the various studies that the ethnic minority groups represent the lower classes. However, without concrete evidence this is merely speculation. For this reason, in addition to the intersecting nature of gender, ethnicity and class, it would be necessary to take the aspect of class into consideration in the various studies on gender and ethnicity in video games.

The studies discussed here employed content analysis; however, they have focused on various issues. At times it may be difficult to make a distinction between the different studies as they have somewhat similar results. In order to make the distinctions more apparent, below is a table summarising the studies on gender and ethnicity in video games.

Table 2. Summary of the studies on gender and ethnicity in video games

Author(s), Year of Publishing	Analysis Method	Sample	Main Results
Dietz, 1998	content analysis	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - 33 most popular Nintendo and Sega Genesis games (spring 1995) - game instruction booklets - focus on the portrayal of female characters and violence 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - 41% of the games had no female characters - 15% of the games had a female heroine or action figure - 28% females seen as sex objects - female characters objectified and inferior to male characters - most characters Anglo
<i>Children Now</i> , 2001	content analysis	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - top ten games in the U.S. for <i>Dreamcast</i>, <i>Game Boy Advance</i> and <i>Color</i>, <i>Nintendo 64</i>, <i>PlayStation</i>, <i>PlayStation 2</i>, PC (2001) - 1st level of the games completed - game manuals - characters categorised according to gender, race and role 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - 64% of characters male, 17% of characters female - 20% of female characters had revealing clothing (only 8% of male characters) - ½ of the female characters were props or bystanders - human characters: 56% white, 22% African-American, 9% Asian/ Pacific Islanders, 2% Latino, 0.2% Native American and multiracial - 87% of the heroes white - 83% of African-American male characters competitors - 86% of African-American female characters victims of violence - female and ethnic minority characters underrepresented
Beasley and Standley, 2002	content analysis	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - random sample of 48 <i>Nintendo 64</i> and <i>PlayStation</i> games - 20 minutes of gameplay from the beginning included - characters categorised according to gender, species and clothing 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - 13.74% female characters - 71.52% male characters - female characters had more revealing clothing than male characters - 40.85% of female characters voluptuous, 56.34% average, 2.82% flat - female characters underrepresented
Burgess et al, 2007	content analysis	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - the game covers of 255 <i>Xbox</i>, <i>PlayStation2</i>, <i>Nintendo Gamecube</i> games - characters on game covers categorised according to species, gender and role 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - 173 of 255 game covers had human characters - 90.2% of human characters were male, 42.7% female - 49% of female characters busty or super-busty - 25.7% of male characters muscular or super-muscular - female characters underrepresented, hypersexualised, less active than male characters

Miller and Summers, 2007	content analysis	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - <i>Xbox, PlayStation, Nintendo Power Magazines</i> - 49 video game articles (2003-2005) - characters categorised according to role, skills and traits 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - five times more male than female characters in the magazines - male characters muscular and powerful, female characters sexy and attractive - 58.1% of the heroes male, 34.6% female - 83.9% of the male characters had weapons, 43.4% of the females - female characters' revealing clothing - insufficient data for ethnicity analysis
Jansz and Martis, 2007	content analysis	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -the introductory films of 12 video games with a storyline - intentionally chose games with characters of various races - focused on gender, race, appearance, role and position 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - 60% of the characters male - 50% of leaders male, 50% of leaders female - 60% of male characters accentuated muscles, 77% of females: large breasts and emphasised buttocks - the clothing of female characters accentuated their sexuality - 70% of the characters white - 5/6 leading females and 4/6 of leading males white - different races underrepresented
Dunlop, 2007	content analysis	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - top 20 <i>Xbox</i> and <i>PlayStation2</i> games (2002) - the game covers analysed - games played and categorised according to how character positioning 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - 9/20 of game covers had dominant males (0 dominant females) - mainly male heroes and female victims (0 female heroes) - only a few playable black characters (either athletes or criminals) - a few Hispanic, Asian, Native American, Middle Eastern, East Indian non-playable characters - ethnic minorities appear less important - powerful female characters underrepresented
Mou and Peng, 2009	content analysis	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - 19 top-selling games in the 21st century for <i>PlayStation2, Xbox, GameCube</i> - game trailers, introductory sequences and game covers - characters categorised according to type, sex, race, position, role, occupation, attire and body 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - 57.9% of the games had both male and female characters - 31.6% had no female characters - 100% of leading characters in introductory sequences male (40% of the supporting characters female) - 58.3% of the female characters in the introductory sequences unrealistically thin (most males normal or bigger) - 84.6% of the characters on game covers male characters, only 15.4% female - 74% of leading characters in game trailers white - white male characters dominated video games - black characters dominated sports games - gender representation not equal - minorities underrepresented

Martins et al, 2009, 2011	content analysis	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - 133 top-selling games for <i>Xbox 360</i>, <i>PlayStation2</i>, <i>PlayStation</i>, <i>Nintendo Gamecube</i>, <i>PlayStation Portable</i>, <i>Nintendo Gameboy Advance</i>, <i>Nintendo Dual Screen</i>, PC (March 2005- February 2006) - 30 minutes of gameplay, all human characters retained - height, head, chest, waist and hip width measured - a comparison sample from CAESAR-data - the study of 2009 focused on female characters (134 characters in final analysis) - the study of 2011 focused on male characters (1074 characters in final analysis) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - female characters had larger heads, smaller chests, waists and hips than the CAESAR-sample - male characters had larger heads, chests, waists and hips than the CAESAR-sample - contradicted with the previous studies, the female characters did not have unnaturally big breasts compared to the real world sample - male characters had blocky bodies, in contrast to the expected V-body type
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4. Data and Methods of Analysis

Console role-playing games might be an unfamiliar genre to some, which is why this game genre will be introduced in the beginning of this chapter. The present study focuses on two Japanese console role-playing games as they have clear story lines, which enables evaluation of character development. Furthermore, these two games have both male and female characters from various social classes and ethnic backgrounds. Thus the two games offer ample study material. These two games will be introduced for the benefit of the readers as it is probable that not all are familiar with them. Furthermore, background information of the games hopefully assists with comprehension of this study. This will be followed by the research question of this study. The data used in this thesis will be presented after this. Furthermore, it will be described how the study sample was selected and gathered. The method of analysis of the data will be discussed at the end of this chapter.

4.1 Console role-playing games

Like books and films, role-playing games have storylines. The main difference is that console role-playing games are more interactive in the sense that the player actually controls what the main characters do. If the player is passive, the game simply does not advance. Most often these games are played by a single player who tries to finish a quest or accomplish something, such as save the world evil. The player takes on the role of the main characters, thus the name “role-playing game”. In addition, the player controls the development of the main game characters. This means that the more effort the player is willing to put into the character, the more powerful the character becomes.

Console role-playing games have predetermined plots and set sequences of events which means that the amount of influence a player has on the games is limited. The story is very important in these games and the main characters form a significant part of the story. Therefore, the characters have well thought out identities, which are built not only through visual means but language and speech play an important part as well. In addition, this genre tends to have both male and female game characters as well as different ethnic and class groups. Thus console role-playing games offers ample data for studies on gender, ethnicity and class. In this study I will focus on two Japanese fantasy role-playing games. These will be introduced in the next two subchapters.

Japanese role-playing games have a linear story line whereas in the western ones the player has more freedom in how to advance in the game. Furthermore, Japanese games tend to use turn-based battle system. Their game settings include medieval and supernatural elements such as magic and monsters. The medieval theme comes forth as the lack of technological and scientific achievements known to man today, even though many games might include some science fiction elements. (Moby Games, n.d.)

The Japanese are known for industriously developing high quality role-playing games, which is why both of *Lost Odyssey* and *Final Fantasy XIII* were first published in Japan, followed by the U.S. and Europe. Naturally this means that the games were published in Japanese, which in turn means that the games have been translated into English by a team of translators. Both of these games have speech sections, thus English speaking voice actors/actresses have been used in these sections. For the list of voice actors/actresses in *Lost Odyssey* and *Final Fantasy XII*, see appendices.

4.1 *Lost Odyssey*

Microsoft Games Studios published the Japanese console role-playing game *Lost Odyssey* in 2008 for *Xbox 360*. Two Japanese video game developers, *feelplus* and *Mistwalker Game Design Studio* created the game. The characters have been designed by the manga artist Takehiko Inoue. According to VGChartz, around 820,000 units of *Lost Odyssey* had been bought by 19 May, 2012 (VGChartz 2012c). I have summarised the game plot below.

The game takes place in a fantasy world that has three states on the brink of war. The people have the use of magic, thanks to the influence of another parallel world, of which only a handful knows about. The other world enables the use of magic in this world; however, not without a cost as also they are affected. The parallel world is tainted by an unknown force, namely human emotions. It was decided that five individuals (Kaim, Sarah, Seth, Ming and Gongora) were sent from the parallel world to study human emotions and their purpose. In this world these individuals seem immortal, as they have travelled the world for a thousand years virtually unharmed in order to see what it means to be human. After travelling the world for over a thousand years, they planned to return home to report their findings. However, not all of them wanted to return. Gongora, the villain of the game, betrayed the protagonists of the game: Kaim, Sarah, Ming and Seth. As Gongora betrayed the other four immortals, he erased their memories with the use of magic, condemning them to wander the world endlessly without a purpose. Gongora had his evil plans and the only ones capable of putting an end to his plans had forgotten their purpose.

The game starts with the mercenary/lieutenant Kaim fighting on a battlefield. The battle ends as lava starts to rain on everyone. Miraculously, Kaim survives and everyone is puzzled as only Gongora, Kaim's superior at the time, knows that he is immortal. Kaim and another immortal without memories, Seth, are sent by Gongora to investigate an anomaly with the help of Jansen, who happens to be Gongora's spy. As time passes they start to realise that something is wrong and the locked memories of the immortals return. Along the way they meet the other two immortals, Kaim's lost wife Sarah and the queen Ming, as well as the grandchildren of Kaim and Sarah, Cooke and Mack. Prince Tolten joins the cause once he finally understands that Gongora has been using him after his father the King was murdered by Gongora. Also Seth's son Sed, who is human and looks much older than his immortal mother, helps to fight the tyrant Gongora.

Gongora wants to break the link between the two worlds and kill the other immortals in order to make himself the only person with godlike powers in the world. When Gongora is trying to break the link, Seth has to sacrifice herself in order to save the others. While doing so she takes Gongora with her to the other side and thus the world is saved.

4.2 *Final Fantasy XIII*

Final Fantasy XIII was developed and published by *Square Enix* in 2010. It was first published for *PlayStation 3* but it was later published also for *Xbox 360*. Tetsuya Nomur, a video game director and character designer, was responsible for the character design. As the title of the game suggests, it is the 13th game in the *Final Fantasy* series. The first *Final Fantasy* was published in 1987 and has acquired a solid base of supporters since. There have been sequels and spin-offs of some of the games, such as *Final Fantasy X-2*, the recently published *Final Fantasy XIII-2* and *Final Fantasy Tactics*. The game series has also inspired some films such as *Final Fantasy: The Spirits Within*. The popularity of the game series can account for the success of the game as it appears to have a quite steady fan base. It is reported that 4,820,000 units of *Final Fantasy XIII* have been sold for *PlayStation 3* and 1,870,000 units for *Xbox 360* by 19 May, 2012 (VGChartz 2012a, 2012b). I have summarised the game plot below.

The game takes place in imaginary world called Gran Pulse in which higher powers have a huge impact on the lives of ordinary people. Above Gran Pulse there floats the artificial sphere Cocoon, where people live in fear of Gran Pulse. Cocoon is ruled by the Cocoon fal'Cie who have godlike powers. They enable life on Cocoon, but treat humans as humans would treat pets. They can enslave the humans by making them l'Cie, who have to finish the task given to them by the fal'Cie by any cost. The chosen ones are marked with brands resembling tribal tattoos. If the l'Cie do not succeed in their tasks, they become monsters (Cie'th) and are forced to wander the world for eternity. If they do succeed in their tasks, they turn into crystals.

People living on the Cocoon are in constant fear of Gran Pulse, because centuries ago the Pulse l'Cie from Gran Pulse attacked Cocoon and managed to destroy a part of Cocoon. The Pulse l'Cie (humans made into slaves by the Pulse fal'Cie) responsible for the attack apparently succeeded in their task as they became crystals. The destructed sections of Cocoon had been repaired with parts gotten from Gran Pulse; however, with these parts the Pulse fal'Cie and its crystallised Pulse l'Cie had been brought to Cocoon.

The Pulse fal'Cie (entity with godlike powers) and the crystallised Pulse l'Cie (the enslaved humans from Pulse) awoke and came in contact with the people living on Cocoon. A boy ran into them and was given a task by the Pulse fal'Cie. People on the Cocoon panicked as they were reminded of the threat from Pulse. It was decided that the whole population in the vicinity of the Pulse fal'Cie must be sent to Gran Pulse; however, the military starts to slaughter them before they can get to Gran Pulse. The game begins as the protagonist of the game, Lightning, has decided to save her sister Serah, who was in the compromised city. Lightning is helped by Sazh whose son was the one who ran into the Pulse fal'Cie and its l'Cie. A paramilitary group lead by a man called Snow tries to save the people from the military while trying to get to his fiancée Serah. A boy named Hope witnesses how his mother dies while saving Snow. Hope wants revenge and starts to follow Snow around with a mysterious girl called Vanille. Lightning, Sazh, Snow, Hope and Vanille find Serah, who has turned into a crystal. Enraged, they attack the Pulse fal'Cie which results in all of them being branded and becoming Pulse l'Cie. They see a vague glimpse of their task, which is the destruction of Cocoon. This makes them enemies of Cocoon, thus they are hunted like animals. They are helped in their struggle by a friend of Vanille, a woman called Fang.

During their journey they discover that Vanille and Fang are the crystallised Pulse l'Cie responsible for the previous attack on Cocoon. The fact that they awoke means that their task was not completed. The whole group is being manipulated by a Cocoon fal'Cie who wishes the destruction of the whole world in the hopes a rebirth. In the end Fang and Vanille save the world and its people by sacrificing themselves. Together they turn into a legendary monster and bring down Cocoon to Pulse. Thus humans walk again on the real world and take the first step without the supervision of the fal'Cie.

4.3 Research question

As was discussed in this Chapter 3, there are a number of ways how the subject of gender and ethnicity has been approached in video games. It was also pointed out that class has not been the focus of video game studies. As was established in Chapter 2, aspects of gender, ethnicity and class intersect. In this thesis the purpose is to identify the various aspects that are crucial in the construction of character gender, ethnic and class identities through analysing the main characters' portrayal in the two Japanese console role-playing games *Lost Odyssey* and *Final Fantasy XIII*. The research question of this study is the following:

1. How are the gender, ethnic and class identities of the main characters constructed in the Japanese console role-playing games *Lost Odyssey* and *Final Fantasy XIII*?

The popularity of video games has grown and people spend more time playing them. As the games have such a large audience, the message video games send interests also researchers. Particularly the aspect of gender has interested many researchers, as was discussed in Chapter 3. In addition, it was also noted in Chapter 3 that ethnicity in video games has been studied less than gender. Nevertheless, ethnicity has been studied more than class in video games. Therefore, it is important to study the aspect of class as aspects of gender, ethnicity and class intersect with each other. Therefore it would be difficult and even counterproductive to analyse one of the three without the two others.

Most of the studies discussed in Chapter 3 concluded that women and ethnic minorities are underrepresented in video games. Furthermore, the study results suggested that the female gender is portrayed as very sexualised. However, it seems that most of the studies focused on a small section of the games rather than taking a more comprehensive approach. Furthermore, it has not been researched if the representation of gender and ethnicity is the same across video game genres. In this study I focus on two Japanese console role-playing games (*Lost Odyssey* and *Final Fantasy XIII*) as this allows me to address the two games thoroughly. Moreover, the comparison of two games of the same genre hopefully enables me to reach a generalisation of how gender, ethnicity and class are portrayed in console fantasy role-playing games.

4.4 Collecting the data

In Chapter 3 a selection of video game studies were presented. While the studies discussed were thoroughly conducted, one needs to consider the game content and the portrayal of game characters in them more extensively. This results in a more comprehensive view of how gender, ethnicity and class are portrayed in video games. In my opinion, 30 minutes of gameplay does not necessarily offer sufficient data for determining the role of characters in the games. In any fictional work the characters tend to change and the consumer of that work gets to see their development as the plot progresses. This means that a character might be in an insignificant role in the beginning, but through character development ends up being the most significant character. By focusing on only a section of a game might result in an incomplete

analysis of the phenomenon. Thus the purpose of this study is to focus on the whole span of the game as this allows me to view possible character and role development. In this study I focus on the two above-presented Japanese video games as they represent the same game genre, namely the fantasy role-playing game genre. This enables me to compare the two games in light of the research question presented above and see whether some clear similarities or differences exist.

There are many reasons why I chose these specific two console role-playing games for this thesis. To begin with, they both have been published in Japan, America and Europe. In addition, they both are popular games, thus they are experienced around the world. This helps ensure that the results of this study has relevance, as there would be little sense in analysing a game no one has played. Most importantly, they both have several main characters of both sexes, which ensures sufficient data for this study. I have been playing fantasy role-playing games from primary school so I have the skills required for playing these games and do not have to employ the help of outside players or coders such as many of the researchers discussed above in Chapter 3 did. As was discussed in the same chapter, I think it is important to actually play the game to the end in order to truly understand the game and the characters. Thus I began by playing and finishing both of the games. During gameplay I recorded each of the cutscenes on a separate hard disc. As the memory capacity of the hard disc was limited, I selected the most useful ones as I progressed and deleted the rest. In the end I had assessed 133 *Lost Odyssey* and 168 *Final Fantasy XIII* cutscenes. For this report I narrowed the sample down to 23 cutscenes to be used as examples below. The scope of this study prevents the use of more examples.

As I played the games, I also made general observations. I first analysed the appearance, voice and role of the characters. During this process I also wrote the plot summaries of the games presented above. In addition, I wrote overall observations of the main characters. The results of these observations will be presented at the beginning of Chapter 5. I focused on the multimodal aspects of the characters (voice, appearance) as they are crucial to character portrayal in video games. In addition, the analysis of the interaction of the characters was crucial to this thesis as it offers important insights to the roles of the main characters. I chose to focus mainly on the cutscenes of the games for the analysis of the interaction segments. The cutscenes were chosen as they contain speech, movement and interaction, which are aspects that I want to focus on. Normal

game play contains much walking from one place to another, which does not offer relevant information for this thesis. The battle sequences do offer information on the strengths of the characters. However, the players control these sequences, which means that the players' preferences influence the characters' actions. Thus the role of the characters depends on the player rather than on the character roles themselves. For this reason, I think that the cutscenes offer the most relevant information for this thesis. With the help of *YouTube*, one can access the cutscenes easily if one is interested.

Cutscenes are cinematic sequences, which players have no control over. The duration of a cutscene can be a few seconds or closer to half an hour. The scenes may contain interaction; however, there are also scenes where there is minimal action. In short, cutscenes vary a lot. The plots of the games are predetermined thus as long as players play the games, the scenes will take place. I could have chosen other material for thesis data; however, I believe they offer the most versatile sample material as the designers have put so much effort into the scene designs. I would argue that the cutscenes are the most crucial aspect of the games in terms of plot development. Furthermore, the player will always see the same scenes as the game progresses. Thus all players get the same gaming experience. Moreover, the lesser conversations and battles in the games are not as important or constant as the player has influence over them and can choose to not to experience them. A player can choose not to speak to some minor characters and still the game progresses as usual. Thus it is my belief that so much effort has not been put into the design of the minor characters. In this study I will focus on the main characters of the game as the players experience the story through them. The main characters of *Lost Odyssey* and *Final Fantasy XIII* provide ample data for studying gender, ethnicity and class as there are multiple main characters of both sex and gender, different ethnicities and classes.

Some cutscenes were automatically rejected as they had so little material to work on. However, the high number of cutscenes ensures that there is plenty of data to work on. After all, *Final Fantasy XIII* has nearly nine hours and *Lost Odyssey* has almost 6 hours of cutscenes and cinematics. In the end I decided to focus on 12 cutscenes from *Lost Odyssey* and 11 from *Final Fantasy XIII* to exemplify how gender, ethnicity and class are portrayed in the two games studied here. This means that the sample is not random, which is why someone could argue that this thesis is biased. Nevertheless, I would argue that the multimodal nature of the data helps to ensure the validity of the

observations. After all, it would be quite difficult to try to force the analysis in some direction due to the multi-layered nature of gender, ethnicity and class. Moreover, in terms of this thesis it would be counterproductive to make generalisations based on some stereotypical preconceptions of the three aforementioned aspects of identity.

4.5 Methods of analysis

In this thesis I approached how gender, ethnicity and class were portrayed in *Lost Odyssey* and *Final Fantasy XIII* in two different stages. Firstly I analysed the name, appearance and function of the 14 main characters in the two games. These general observations I made as I played and finished both of the games. I also focused on the interaction of the characters as it is my belief that the construction of character identities rely heavily on interaction. In order to analyse how gender, ethnicity and class are portrayed in the video games, I analysed the voice, appearance and role of the main characters. I decided that the best way to do this was to observe and analyse the cutscenes of the games. There was much material to work on so I selected 23 cutscenes (12: *Lost Odyssey*, 11: *Final Fantasy XIII*) to be used as examples in the analysis. These cutscenes were selected as they provided evidence on ethnicity, gender and class. I focused on all the main characters as the purpose was to discover how gender, ethnicity and class are portrayed in console fantasy role-playing games. This approach was chosen so that this study could provide results that can be generalised for the use of future research. One could have chosen to focus on one or two main characters in each game; however, I believed that first one should provide the groundwork for such studies. Nevertheless, as intersectionality looks at the positioning of women, the second stage of this study focused on the adult female characters of *Lost Odyssey* and *Final Fantasy XIII*. Throughout this study I have argued that the whole span of the games is important to include in any analysis as this offers a truthful account of the role of the game characters. Therefore, I have analysed how the female characters develop and change as the games progress.

This study was based on qualitative analytic methods as my purpose was to study the appearance, voice and behaviour of the characters in relation to others. I decided not to use quantitative analytic methods as I lack the skills to numerically calculate the physical attributes and voice of the characters. In addition, I believe that speech, appearance and behaviour are aspects that can be interpreted in different ways according to our own conceptions. Therefore, quantitative analytic methods were not suitable for

this thesis. They could be suitable if the perspective of this study were different. Furthermore, multimodality is central in video games which quite naturally requires an analytic method that can take into consideration the audio, visual and behavioural aspects of the main characters. Moreover, as the term multimodality suggests, it is a phenomenon that has many layers. This in turn corresponds well with the idea of intersectionality, which is concerned with various categories of identity being interconnected. Thus it can be argued that everything is linked to each other. In this study it was recognised that the categories of gender, ethnicity and class intersect. Therefore, this study focused on how this intersectionality of these three categories manifested in *Lost Odyssey* and *Final Fantasy XIII*. One could have included other categories in the analysis as well; however, as Christensen and Jensen (2012: 112) argued, including too many categories makes research too challenging.

In this thesis various aspects had to be considered in the analysis. To begin with, the protagonists were not real which naturally implied that the characters were constructed from various fictional components. As the designers could begin from scratch, it is my belief that every single component had some meaning in character portrayal. Thus I began by focusing on the protagonists' names and appearance. In the study of multimodality also voice is a salient aspect of production. Therefore, I also observed voice and how it together with the physical appearance and naming influenced the identity portrayal of the protagonists. Furthermore, the interaction of the protagonists was also observed as the interaction segments offered valuable information about their roles in the games. Initial observations of the characters were made as I played the games. Based on these observations I chose the 23 cutscenes discussed below to be used as examples. Following the footsteps of the studies discussed in Chapter 3, I employed content analysis in this study. Thus I looked at the content of the games and analysed how gender, ethnicity and class are portrayed in the games. This allowed me to reach results that could be compared with the existing studies.

5. Analysis

In the following chapter the data will be discussed and analysed. As the purpose of this study is to compare *Lost Odyssey* and *Final Fantasy XIII* in order to see whether there are some similarities and differences in how gender, ethnicity and class categories are constructed, the protagonists of both games will be discussed first. First the individual aspects of the protagonists will be discussed, such as voice, appearance, clothing and

role. The main observations of the analysis of both of the games will follow each subchapter. These will be followed by a more close analysis of the adult female characters of the role-playing games analysed in this study. A summary of the analysis will be provided at the end of this chapter.

5.1 Game character description

In this section the game characters of *Lost Odyssey* and *Final Fantasy XIII* will be discussed. Each playable main character will be described in terms of voice, appearance, clothing and role in the game. Images of the protagonists can be seen in *Appendices I and II*. A list of the voice actors and actresses in the English versions can be seen in *Appendix III*. As the subheadings of this chapter suggests, much of the contents of this section is descriptive. They are based on observations visual and audio perceptions made while playing the games. An effort is made here to present the characters in a concise but descriptive manner as they might be unfamiliar to the readers of this thesis.

5.1.1 *Lost Odyssey* character description and analysis

Kaim Argonar

Kaim is an immortal from another world and he has wandered around the world for a thousand years. Under this time he has had many professions; however, in the beginning of the game he works as a lieutenant in the Uhran army. Due to the actions of the arch villain Gongora, Kaim has lost his memory, leaving him to wander the world without a purpose. Kaim is often very brief and serious. His wife is Sarah, who is also an immortal. They have a daughter called Lirum, who dies in the game just as Kaim regains his memory. Lirum has two children, Cooke and Mack, who join the battle to defeat the evil Gongora.

Kaim fights with a sword and is a very physical fighter. He wears grey and purplish armour, which is a masculine attire. His body is well covered; however, his armour does leave the lower parts of his abdomen and back naked. He has shoulder-length dark grey hair and big sideburns. Having big sideburns is a masculine attribute as women do not tend to have them. His body is slight but muscular. His voice is low which is also accepted as a masculine attribute as Kroløkke and Sørensen (2006: 90) clarify. Kaim speaks standard American English; however, his appearance is Asian. His name is of a Japanese origin and it is a male name. Kaim does not have a title such as king or lord. In

fact, it appears that he does not want to have any power as he keeps escaping the rest of the world. Nevertheless, he is well respected by the rest of the group. Furthermore, in Example 1 below, the King of Gohtza asks for the advice of Kaim and Sarah, even though Kaim and Sarah do not have any special status besides being immortal.

Example 1. *Lost Odyssey*, cutscene 73.

King: Kaim, Sarah, I have a favour to ask...

I will shortly be meeting in secret with King Tolten..

To discuss what can be done to avoid war, given the strained relations between our countries... And I would like both of you to be present when I meet with King Tolten.

Kaim: Why?

King: The young king and I will be struggling with the divide between truth, reality and fact. I want your advice, given your perspective as immortals.

As can be seen in Example 1 above, the King of Gohtza turns to Kaim and Sarah at a critical moment. The King is trying to avoid war and seeks the immortals' advice to accomplish this. While Kaim and Sarah do not have royal status, they are considered to be equal to royals as the King requests rather than commands their advice.

Even though Kaim does not speak much and does not want power, he is the uncontested leader of the group. The rest of the group often wait for his decisions and turn to him for solutions when facing difficulties. Kaim is a very masculine character as he is muscular, has a low voice, is serious, fights with a sword and has dark armour. His masculinity is strengthened by every attribute as his name, profession, appearance and voice are all considered to be masculine. While he has long hair, it is not a feminine attribute as nearly all men in the game have long hair. Thus a man having long hair is the norm in the world of *Lost Odyssey* rather than an anomaly.

Sarah Sisulart

Sarah is also an immortal. He is Kaim's wife and thus the grandmother of Cooke and Mack. She loses her mind as Kaim and she lose their daughter Lirum. She regains her senses when Kaim and the others find her again nearby the kingdom of Gohtza. She is a scientist and has kept a record of their time on the world. Thus she is a historian working with her brains rather than a warrior working with her brawn. She wears a yellow coat, a white bodice/tunic and puffy grey harem pants. Her clothing leaves a section of her back and a large part of her chest naked. She has long straight brown hair and wears glasses. She has a quite feminine physique with quite a big chest. Therefore, she is a very feminine character as her role and appearance do not have masculine

attributes. In battles she uses magic thus no physical strength is required. She uses a staff that enhances her magical abilities. She has a quite high voice and speaks standard American English with no particular accent. Her name is a traditional woman's name common in America and Europe. Her appearance is more western than the appearance of the other; however, this could be due to her having round glasses.

There is nothing masculine about her. Her name, high tone of voice, clothing accentuating her feminine features and physique and battle style are all considered to be feminine characteristics. The sum of these attributes contributes to the fact that there is no mistaking that she is a woman. Furthermore, even if one of these attributes were deleted, such as voice, Sarah would still be a very feminine character. It is also worth noting that while Sarah does not have an official title or royal status, she is considered to be equal to royalty as can be seen in Example 1 discussed above.

Seth Balmore

Seth is also an immortal and she joins Kaim in Uhra. She is a pirate queen, which is somewhat surprising as being a pirate is considered to be a masculine profession by real life standards. Being a pirate queen means that she is a leader and thus has high social status. She fights with a sword just as Kaim does; however, she is not physically as strong as Kaim. Moreover, she is a more proficient magic user than Kaim. Thus one can argue that her mental capabilities exceed Kaim's. This would seem to support the fact that men fight with their brawn as they are physically stronger while women due to being physically weaker than men have stronger mental abilities. Seth has a somewhat low voice, which according to Kroløkke and Sørensen (2006: 90) is considered to be an attribute of voice of men. She wears armour on her arms, which is also a masculine characteristic. However, otherwise her appearance and clothing are very feminine. She wears a short close-fitting dress with a halter neck. Her dress has a low cleavage and leaves her back naked. Her physique is very voluptuous. The hair is curly yet spikey and quite short. She speaks standard American English with no particular accent. She has a son named Sed, who also joins the battle against Gongora. Her dead husband Aneira is described as a rare creature with wings. It is suggested that she killed Aneira when saving their son from him. In the end she sacrifices herself in order to save the others and the world, which requires a huge amount of bravery.

Seth is an interesting mixture of feminine and masculine attributes. To begin with, her name is traditionally a man's name. In addition, her profession is very masculine. Furthermore, her battle technique requires physical strength. Furthermore, she is very straightforward and ready to meet any challenge head-on. However, her physique and appearance are very feminine due to her clothing and hourglass body type. There is no mistaking that she is a woman based on physical appearance. Furthermore, it is very apparent that she is foremost a mother as she will do anything to save her son. However, if one were told only that there was a character named Seth, who is a pirate and fights with a sword, one would automatically assume this character to be male.

Ming Numara

Ming is the fourth immortal of the group. She is the queen of Numara which clearly indicates that she belongs to a high social class by default. She is a sorceress, thus she fights using magic. Therefore she does not require physical strength in battles. She uses a staff which enhances her magical abilities. The name 'Ming' is of Chinese origin and is used for both boys and girls. It is worth noting that many Chinese emperors had the name Ming. She speaks British English which makes her stand out from the rest of the group. It also makes her seem a bit more educated and polished than the rest of the group. Furthermore, she uses quite formal vocabulary as can be seen from Example 2 below (for example, "forsake", "reflects poorly").

Example 2. Lost Odyssey, cutscene 39.

Ming: Even so, I will not forsake my duties.

...

Ming: Such insincerity reflects poorly on your true self.

Ming has long mahogany-colour hair which is tied on a high ponytail. She has a tiara which signifies her status. She is very voluptuous and she wears very revealing clothing even though it seems that quite a lot of fabric has been used for her clothing. The colours used in her clothes are grey and blue/purple, colours associated with regality. She wears a floral patterned cape with sleeves. Her chest is mostly naked as is most of her waist. The bottom half of her clothes resemble bikini briefs. Her legs are mostly covered with high boots and some sort of garment hanging from her hips. She has a couple of knives hanging from the cloth; however, I never saw that they were used in the game. Her inner thighs and a part of her buttocks are left naked. The revealing clothing and her status seems to at odds; however, the fantasy settings of the game

allow for this kind of contradiction. Below is a picture of her giving a speech to her people about the importance of peace. The angle offers an extensive view of her body and clothing.

Picture 1. Queen Ming giving a speech. (*Lost Odyssey* cutscene 41)



Ming is a female character who is very feminine based on the following observations. Her name clearly indicates that she is a woman as does her voice, clothing and physique. Her battle technique does not require physical strength. Her accent, name and behaviour give the impression that she belongs to a higher social class than the others. This is in fact true, as she is the Queen of Numara. While her clothing is perhaps not the most official, it does not lower her status. During the game she falls in love with the thief Jansen and marries him in the end. This reminds me of a typical fairy tale in which a common girl marries a prince. In *Lost Odyssey* the roles are only reversed.

Jansen Friedh

Jansen is the first immortal to join the group. He is a magician and thief from Uhra. While he appears to be well-built, his fighting technique does not require physical strength. He uses a staff which enhances his magical abilities. He is the joker and the source of humour in the game. His hair is tied to a high ponytail; however, this is not seen to be a feminine attribute as no attention is paid to it in the game. Male characters simply have long hair. He has layered clothing that is white and brown and leaves no bare skin. He wears a loose-sleeved jacket and trousers that come down to his knees. Otherwise his legs are covered by socks or tights. He speaks standard American English and has a low voice. The name Jansen is a male name. His behaviour clearly implies that he is interested in women sexually as can be seen in Example 3 below. In

the example Jansen meets Seth for the first time. He is escorted to the scene by three women who based on appearance and behaviour are prostitutes.

Example 3, *Lost Odyssey* cutscene 16.

Jansen: Whoa! Baby. What a woman. I can't believe my luck!

Seth: He reeks of booze.

Kaim: Why are you late?

Jansen: Can't you tell? A man's gotta do certain 'things' before leaving on a mission like this, and I did what I had to do.

Jansen kisses the three girls.

.....

Jansen: Oh that is so sweet! I know, I know. Oh don't say that. That is so nice.

Awww..you girls... I'm already missing you... Hey can't I just have fifteen more minutes? Fifteen for her, for her, for her. That's forty-five minutes. That's...

It is clear that by saying "A man's gotta do certain things before leaving on a mission like this, and I did what I had to do." he is referring to having sex. Jansen is a masculine character as he appears to be muscular and has a low voice. The masculinity is not influenced by the fact that he has a fighting technique that does not require physical strength. Moreover, his profession as a thief is something that does not require physical strength. Cunning and a quick mind are characteristics that a thief requires rather than strength. His appearance, behaviour bordering on being a lecher and name create a clear identity that Jansen is a male character. Furthermore, his status as a thief and behaviour imply that Jansen has low social status. However, belonging to a lower class is not an issue as Jansen becomes a king in the end as he marries Queen Ming.

Sed

Sed is Seth's long-lost son, who is 70 years old when they meet again in Uhra. He has followed his mother's footsteps and is also a pirate, which is considered to be a masculine profession. He is also a leader as he is the captain of a pirate ship. Being in a leadership role suggests that he belongs to the higher social class. However, it appears that he does not respect the higher classes as he dislikes royalty. Furthermore, being a pirate involves stealing from others and most often from those who are richer than oneself. Therefore, while Sed has power, he does not seem to appreciate those born into power. In battles he uses a gun which allows him to fight from a distance. He has long grey hair which is tied to a ponytail. As was discussed already above, having long hair is not a feminine attribute as all men in the game have long hair. His body is well covered as he wears layered clothing. The colours used in his clothes consist mostly of red, beige and grey. He has a breastplate with a skull on it, which further enforces the

image of being a pirate. He has wide pants with patterns of flames on the pant-legs. He speaks standard American English and has a low voice. It is suggested that he has an artificial leg as it was torn off by his father Aneira in a bout of madness caused by the villain Gongora. This enforces the identity of being a proper pirate as in many fairy tales pirates have wooden legs. The name Sed is a man's name and it is said to be derived from the name Cedric.

Sed is another male character that has solely masculine characteristics. After all, he has a masculine profession (pirate captain), has a low voice and has a male name. While he fights from a distance, it is not an indication of femininity as he is already quite old and is not physically as fit as the younger male characters. Furthermore, guns are considered to be a masculine choice of weapon. In addition, his gun is quite large. While he is quite old, he calls his mother Seth 'Momma'. Furthermore, there are times when Seth scolds his son for his behaviour. While he himself has leadership status, he has no appreciation for royalty and does not hesitate to express it.

Cooke

Cooke is the granddaughter of Kaim and Sarah. She is very spirited and brave despite her young age. She uses magic in battles, which does not require physical strength. The staff is her weapon of choice in battles. She does not have long hair but most of it is tied to a small ponytail. Red is mostly used in her clothing. It leaves her arms naked as well as a section of her thighs as she has a short skirt and high boots. As is to be expected due to her young age, her chest is well covered. She speaks standard American English and has a quite high voice, which is to be expected as she is a young girl. The name Cooke is said to be male name and it is also often used as a surname. She appears to be of lower classes as her family lived alone at the outskirts of the wealthy city of Numara; however, her mother was close friends with Ming the queen. Thus it appears that status does not prevent friendship across class borders.

Cooke is still quite young; however, there is no question that she is a girl despite the male name. Her voice is quite high and her clothing is also a clear indicator of gender. There are times when she is quite the tomboy, for example, she kicks people. Below is an image of Cooke and Mack at the wedding of Ming and Jansen. Cooke's clothing clearly indicates that she is a girl. While the dress is in a girlish pink colour, there is something somewhat sexual with the dress. I believe that this impression is due to the

length of the dress and the type of stockings. However, Cooke does have a similarly short skirt for the whole game. Thus it appears that bare skin on a female child is normal.

Picture 2: Cooke and Mack at the Ming and Jansen's wedding. (*Lost Odyssey*, cutscene 133)



Mack

Mack is Cooke's younger brother. While Cooke and Mack have immortal grandparents, they themselves are mortals. He fights with magic and also with discus. These do not require physical strength, which he does not have due to his young age. His clothing consists of mostly green clothes which leave only a section of his arms and knees bare. He wears shin pads for protection. He has a type of a belt pack in which he can carry items. He speaks standard American English and has a quite high voice. The name Mack is a male name. There are times when he cries but he says that he wants to be as strong as Kaim and thus does not want to cry.

Mack is still very young, only about 11 years old. Thus it is not a feminine characteristic that he has a high voice and fights from a distance. Furthermore, he fights also with the discus so it can be expected that he will be stronger as he grows up. In the image above (Picture 2 above) Mack has clothing that does not leave any part of his body naked while his sister has much more revealing clothing. He, like his sister Cooke, lives outside the outskirts of Numara. While this would suggest that he is an outcast, he is close to Ming, the queen of Numara. Thus social class is not a problem here.

Tolten

Tolten is the young mortal prince deceived by the villain Gongora. While he is very timid, he fights with a sword, which requires also physical strength. In the game he says that he has studied fighting but has not had to do it in practice. He wears golden armour

that seems to have diamonds embedded to it. Thus the armour is more for appearance and signifying status than for practicality. He has curly golden hair. He speaks standard American English with an accent that indicates that he belongs to a higher social class. He has a somewhat high voice. His appearance, status as first the prince, later as the king, speech style all indicate that he belongs to a higher social class.

Tolten is the male character that has the most feminine aspects of all male characters in the game. He has armour; however it is shiny and sparkly, which is associated with femininity by many. In addition, speaks in a high voice and is quite timid. However, as he travels with the others, he becomes surer of himself. While he has belongs to the higher classes (being the prince), he is not respected by anyone in the beginning. Thus high class does not automatically equate respect; in fact, it seems that a weak individual of the higher classes begets only disrespect.

5.1.1.1 Summary of the analysis of the main characters in *Lost Odyssey*

It is clear that physical appearance and clothing are the key components in portraying sex in *Lost Odyssey*. The male characters are muscular and have clothing that mostly covers their bodies. By contrast, the female characters have bodies that can be regarded as voluptuous and revealing clothing that accentuates their feminine characteristics. In addition, the clothing influences also how gender is portrayed. For instance, Ming is a very feminine character and she has very revealing clothing. By contrast, Seth is somewhat a masculine character and she wears armour. Kaim is the most masculine male character in the game and he is covered by dark armour. Also Tolten has armour; however, his armour is shiny and golden, which combined with his insecurity makes him more feminine than Kaim. Furthermore, the masculine characters appear to have clothing that is practical as they have pouches where they could carry items, their bodies are covered or they have armour so that they are better protected from attacks. Meanwhile the feminine characters have clothing that is more attractive than practical. After all, going into battle with your chest bare seems like offering a target to the enemy. (For pictures of the main characters, see Appendix I.)

The characters mostly have Asian appearance, with the exceptions of Sarah and Tolten who appear Caucasian. The impression can be due to the fact that Sarah has round glasses so that one cannot see the shape of her eyes. Tolten has golden curly hair, which

Asian people are not expected to have. However, clothing does give the impression that the characters have different ethnicities. To begin with, Ming, Mack and Cooke are from Numara and they all have the most Asian style clothing. Kaim and Seth begin their journey from Uhra and both wear at least partial armour. Also Tolten who is from Uhra wears armour. However, Jansen is from Uhra but has Asian style attire. This can be due to the fact that the designers have considered that he will have a close connection to Ming later, thus they would seem a fitting pair. Sed and Sarah are discovered as the group travels around the world. They have the most different clothing from the others.

It is important to note that the male and female characters are equal in the game. While they turn to Kaim when faced with grave trouble, they are capable of making decisions for themselves. In fact, in the beginning of the game, the accomplished leaders are the female characters Seth and Ming whereas Tolten must grow into the role of a leader. Furthermore, in more than one occasion the female characters take control while Kaim still hesitates. Kaim is accepted as the leader even though it seems that he has no title of a leader of any kind. In fact, considering the status of all the main characters, Jansen as a thief is of the lowest class. However, class is not a major issue as there is love and respect across class borders.

In *Lost Odyssey* Caucasians form the minority as six out of the eight main characters appear Asian. Other minorities are not present in the game (for example, no African-Americans or Latinos/as). However, the protagonists do not appear to have any differing customs or beliefs even though they come from various parts of the world or have differing looks. Their clothing does give some indication of their ethnic background, but it is limited to that. It is interesting that accent and social class are connected. The royalty (queen Ming and prince Tolten) have slight British accent, thus their speech seems somewhat more polished. Furthermore, Ming tends to use very formal language, which further reinforces the impression of nobility. However, there is an interesting correlation between gender and class. Looking at Tolten, it appears that when a male character is feminine, he is not as respected even though he might have high social status. However, a female character does not appear to lose social standing regardless of how masculine or feminine they are.

5.1.2 *Final Fantasy XIII* character description and analysis

Lightning / Claire Farron

Lightning, whose real name is Claire Farron, is a soldier but quits when she goes to save her sister. In the beginning Lightning seems quite rude and even callous. There are a couple of occasions when she tries to leave everyone behind but always ends up staying with the others as she realises that she needs them as much as they need her. In addition, towards the end of the game the more caring nature comes forward and there is no doubt that she would stop at nothing to save the ones she cares about. As a soldier she cannot stand her sister's fiancé Snow, who is opposed to the military.

There is no question that Lightning is a woman with her slender but feminine figure. She has fair long hair and her appearance is Caucasian. Her upper body is well covered as she has a kind of a sleeveless shirt with a turtle neck. She has shoulder armour and gloves that seem to have some sort of knuckle reinforcement. Her high boots come up to her knees and an equipment pack is strapped to one of her naked thighs. A belt is strapped right below her chest and she wears a cape which is tied to one shoulder. She fights with a gunblade, which is kind of a combination of a sword and a gun. Her clothing is practical and quite masculine despite the fact that she shows quite much bare skin. Her voice is quite low and she speaks standard American English with no particular accent. As was established in Chapter 2, a low voice is considered to be masculine attribute.

Lightning is a combination of aspects considered both masculine and feminine. Being a soldier is typically considered to be a masculine profession. Her physique is slight thus it is neither curvy nor muscular. She fights with a kind of a sword, which is often considered to be a masculine choice of weapon as the use of it requires strength and close-combat. One could expect a female character to use weapons that do not require that much physical strength, such as magic or archery. Her clothing has both practical and decorative aspects. It is practical in the sense that she has various pockets to store her items, the enforced knuckles on her gloves ensure a more painful hit and she does not wear a skirt which might tangle her legs. The ornamental aspect comes from the fact that the use of the belt below her chest accentuates her bosom and the cape seems to serve no real purpose. While her bosom is emphasised, no cleavage can be seen. The name Lightning does not reveal her gender but it does suggest that she is quick, violent

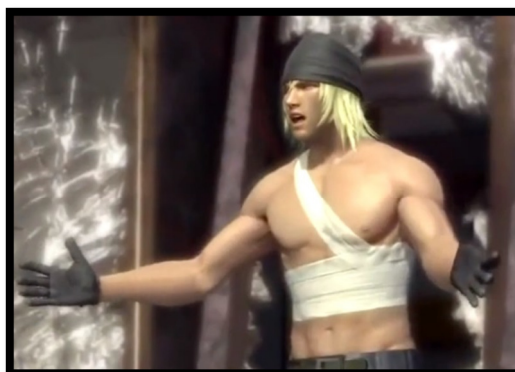
and powerful, which she is. She has a low voice which is considered to be a masculine characteristic. One could claim that all these aspects make her quite androgynous.

Snow Villiers

Snow is the leader of a resistance group called NORA and the fiancé of Lightning's sister Serah. His friends lead the resistance group when he goes to save Serah. He calls himself repeatedly a hero as he tries to save everyone. Snow combats with his fists, which requires much physical strength. He is tall, quite muscular and has a V-shaped body. However, he is not as muscular as a bodybuilder would be. His clothing does not leave much naked skin as he has long loose pants and a long grey coat; however, he does have a somewhat low cut neckline. The clothing style is quite plain as nothing really stands out. He wears a scarf, which hides most of his medium-length hair. His voice is quite low and he speaks standard American English with no discernible accent. Nothing seems to demoralise him as he believes his group will achieve their goal. Throughout the game he acts as a morale booster as he encourages his companions.

Snow is portrayed as very masculine as he is muscular, combats with his fists, has a low voice and is a resistance group leader. The name Snow does not automatically indicate sex; however, his appearance and behaviour does. He is very assertive and confident, aspects considered to be more masculine than feminine. His leadership among the resistance group is not questioned. His clothing style is very plain and does not contain extra elements, which is generally considered to be accepted for men. Wearing too decorative clothing would suggest femininity. The fact that he is quite an average male does not make him stand out from the others. As was mentioned above, he does have a shirt that has a low-cut neckline and one can see that he has a muscular chest; however, otherwise his body is well covered. Nevertheless, there is a scene in which one can see his upper body fully naked. Below is an image of that. It shows that he is very fit and muscular; however, he is not overly muscular as a bodybuilder might be.

Picture 3: Snow trying to convince soldiers that he is no threat. (*Final Fantasy XIII*, cutscene 92)



Sazh Katzroy

Sazh is the oldest playable character in the game as he is in his forties. He is also the only black playable character in the game. He joins the fight as he tries to save his son Dajh, who is the only other significant black character in the game. The hairstyle differs quite much from the others as he has an afro. Thus the African-American aspect of him is greatly accentuated. A small yellow bird called chocobo lives in his afro. The fact that he is older than the others makes him feel somewhat fatherly towards the others. Guns are his weapon of choice. He has a low voice and speaks American English. His clothing does not leave any skin naked. He is often the source of humour in the game, as he is the one who misses a smooth landing or says something humorous. He often uses more informal English than his companions. For example, he uses forms such as “ain’t”, “outta here”. In Example 4 below one can see that he also has incorrect verbal inflection at times.

Example 4, *Final Fantasy XIII*, cutscene 46

Sazh: Who'da thunk?

His age, hair style and skin colour make him stand out the most from the rest of the characters. In addition, the fact that he is kind of the joker in the game sets him apart from the others. Furthermore, the name Sazh distinguishes him as well as it does not seem to have any other meaning while the other protagonists have names that mean something else as well. The fact that he is black, has an afro, has the most informal and at times grammatically incorrect register and fights with guns is quite interesting. It seems to correspond to some stereotypes associated with African-Americans (different register, hair style).

Hope Estheim

Hope is the youngest protagonist as he is only 14 years old. He has a complicated relationship with his father. He seems to be closer to his mother Nora, who dies in the beginning of the game when saving Snow. He wants to avenge her death which is why he begins to follow Snow, whom he blames for her death. Hope uses a boomerang-like weapon in combat which enables combat from a distance. He is also the most proficient magic caster along with Vanille. As well as being the youngest, he is also the shortest of the group. He has a low voice despite his young age. He speaks standard American English with no particular accent. His clothing leaves parts of his arms and legs naked.

The name Hope does not automatically signify sex. In fact, it is used more as a girl's name in English-speaking countries. Hope is also a noun thus the name has a further meaning. In the beginning he loses hope as his mother dies but as the game progresses he begins to find hope. However, his name is the only feminine aspect in the portrayal of his character. For example, Lightning is much more androgynous than him. The fact that he uses magic and boomerang in combat does not require that much physical strength. This is normally considered to be a quality of female characters. However, his young age explains why he has combat techniques requiring more mental skills than physical strength.

Oerba Dia Vanille

Vanille is as sweet as her name implies. Vanille is vanilla in French and German. She comes from Pulse, which makes her a foreigner. Her skin colour does not signal that she comes from a foreign place; however, there are other aspects that do. To begin with, she has her surname as the first part of her name. The surname Oerba is her hometown thus it signifies where she comes from. She also has an Australian accent along with Fang while the other main characters speak American English. Her clothing style is also more decorative than the others' clothing. She has a lot of beads and bracelets, wears a halter top, a skirt and a fur pelt, which covers her bottom. Her clothing leaves her arms, legs and midriff naked. She has her red hair in pigtails. In addition, she has a fragile and high voice. The fragility is portrayed also in her physical attributes. She is quite short and not that muscular. She combats with a rod-like weapon which can be used from a distance. Along with Hope, she is the most powerful magic caster in the group. She is always upbeat and seems a bit whimsical at times. In the end she and Fang sacrifice themselves in order to save the world.

Her profession is a mystery; however, the fact that she comes from a culture that has disappeared makes her profession irrelevant. Without reference to the professions of others of her people, her status cannot be determined. Nevertheless, the fact that she prays several times in the game suggest that she is a spiritual person. Below is an image of her giving a prayer. She has her head tilted downwards and she has her fingers crossed in a peculiar way. This is a gesture none of the other character use.

Picture 4. Vanille offering a prayer. (*Final Fantasy XIII*, cutscene 21)



Vanille is definitely the most feminine character in the game. She has a high voice, revealing clothing that accentuates her sex as well as gender and a combat technique that does not require physical strength. Her accent and clothing signal that she is a foreigner, something that the other protagonists curiously do not seem to notice.

Oerba Dia Fang

Fang is also from *Pulse*. Her name does not signify sex, one could expect it to be an animal's name or more suited for man. However, one can argue that it describes her personality. She is rough, strong and dangerous. Nevertheless, her appearance makes her definitely a female. She has long dark hair, a beauty mark under her eye, luscious lips and is otherwise also fairly voluptuous. Her clothing leaves her legs, arms and sections of her midriff bare. Like Vanille, Fang has more decorative clothing than the other characters. She has sari-like blue clothing draped around her. Besides the clothing, also her accent sets her apart from the others. She has an Australian accent, which indicates she is not from Cocoon. While she has many feminine qualities, she is also very masculine. To begin with, she has a very low voice. She is abrupt and gets straight to the point. In addition, she is very physical. She fights with a spear, thus she combats close-range. As is with Vanille, Fang's surname Oerba comes first and signals her hometown. Her profession is not told in the game. She will not let anything stop her as she tries to save Vanille. In the end Fang and Vanille sacrifice themselves to save the entire world.

Fang is a combination of masculine and feminine characteristics; however, she is not as androgynous as Lightning is. Her clothing and physique clearly signal that she is

female; however, her behaviour and voice are quite masculine. Furthermore, her name and combat style are also masculine.

5.1.2.1 Summary of the analysis of Final Fantasy XIII main characters

The main characters of *Final Fantasy XIII* are easily distinguished as male or female according to their appearance. However, their names do not reveal their sex so easily. In fact, it appears that the names signify more personalities and gender than sex. Fang and Lightning are masculine women of action and aggressive, Vanille is very sweet and feminine, Snow is at times quite naïve but masculine and Hope despairs at first but in the end boosts the moral. The name Sazh does not describe his personality; however, he is distinct from the others also because of his skin colour and age.

Lightning and Fang of the female characters have many masculine attributes. While Lightning is slightly androgynous in appearance, she has a very masculine profession (soldier) and a combat style. In addition, in the beginning almost ignores the others and is quite aggressive at times. Also Fang is very aggressive and has a masculine combat style; however, her appearance is feminine as it is quite voluptuous. While Snow is a leader of a resistance group, he is not the uncontested leader of the group trying to save Cocoon. In fact, Lightning appears to lead the group even though she does not ask for the leadership role. It is more like she and Fang are so assertive that they naturally assume the role of leadership. Most often Sazh, Vanille and Hope follow the others even when they are not sure that they should be doing that.

There is ethnic variation in the characters as Sazh is black while the others are white. In addition, Vanille and Fang come from another world (Pulse). Language is another indicator of ethnic variation as Vanille and Fang have Australian accents and Sazh uses more informal vocabulary than the others. Moreover, Fang and Vanille have clothing that is more exotic and decorative while the other characters have more urban clothing and practical in terms of battling and traveling. After all, the characters from Cocoon (Lightning, Snow, Hope, Sazh) have either long coats, packs for items or protective gear to help them in their journey. By contrast, Fang and Vanille (Pulsians) have clothing that leaves much skin bare and not a lot of room for items.

The main characters belong to the same class while they have diverse roles and professions. None of them are of the higher class as they are not royalty or formally accepted leaders (with the exception of Snow, who is a leader of a group not formally recognised), nor are they lower class as they appear economically well-off. It is interesting that the female characters are the ones controlling the game and the ones who start and end the quest for saving Cocoon. Lightning is the first character one plays in the game while Fang and Vanille are the ones who save everyone in the end. It appears that being a masculine male makes the character less significant in the game. Being black on top of that makes the character almost into a supporting character (Sazh). It appears that being a masculine female character is the makings of a good leader.

5.1.3 Comparison of *Lost Odyssey* and *Final Fantasy XIII* characters

In this section the portrayal of the characters introduced above will be discussed and compared in order to see whether some similarities and differences with respect to gender, ethnicity and class exist. For the sake of brevity *Lost Odyssey* will be referred to as *LO* and *Final Fantasy XIII* as *FF* from now on.

In both games the female characters show much more skin while the male characters are more fully clothed. The main male characters have multi-layered clothing or armour that covers everything. There are only two male characters that show some skin in the games. Kaim in *LO* has a section of his lower back and abdomen left exposed by his armour. Snow in *FF* has such a low neckline that one can see his muscular chest. Furthermore, as was mentioned above, there is a scene in which one can see Snow without a shirt. In both instances one can see that Kaim and Snow are both very fit and quite muscular; however, they do not have unrealistically large muscles. In *LO* the masculine characters have more practical clothing while the feminine characters have more decorative attire. By contrast, practicality and opulence in clothing appears to be an issue of ethnicity rather than gender. The people from Cocoon have more practical and sedated clothing while Fang and Vanille from Pulse have more decorative clothing. Ethnicity is also signalled through name and accent as Vanille and Fang's surnames signal their origin and they have Australian accents.

In *LO* the chest area of the female characters is more exposed while in *FF* less cleavage is shown. However, in both games the female characters have some parts of their body

naked. In *LO* Seth, Ming and Cooke all have some parts of their thighs naked while Seth, Ming and Sarah have at least a part of their cleavages exposed. In *FF* the cleavage area is more covered; however, Lightning, Vanille and Fang all have naked legs. Furthermore, there is no question that the female characters are in fact female, as their clothing accentuates their femininity and is generally more decorative than the male characters' outfits.

Based on the observations discussed above, it would seem that the higher voice a character has, the weaker the character is physically. Of the women, Sarah and Vanille are the physically weakest and also have the highest voices. There are also Cooke, Mack and Hope who are physically weaker than most and have higher voices; however, this is to be expected as they are still so young. It would appear that also Sed, who has a low voice, is not as strong as the most but this too can be the result of his high age. An interesting example is Tolten, who is an adult, appears to be physically fit but still has a quite high voice. However, the high pitch of his voice can be an indication of his inexperience and naivety. After all, a person with high voice is considered to be uncertain while a low voice is thought to evoke authority and respect. Thus it appears that high voice and femininity correlate as well as does low voice and masculinity.

It is worth noting that both sexes are equally represented in the games. Moreover, it appears that class is not dependent on sex as both female and male characters are in leading positions. However, it appears that gender and class is closely connected. A masculine leader is more respected than a feminine leader. The female characters with masculine attributes appear to be natural leaders, while a male character with feminine attributes must develop further in order to receive respect (Tolten). Ethnicity and class is more difficult to assess as the games are not exactly overflowing with examples of various ethnic groups. There are some instances of attributes of ethnicity that distinguish some characters from the others, for instance, clothing, accent, vocabulary choices and grammar, gestures. However, while in *LO* the main characters are from around the world, they have similar values and customs. Thus there is not much ethnic variation. However, class is more pronounced in *LO* as there is nobility as well as regular people. Nevertheless, class is not a dividing issue as most of the time they treat each other as equals and in the end a thief marries a queen. In *FF* ethnicity is more pronounced which is to be expected as two out of the six main characters are from a

completely different world. By contrast, class is not that pronounced among the main characters as they all seem to have somewhat similar backgrounds.

The main characters have versatile professions. In *LO* there is a prince and a queen, a pirate queen and pirate captain, a male lieutenant, a male thief and a female scientist. In *FF* there are two female soldiers, a male freedom fighter and a male pilot. Thus, in both games there are female characters that have masculine professions; however, there are no male characters that have feminine professions (such as a nurse). It appears that in games the gender lines regarding profession can be easily crossed, at least in one direction (females in masculine professions). After all, being a soldier or a pirate is considered to be a masculine profession in reality; however, there are two female soldiers and a female pirate in the games. However, it is interesting to note that these characters (Seth, Fang and Lightning) have other aspects of identity that are also typically considered to be masculine by our standards. To begin with, one could associate their names foremost to be male names (Seth, Fang, Lightning). In addition, all of these characters have quite low voices, battle techniques that require close combat and somewhat aggressive and assertive personalities as they often act before consulting anyone else. One important aspect to remember is that in the end it is the female characters that save the others and the world through sacrificing themselves. In *LO* Seth sacrifices herself and in *FF* Vanille and Fang together sacrifice themselves in order to protect the others. This type of act is typically considered to be a masculine act, for example it is considered that it is men who fight wars and rescue people (for example, firemen, policemen).

While gender equality exists at least among the protagonists and various social classes are represented, it is clear that various ethnicities are not equally represented in the two games. To begin with, in *LO* there are no black characters; however, there are Asian characters. In *FF* there is Sazh and his son Dajh who are black, otherwise the characters are Caucasian. However, in terms of ethnicity, Vanille and Fang represent a different ethnic group (Pulsians) than the others belong to. This is signalled through their names (Oearba Dia, which signals their hometown), clothing (more colourful and decorative than the clothing of others), behaviour (Vanille's prayer) and accent (Australian accent).

5.2 Powerful women

One often associates women being the weaker sex and this is often true at least in physical sports. However, in both of the games discussed in this study there are very strong and powerful female characters present. As was discussed in Chapter 2, intersectional studies have most often focused on the intersecting identities and position of minority women. Furthermore, in Chapter 3 it was concluded that most game studies have found that female characters are underrepresented in video games. Therefore, in this section the focus is primarily on the adult female characters of the two games in order to analyse their position and role in the games more in depth.

5.2.1 Evolving into strong female characters in *Lost Odyssey*

There are three adult female characters in *LO*, all of whom are immortal. However, since they all have lost their memory, they are lost and confused about their purpose and mission in the world. Not remembering their pasts makes Ming question her purpose and Sarah loses her sanity. As the game progresses, the characters become stronger. In this section the development of the three female characters will be discussed. The most noticeable change takes place in Ming, which is why she will be discussed at length in this section.

Seth

Seth is very strong and determined already from the beginning. While she also has lost her memory, she has not lost her purpose as she does not question her abilities or future. As was discussed above, Seth has many masculine attributes. Thus it appears that the fact that she is masculine has prepared her for the loss of her memory. Furthermore it supports the fact that insecurity is considered to be a feminine attribute. Seth is very confident and trusts her abilities, as can be seen in Example 5. In the cutscene the characters have stolen a ship and now Jansen is wondering how to operate it.

Example 5. *Lost Odyssey*, cutscene 64.

Jansen: Ah, alright, this should be easy... Oh... Wow... A lot of buttons here. I'm gonna need a manual. I think I'm in trouble.

Seth: Outta the way, amateur!

Seth shoves Jansen aside and takes the helm.

Jansen: Ouh!

Jansen has learned before that Seth is a pirate queen, therefore, he should know that she would be able to operate the ship. However, he does not even think of asking Seth for

advice. Instead he tries to sail the ship himself. He realises that he has no idea what to do. Seth pushes Jansen aside without warning or apology and simply sails away with the ship. It is expected that a male character would take control; however, it is unexpected that he would have no idea what to do. Furthermore, it is surprising that a female character would simply push someone out of the way. One would expect that a female character would ask nicely: “Would you please step aside?”.

Besides being the most assertive and aggressive, Seth is also physically the strongest female character. This is obvious as she fights with a sword which requires a lot of physical strength. Furthermore, she manages to push Gongora, who is much bigger than her, through the Mirrors during the final confrontation (see image below).

Picture 5. Seth pushing Gongora through the Mirrors. (*Lost Odyssey*, cutscene 131)



While Seth appears to be physically fit, she does not look like she would be stronger than the man she is pushing. Nevertheless, she succeeds, which in turn saves everyone else and the world. However, this means that she must also pass through the Mirrors, which means that she cannot return. This she has to sacrifice herself in order to save the others, which is a demonstration of great courage. Typically in fairy tales men are considered to be the knights in shining armour who save everyone. In *LO* it is a pirate queen who saves everyone.

Sarah

Sarah has lost her mind when the others find her. She blamed herself for the loss of child, which led to self-destructive behaviour. She finally regains her senses when her grandchildren sing her a familiar lullaby. Throughout the game Sarah appears to be more cooperative than independent in her decisions. Most often she turns to Kaim when faced with problems; however, there is an important scene where she takes control. Sarah, who appears to be the physically weakest of the adult female characters, makes a sacrifice of her own as can be seen in Example 6 below. In the scene Kaim and Sarah

have just found Cooke and Mack who were on an unauthorised train trip; however, the happy reunion is ruined by Gongora who is trying to kill the characters from afar with the help of magic.

Example 6 *Lost Odyssey* cutscene 86.

Sarah: I'm scared Kaim. I'm worried about losing my memory again, or maybe this time, even my body.

Cooke: Nooo!

Sarah: Kaim! We've got to save them!

Kaim: I know!

Grunting from pain. Sarah begins to cut the carriage into two with magic.

Kaim: Sarah!

Sarah: I won't let our grandchildren die!

Sarah first turns to Kaim for some sort of solution to the difficult situation they are in and confesses that she is scared. Kaim does not respond, which is why she states the obvious that they must save Cooke and Mack. Kaim is aware of this but does not have a solution and hesitates. Thus Sarah must take matters into her own hands and uses magic to cut the train carriage into two. This means that Sarah and Kaim are left in the half that will be destroyed by Gongora, thus Sarah sacrifices herself and Kaim in order to save the children. This is a noteworthy event as until this scene Sarah has mostly relied on Kaim to make the decisions.

Ming

Ming is a queen, therefore it would be expected that she has much power due to her station. However, that is not the case when the others meet Ming. She had to make a sacrifice years before in order to save the people of Numara. She was forced to seal off her own memory by Gongora. The loss of her memory left her only a figurehead, as Kakanas, her second-in-command, calls her. Cutscene 42 below is a good example how Ming was viewed by others.

Example 7. *Lost Odyssey*, cutscene 42

Kakanas: You handled your role well.

Ming: So my performance was acceptable?

Kakanas: Yes, your Highness. We should now be able to achieve our objective. Let them loose and follow them to the truth.

Ming: And what will we gain from this exercise?

..... (*Kakanas talks about his plans for Grand Staff, Ming is confused.*)

Ming: You plan to start a war?!

Kakanas: The White Boa is already being converted into a battle flagship, and we've begun assembling troops and arms. This action is for the sake of the entire world.

Ming: I won't allow it!

Kakanas: While your majesty might have other ideas, the people will approve of these safety measures.

..... (*Kakanas and Ming argue, Ming faints and falls on the ground on Kakanas' feet, he*

just looks at her)

Kakanas: Hmph! Figureheads. They should just keep quiet, play their role, and smile.
Someone get in here now!

Even though Ming is the Queen, Kakanas has no respect for her. He has told what she should do and praises her when she has done as he had asked. Ming also appears to seek approval as she asks if she had performed well. In addition, it appears also that she does not know what is going on as she asks Kakanas the reason for his orders. In addition, she has no idea what is going on in her country as she is unaware of the military actions ordered by Kakanas. Once she understands that he is planning war, she becomes upset and stands up to Kakanas. His responses clearly indicate that it is irrelevant what Ming wants. In the end Ming faints during their debate. He simply watches as she is on the floor which further proves that he does not respect or care about her. His comment about the role of royalty as puppets who should do as they are told strengthens the impression of his low opinion of Ming.

There are a number of scenes where Ming is uncertain even though she has this air of royalty about her. However, as they travel together, she becomes more assertive and does not hesitate to act. In Example 8 below, Ming is trying to gain entry to the leader of Gohtza in order to prevent war. In order to convince the guards of her identity, she shows the royal crest of Numara on her chest (picture 6 below).

Example 8, Lost Odyssey, cutscene 70.

Ming: Proof I can furnish. Even a foot soldier such as yourself should recognize the crest of the Royal House of Numara.

Jansen: Hey, hey, hey, hey, what..

Seth: Wowwow. Hey, you can't do that! You're a queen!

Jansen: Yeah, I agree with you finally. Yeah, there's gotta be a better way- well, that's, that's a very...

Ming removes the pendant and shows the glowing mark on her chest.

.....

Seth: That was a very daring thing to do.

Ming: It was for everyone's sake.

Picture 6. Ming shows the royal crest of Numara. (Lost Odyssey, cutscene 70)



Seth and Jansen clearly think that it is inappropriate that a woman of her stature reveals her chest. Seth comments that Ming was bold in showing the crest. Ming sees it as something she had to do for the sake of others. Since the situation was not threatening, the boldness of the act is caused by the fact that she reveals her chest. However, as can be seen from Picture 6, revealing the crest does not actually result in more naked skin. After all, the neckline of her outfit is very wide and low.

Ming becomes mentally stronger and more certain of herself as the game progresses. She proves her strength in Example 9 below. In the cutscene the leader of Gohtza, prince Tolten and Queen Ming meet to discuss the terms of peace. However, their meeting is interrupted when Gongora decides to freeze the people on board the train carriage. Ming saves herself and Jansen with her magic powers.

Example 9. *Lost Odyssey*, cutscene 83

Jansen: Huh, this is weird. Why am I not frozen. Maybe I'm immortal. You know, my mom always said I was special. Yeah. What? Oh, Ming!

Ming: I don't know how long I can hold out. But at least I can keep you safe for a while.

Jansen is surprised that he is not dead; however, he does not notice at first that it is Ming that is keeping them safe. When he realises that Ming is using her magic to save them, he is surprised. Ming is not sure how long she can keep them safe; however, her statements proves that she is foremost concerned with Jansen's safety. While Ming is immortal and it is expected that she has some remarkable abilities, Example 10 below shows that it is considered to be somewhat strange that women save men. In the scene the player sees a flashback that Jansen loses consciousness first in the frozen train. Seeing him pass out, Ming unleashes a strong magic outburst. In present time Ming and Jansen have escaped from the train. Jansen has found some food for Ming.

Example 10. *Lost Odyssey*, cutscene 95.

Ming: Thank you. Shall we eat?

Jansen: I'm okay. You go ahead. You need to get your strength back. You must be exhausted. You had to use a lot of magic energy to protect me.

Ming: But as a result, I finally know who I am. Thanks to you!

Jansen: Well. Yeah. You know, I had to do what I had to do there, just kinda sat there and you basically protected me. Gee. That... was really embarrassing, actually. Oh man, I don't wanna remember that.

Jansen does not directly thank Ming for saving him; however, he does bring her food so that she can replenish her strength. Ming thanks him for the food and being the reason

why she regained her memory. He on the other hand is very embarrassed by the fact that he was saved by a woman. While the game has powerful women, it appears that it is traditionally men who are the saviours.

5.2.2 Opening up in *Final Fantasy XIII*

The female characters in *FF* are very strong already from the beginning; however, during the course of the game they become more open and honest with each other. These characters will be discussed individually below.

Lightning

As was discussed above, Lightning is a quite androgynous character. She is used to taking control, as can be seen right from the beginning. Example 11 is from the very first scene of the game. In the scene people, including Lightning and Sazh, are on a train destined to Pulse.

Example 11. *Final Fantasy XIII* cutscene 1

Sazh: You serious?

Lightning: Be quiet!

Sazh: Hmph. Best of luck.

Lightning attacks the guard and defeats him.

Sazh: She did it.

While Lightning fights other guards, Sazh kneels by a child.

Sazh: You all right? I'm not a l'Cie.

.....

Sazh comes with a group of people.

Sazh: So far so good. They all wanna fight.

Lightning: Good for them.

.....

Lightning and Sazh look at the forces attacking them.

Lightning: Give me that!

Lightning takes a bazooka from Sazh and shoots at the enemy.

....

A robot attacks the train transporting the deportees.

Sazh: Run!

Lightning runs towards the robot.

Sazh: I meant away!

Sazh questions Lightning's decision to fight the guards. She orders him to be quiet and chooses the right moment to attack. While Lightning alone defeats the guards, Sazh checks on the others. He kneels by a boy and asks if he is all right. When they are freed, they look outside and see that there is a huge battle. Lightning takes a bazooka from Sazh and shoots at the enemy, while Sazh is a bystander. When a huge robot attacks their train, Sazh shouts that they should run. Lightning does run; however, she runs to attack the robot. For this reason Sazh clarifies that he meant that they should run away.

This opening scene has many examples of reversed traditional roles. To begin with, it is the female character that fights the guards, while the male character is making sure that the others are okay. Furthermore, Lightning barks orders rather than makes polite requests. Moreover, it is the female character that grabs the bazooka to shoot while the male character simply stands and watches. To top it all, the male character suggests that they should run while the female character runs head first into battle.

Lightning is used to being in control as she is a soldier. The tendency to take over can be seen from Example 12 below. In the scene the group is escaping on an airship with Sazh on the controls. As they escape, they are being fired at by the army.

Example 12. *Final Fantasy XIII*, cutscene 38.

Sazh: Oh no!

Lightning: Give me that!

Sazh: What?

Lightning takes the controls from Sazh and fires at the enemy.

Vanille: Did we get them?

Lightning: We got one of them.

Hope: They're still behind us!

Sazh: Stop that! Hey, I said stop! You wanna die?!

Hope: How are you gonna lose them?

Sazh: You got me kid!

Lightning: Then let me!

Sazh: No thank you!

Lightning has trouble relinquishing control to Sazh, which is why Lightning tries to take control of the ship. Sazh trusts his own abilities as a pilot, which is why he takes the controls back. However, he has to argue to get Lightning to stop. She gives up; however, she wants to try again when she hears that Sazh is unsure how to escape their pursuers. It is to be expected that a male character would fly the ship as traditionally being a pilot is considered to be masculine profession by our standards. However, it is unexpected that a female character would try so tenaciously to take control as male characters have been seen to be the leaders (as was discussed in conjunction with game studies in Chapter 3). Furthermore, Sazh is not attacking the pursuers as he is more focused in escaping. Lightning, on the other hand, seems to think that attack is the best defence. Often aggressive action is seen to be masculine characteristic and evasive action is considered to be feminine behaviour.

It is clear that Lightning is a character who is very rough and brief in the beginning, as can be seen in the Examples 11 and 12 above; however, also her character evolves during the game. As the game progresses, she becomes more open and considerate of

others. In Example 13 the group is trying to figure out what to do. Fang is desperate and she is being attacked; however, she wants the attacker to put her out of her misery.

Example 13. *Final Fantasy XIII*, cutscene 126.

Fang: Why are you protecting me? What are you doing?

Lightning: Protecting one of our own.

.....

Lightning: I'm fighting this Focus to the end. We all are. So please... fight with us.

Lightning holds a hand out to Fang.

Lightning protects Fang as she considers Fang to be a part of her new family. She asks Fang to join the fight as she values the input of Fang. In the beginning of the game Lightning rushed to battle alone and barked orders at others. In Example 13 Lightning asks Fang politely to help them, which shows how much she has changed during the game.

Fang and Vanille

Fang and Vanille are a unit. In the end everyone else gets involved in the battle is because Fang is trying to save Vanille while Vanille is not ready to face her destiny.

Fang is very determined right from start to do anything it takes to save her companion Vanille as can be seen from Examples 14 and 15 below.

Example 14. *Final Fantasy XIII*, cutscene 87

Fang: Pulse and Cocoon can rot for all I care. If I don't figure out our Focus soon...

... Vanille's gonna be a Cie'th. I'll tear down the sky if it'll save her.

As is apparent from Fang's speech, she is not concerned for her own safety. Her only concern is to save Vanille. She does not hesitate and she is sure she knows what to do.

Example 15. *Final Fantasy XIII*, cutscene 126

Fang: Let Cocoon get what's coming. They hate us for being l'Cie. What's it to me if they die? Better that than watch a friend go Cie'th! If you don't have the nerve for it, I'll do it myself. Go on alone, get stronger, and Smash Cocoon out of the sky!

Vanille: Oh, Fang!v

Fang: You turn Cie'th and there's no coming back! I'm not letting it end that way!

Fang is so dedicated to save Vanille that she is willing to face everyone on her own. There is no question in her mind what she must do. Vanille on the other hand is trying to cope with the guilt of destroying innocent people's lives, even though there is not much she cannot do about it. In the beginning she is trying very hard to escape the

situation as can be seen in Example 16 below. In this cutscene Vanille is giving advice to Hope who has trouble dealing with the death of his mother.

Example 16. *Final Fantasy XIII*, cutscene 16.

Vanille hugs Hope.

Vanille: It's too much isn't it? Face it later.

Vanille suggests that Hope should deal with his emotions later, which is just postponing the inevitable. This is something that Vanille does for most of the game as she is at a loss what to do. While Vanille is avoiding her responsibilities; however, other people get hurt. In Example 17 below, Sazh has been told by a third party that Vanille is responsible for Sazh's son becoming a l'Cie. Vanille finally has to take responsibility. She is confronted first by a phantom Sazh that is in fact Vanille's conscience.

Example 17. *Final Fantasy XIII*, cutscene 101.

“Sazh”: A coward and a killer. The people you used don't get to live. Why should you?
Tired of living with guilt? Then die with it .

Phantom Sazh evaporates and the real Sazh arrives.

Sazh: Vanille.

Sazh points a gun at Vanille.

Vanille: My name is Oearba Dia Vanille. I'm a l'Cie from Gran Pulse. And to everyone on Cocoon... evil. Shoot me! Shoot me for your son!

Sazh: Don't you even! You think you die and that's that? You think you die and everything will be sugar and rainbows?

Vanille: Then what can I do?

She has a lot of guilt for what her presence on Cocoon has caused. Thus she sees the phantom Sazh who calls Vanille a coward and a killer. Vanille does not know how to live with her guilt, thus she suggests that Sazh should kill her. Sazh sees that Vanille dying will not solve anything; however, Vanille is still at a loss what to do. However, in this scene Vanille is not trying to escape responsibility. This is an indication that she realises that running will not help, she must face it sometime.

When they finally battle the enemy responsible for trying to destroy the world, Fang does live up to her promise discussed above and alone tries to destroy the enemy in order to save Vanille. Vanille has been imprisoned by the enemy and is tortured by it to taunt Fang into attacking it. The enemy is doing this in order to die and to be able to be reborn again. Unfortunately for the rest of the world, this rebirth would require the destruction of entire Cocoon. Fang becomes a beast (see image below); however, even then she does not succeed in saving Vanille alone.

Picture 7. Fang as the monster Ragnarok, Vanille terrified. (*Final Fantasy XIII*, cutscene 165)



In the scene Fang has become the monster Ragnarok in order to save Vanille. At this point saving Vanille means destroying Cocoon, which naturally would mean the death of everyone on it. Even though Fang has become a beast, it is apparent that she is female. After all, she has a bodice and her body is curvy, as can be seen in the picture above. Vanille is terrified that Fang is trying to destroy the enemy as she does not want innocents to die. However, finally Vanille realises that she and Fang must together become the beast of they have any chance of saving the world. Thus they sacrifice themselves and unify in the beast Ragnarok. Below is a picture of the beast they become.

Picture 8. The beast Fang and Vanille have become. (*Final Fantasy XIII*, cutscene 168)

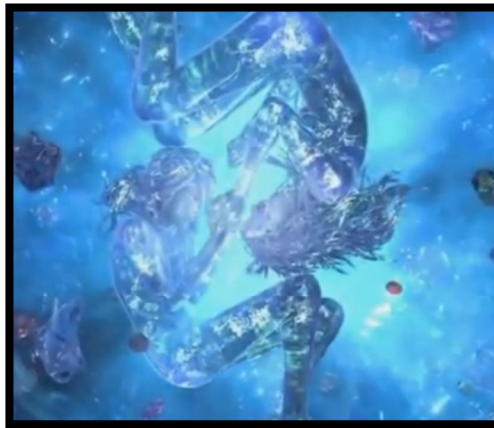


While they have become a beast, they have not lost their sex. The beast is very muscular and it could be seen to be genderless; however, it has a brassiere. This accentuates the aspect that it is a female beast. In comparison of the two versions of the beast Ragnarok (Pictures 7 and 8), when Fang and Vanille join their efforts, the beast becomes more

masculine. While it still has a brassiere, it has lost its curviness and femininity. In fact, it is quite masculine with its pronounced muscles. This is interesting as this suggests that the beast must become more masculine before it can succeed in saving the world.

If one thinks of Vanille and Fang, they represent an interesting couple in every sense. One is very feminine, the other is quite masculine. Even their names represent opposites, as Vanille is something sweet while Fang is something rough and dangerous. It is as if they are yin and yang as they must complement each other in order to be whole. This symbolism is further evident in the way they are crystallised after they have accomplished the impossible and saved everyone (see image below). The placement of Fang and Vanille resembles the symbol of yin and yang.

Picture 9. Fang and Vanille after finishing their Focus. (*Final Fantasy XIII*, cutscene 168)



5.2.3 Summary and comparison

While both games have powerful female characters in leading positions, there is a difference. In *FF* the masculine female characters Fang and Lightning are very strong from the beginning and become slightly softer and more emotional towards the end of the game. The feminine character Vanille has to stop avoiding responsibility and must become stronger. They realise that they will not be able to save everyone on their own. The most feminine female *LO* characters Ming and Sarah become stronger towards the end and are able to protect the ones closest to them. By contrast the masculine Seth does not undergo any significant development. It is noteworthy that in both games it is female characters that save the day through sacrificing themselves. However, it is noteworthy that the ones saving the world are masculine. In *LO* Seth is quite masculine right from the beginning and in *FF* the successful version of Ragnarok is more

masculine than the first one. This appears to suggest that while female characters may be the heroes of the day, they must have masculine attributes in order to save everyone.

5.3 Summary of the analysis

In both of the games both female and male characters are equally represented. Furthermore, there are both female and male leaders. It is apparent that physical appearance and clothing are crucial in determining the sex of the main characters. In addition, clothing is crucial in portraying gender. The more masculine a character is, the more armour the character has. Tolten is an exception with his shiny golden armour; however, he is a prince which is why he is dressed in such a manner. Moreover, his femininity is accentuated by the shiny armour, thus it is a conscious design attribute. Masculinity seems to be portrayed through the practicality of clothing as well. The masculine characters had more practical clothing whereas feminine characters had decorative clothing. The only exception was Fang in which case ethnicity seems to outweigh the importance of masculinity. However, clothing does not always appear to be a reliable indicator of class, as can be seen with Ming. She is a regal and dignified queen but still she wears clothing that is extremely revealing. However, clothing can be an indicator of ethnicity as is most apparent in the case of Vanille and Fang. Accent also appears to be a good indicator of ethnicity (Vanille and Fang). It appears that there is some ethnic variation present at the games; however, the minorities are not well represented.

It appears that voice and gender are closely connected. The higher a voice a character has, the more feminine attributes the characters. Vice versa, the more masculine characters had lower voices. Class was more pronounced in *LO*; however, the class borders could be easily crossed. There was royalty, but it did not automatically signify respect from others. Furthermore, the class boundaries were not absolute as the main characters treated each other as equals most of the time. Furthermore, the character with the lowest social status married the character with the highest social status.

It is noteworthy that three of the female characters in the games had many masculine characteristics (Seth, Lightning, Fang) such as combat technique (close combat), name, profession (pirate, soldier, warrior), low voice and aggressive behavior. On the contrary only Tolten of the male characters seemed to have feminine characteristics (high voice

on occasion, golden armour). Furthermore, it seems that female characters may have masculine professions while male characters do not have feminine professions. Furthermore, as the characters developed, it appears that most often they became more masculine. However, in *FF* Lightning and Fang become more feminine as they must come face to face with the fact that they cannot save everyone alone. Interestingly, the beast saving everyone in *FF* is female but evolves into an improved masculinised version. This suggests that masculinity is seen only as a positive attribute whereas femininity can be viewed also as a negative attribute.

6. Results

In this section the findings of the present study will be discussed in relation to the research question presented in Chapter 4. This will be followed by discussion of the findings in comparison to the findings of previous studies conducted on video games presented in Chapter 3.

6.1 Findings related to the research question of this study

In this study I focused on gender, ethnicity and class identities of the protagonists of *Lost Odyssey* and *Final Fantasy XIII*. The analysis showed that physical appearance and clothing formed a considerable part of not only the portrayal of sex but also gender, ethnic and class identity construction. Also voice had a significant role in gender portrayal. In addition, the character names and professions were crucial in portraying gender, ethnicity and class.

The female characters had clothing that leaves much more skin bare and accentuated their sex more when compared to the clothing of male characters. Furthermore, the feminine characters had clothing that appeared to serve a more decorative purpose whereas the masculine characters had more practical clothing. Interestingly, ethnicity appeared to be more important in character portrayal than gender, as could be seen in the case of Fang. The portrayal of ethnicity relied mostly on appearance and clothing as well. In *FF* the black skin colour and afro hair distinguished Sazh from the others. The clothing of Lightning and Vanille signals that they have a different background than the others as they are from another world than the others (from Pulse).

With regard to social class, the clothing of characters seemed to support the impression of upper class. While Ming had clothing that is revealing to the degree that it could be

seen vulgar, especially when considering her high status, she did wear a tiara, which clearly signified that she was royalty. Tolten had golden armour with jewellery, which also indicated that he belongs to a higher class. None of the characters had clothing that would clearly signify that they are lower class. In *FF*, Ligthning and Sazh have uniforms that signify that they could belong to the working class; however, most often class was not as salient as gender and ethnicity. While Fang and Vanille had clothing that differs from the clothing of the others, it is difficult to say to what degree this was a question of ethnicity rather than class. As Fang and Vanille came from a different culture, one would have had to have compared their clothing to the clothing of their own people. However, this was not possible due to the fact that they are the last survivors of their people. In addition, one has to be aware that the protagonists must have clothing that makes them stand out from the less significant characters. Thus they are automatically special. Furthermore, they seldom change clothes regardless the number of days they are journeying in the same clothes.

In addition to physical aspects, also voice and the way they speak signalled gender, ethnicity and class. The pitch of voice signals gender of the protagonists as it seemed to signal how masculine or feminine the characters were. The characters with the most feminine characteristics had the highest voice and the ones with masculine characteristics had the lowest voices, regardless of sex. Speech also signalled ethnicity and class. Sazh in *FF* used different register and grammar forms than the others, thus making him slightly different from the rest. However, the most noticeable aspect that signals ethnicity with regard to speech was accent. This was most evident in *FF* in the speech of Vanille and Fang who have Australian accents. In *LO* accent signalled class, as Queen Ming had a heavy British accent and Prince Tolten had a slight British accent. Thus British English was seen to be the accent royalty speak. Ming's accent did not signify ethnicity, the other Numarans Mack and Cooke did not have accents.

In sum, the clothing and physical appearance played a remarkable part in defining gender, ethnic and class identities in *Lost Odyssey* and *Final Fantasy XIII*. Voice was a great indicator of gender, while accent could be an indicator of both class and ethnicity.

6.2 Comparison of the findings of the present study to previous studies

There are several similarities in the results of this thesis and the studies discussed in Chapter 3; however, there are also some differences. In one of the earliest studies on

gender in games Dietz (1998) discovered that video games had none or very few important female characters or they were categorised as sex objects. Also *Children Now* (2001), Beasley and Standley (2002), Burgess et al (2007), Miller and Summers (2007), Dunlop (2007) and Mou and Peng (2009) had similar results as Dietz. They discovered that female game characters had more revealing clothing than the male characters had. In addition, the clothing accentuated their sexuality and gender. They also discovered that the female characters were also underrepresented. The results of Jansz and Martis (2007) support the studies of the aforementioned researchers; however, they did make another interesting observation. They found that there were an equal amount of both male and female leaders in the games they researched. This contradicts with the findings of Mou and Peng (2009) who found that the lack of female leaders was disconcerting in the studied games. The results of this study support the results of the researchers mentioned above as it can be seen that the female characters in the two games have revealing clothing that accentuated their gender. I would not deduce from the data that it accentuates their sexuality since while the female characters have revealing clothing, I would not claim that the clothes are sexual. Rather it accentuated their sex. Furthermore, the female characters do not act in a sexual manner thus sexuality is not a salient aspect of their identities. Even though Ming has by far the most revealing clothing, her behaviour is very proper and decent. To her, her clothing is more of a uniform she wears. With regard to gender equality in the games, the female characters in the two games have very important roles and the female sex is equally represented in both of them. This is contradictory to most of the study results mentioned above as only the study of Jansz and Martis (2007) had similar results with regard to leadership.

The studies of Martins et al (2009, 2011) took the analysis of the physical features of the game characters to a new level as they measured the characters and mathematically calculated how these measurements correspond to the measurements of an average person. While most studies had claimed that the female game characters were unrealistically busty, Martins et al discovered that the characters had in fact smaller chest than American women in average. While I did not have the capabilities to conduct similar calculations in my thesis, I would evaluate that the female characters studied in this thesis did not have unrealistically big chests. However, it is noteworthy that the *Lost Odyssey* female characters seem to have larger breasts than the female characters in *Final Fantasy XIII* have. Nevertheless, these are two different games that have

somewhat different aesthetics in general. After all, *Lost Odyssey* has a more Asian atmosphere while *Final Fantasy XIII* has a more futuristic and western atmosphere.

Ethnicity and race in games have also interested researchers. Dietz (1998) reported that most game characters were Anglo, which supports the findings of Children Now (2001). They found that over half were White, 22% African-American, 9% Asian and the rest Latino and other minorities. Dunlop (2007) wanted to study also ethnicity; however, the only conclusion she could make in her study was the absence of minority groups. Also Martins et al (2009) discovered that over half of the characters in their sample were White. In the study of Mou and Peng (2009) the corresponding percentage was 74. The results of this thesis both support and differ in the results of the studies that had incorporated an ethnic approach. In neither of the games there were no Latinos or other minority groups, which supports the findings that minorities remain minorities in video games. In *Final Fantasy XIII* only one character was black while the rest were white. However, Fang and Vanille had a different cultural background as the others since they came from a different world. Thus their ethnicity was different even though their skin colour was the same. Furthermore, the characters in *Lost Odyssey* had an Asian appearance while four of them actually came from another world. Thus, based solely on the appearance of the main characters in the games, there was an equal representation of white and Asian characters while there was only one black character. Thus this would seem to suggest that the only real minority is the African-Americans. However, this result is not applicable due to the narrow scope of this study. As was mentioned above, a more Asian aesthetics can be seen in *Lost Odyssey* than in *Final Fantasy XIII*. Thus it is to be expected that there are Asian looking characters. Nevertheless, their appearance was not stereotypically Asian. The clothing and physical features of the protagonists in *Lost Odyssey* looked somewhat Asian; however, the Asian features were not strong as one could assume, at least in my opinion. I suppose this is due to the fact that also the western audience needs to be able to identify with the characters.

Categorising characters solely on the basis of physical appearance has its uses; however, I would argue that a more comprehensive analysis is required for studies on ethnicity. After all, as was established in Chapter 2, Healey (2011) clarified that ethnicity is more than just skin colour, it is clothing, customs, language and behaviour. Thus in this study ethnicity is not seen as skin colour. Ethnicity was portrayed through accent, clothing and customs in the role-playing games examined in this study. I would argue that

studies on gender should also include more than physical appearance or how they are represented in game covers or gaming articles. The characters are more than just appearance. As was seen in this study, female characters can achieve near impossible goals despite the clothing they have. Thus one needs to look at role the characters have and how they interact with each other in order to see if there is any underrepresentation in any regard.

This study has focused on several issues that other studies have focused less on. To begin with, the previous game studies discussed in Chapter 3 have not focused on the names of the characters. According to the data of this study, the names offer an interesting perspective into their gender and ethnic identities. To begin with, the names did not automatically reveal sex (Seth in *Lost Odyssey* and Lightning, Snow, Fang, Hope in *Final Fantasy XIII*). In addition, as was discussed in Chapter 5, in *Final Fantasy XIII* the names appeared to portray personalities, gender and in some cases even ethnicity more than sex. Through analysing both of the games it became apparent that the characters changed as the stories progress. This suggests that it is important to look at the whole storyline rather than a section of it, as has been often done in the studies discussed in Chapter 3. If one focuses on the first few minutes of gameplay as was done, for example, by Beasley and Standley (2002) and Jansz and Martis (2007), it excludes a lot of salient data. This in turn possibly results in misrepresentation of the phenomena researched.

In sum, the results of this thesis support the results of previous studies that have found that female game characters show more skin than male characters do. In addition, the female characters have clothing that accentuates their sex which also other researchers have concluded in previous studies. However, the results of this thesis show that both sexes are equally represented and they have equal roles, which contradicts with the results of previous studies. Furthermore, this study shows that there is slightly more ethnic variation present in the games analysed than in the studies presented in Chapter 3.

7. Discussion

The purpose of this study was to examine and evaluate how the gender, ethnic and class identities of the protagonists of *Lost Odyssey* and *Final Fantasy XIII* were portrayed, if and how these identities intersect and how these portrayals resemble western societal

expectations and norms. The implications of the results of this study are discussed below.

The results of this thesis support the previous findings that female game characters show much more skin than male game characters do. In addition, the sex of female characters is accentuated by their clothing. There are many who argue that this is disconcerting as it might influence negatively the body image of young female players while young male players might end up having unrealistic expectations of the appearance of women. It does sound alarming when the problem is presented like this; however, I would argue that the issue is more complex than something that could be solved by having the female characters wear the same clothes as male characters do. After all, one has to look at one red carpet event (such as the Oscars) and see how the beautiful celebrities compete who has the most sexy and glamorous attire in the event. The most successful ones get their picture shown around the world by the media.

It was surprising to discover that fantasy role-playing games tend to follow the norms of western society despite the freedom of design the genre offers. For example, as I played the games, it was apparent that the natural continuum to a relationship was marriage. Marriage was the goal of Snow and his fiancée as well as for Ming and Jansen. Kaim and Sarah were already married. Therefore, it can be argued that the games are only reflecting our society instead of making a huge impact on it. In addition, the issue many of the studies discussed above have ignored is the role of female characters in the games. It is true that there are a multitude of games in which female characters might be present just for the sex appeal or be the helpless victims; however, this does not apply to all video games as could be seen in the role-playing games examined in this study. As was found in this study, the female characters can be the ones who achieve the impossible and save the world despite an impossible foe. Thus one should look at beyond the appearance of the characters and focus on the role they have in the games in order to make reliable conclusions about the message the games are sending to young players.

Despite the important and powerful roles female characters had in the two games, it is interesting that three female characters had to sacrifice themselves in order to save other characters. In addition, in *Final Fantasy XIII* it took the combined effort of two female characters to save the world. This has several possible implications. To begin with,

these games are creating an image of powerful women who stop at nothing to save the world. In short, it is not just men who are able to save the day. Women have the capabilities to do anything men do. However, it could also imply that female characters are not strong enough to save the world and stay alive while doing it. It could be that only men are so all-powerful that they could achieve such a deed alone and without dying. Some could argue that women are expendable, which is why they are allowed to die at the end. However, this is not my opinion as the female characters are central in both of the games. I would argue that their sacrifices make them appear even more powerful than the male counterparts as they were ready mentally and physically to carry out such a deed.

Sexuality has not been often researched in video games. However, sexuality is a subject that is quite explicitly apparent in popular culture nowadays. In our society homosexuality causes much heated discussion; however, most societies accept that it cannot be denied or ignored. This is why the relationship between the two female characters Fang and Vanille in *Final Fantasy XIII* is so interesting. During gameplay it is implied that they have a romantic relationship; however, it is not explicitly stated. In *Lost Odyssey* there is a romantic relationship between a human and a nonhuman character. Sed is the offspring of Seth and a male non-human character called Aneira. Thus this indicates that a romantic relationship between a non-human and a human character is more accepted than a romantic relationship between female human characters. This in turn suggests that it is the sex of the parties involved that defines the appropriateness of a relationship. It remains to be seen how long it takes before same-gender relationships are accepted and common and more importantly normal rather than something abnormal, also in video games. After all, the settings of the games are in imaginary worlds, thus game developers have freedom when creating the fantasy societies. However, it should be acknowledged that game developers have to meet the expectations of the target audience as creating games that alienate the public would be unprofitable. Therefore, it is understandable that the games seldom experiment with topics that divide the public and could possibly alienate some consumers.

It appears equality seems to exist among the protagonists as they treat one another as equals and also the female characters act as leaders. However, one should note that if one considers also others characters, one notices that there are more male than female characters in noteworthy leading positions. For instance, in *Lost Odyssey* there are only

a couple female characters in leading positions, for example, in the Uhran state council there is one woman and Ming leaves her lady-in-waiting in charge of her nation once her military leader has betrayed her. In *Final Fantasy XIII* there are only two female human characters that have higher social status; however, one of them is killed quite early in the game (a commander responsible for the capture of Sazh's son). The other is a bartender and a member of NORA, the resistance group. Nevertheless, one should remember that the storylines of the games focus on some form of military operations, thus, it is to be expected that most of the auxiliary characters are male. Moreover, quite often the soldiers seen have their faces covered thus their sex cannot be distinguished, although I would assume that they are male. If one sees a female soldier in battle, they are often clad in clothing that leaves no room for speculation about their sex. Based on these observations and analysis, it is clear that there are many aspects of identity that are significant in creating game characters. These aspects include the name, voice, clothing, appearance and behaviour.

Interestingly, masculinity is seen as a more positive aspect than femininity in the video games discussed in this study. After all, the masculine characters were the leaders and most respected. Furthermore, when the characters developed, they became more masculine. However, this is once again an issue which is present also in the real world. Politicians with high voices are not considered credible and masculinity is appreciated in the business world as well as in politics. The games appear to portray traditional conceptions of class as well, as royalty is seen as the higher class. Like in the real world, being a royal does not equal automatically generate respect in the games. Also ethnic variation is less present in the games even though the possibilities could be limitless in a fantasy game genre. The games are surprisingly traditional and follow the rules of reality despite the fantasy and science fiction settings. This shows that even fantasy has its limits.

8. Conclusion

It is my hope that this thesis has offered some new information and insights into the subject of the portrayal of video game characters. However, I readily acknowledge that this thesis has its limitations. In this final chapter I will briefly discuss these limitations. This will be followed by some possible suggestions for further research.

One aspect that limits this study is something that is difficult to disregard, namely my own sex and ethnic background. As I am a woman born and raised in Finland, I am bound to have a different view on the subject than for example a Japanese man would have. After all, these two games are the work of Japanese game companies, thus they are bound to have nuances misunderstood or unnoticed by me. Unfortunately I do not possess the same cultural knowledge as a native Japanese would have. However, this is something that can also be considered to be an advantage, as I as an outsider might notice certain aspects more easily than a native might. Furthermore, as the games are also directed at people outside Japan, I represent a part of the target audience, thus my observations are as valid as anyone's.

While the results of this thesis give some indication of how the characters are constructed and what this implies in a more societal level, the scope of this study is not sufficient. Two games of one game genre do not offer enough evidence for generic conclusions applicable to every game. However, this study does look at the two games more closely than other studies have. Thus, it can be argued that the observations are more valid as there is more research data that is analysed. Therefore, in this study it is ensured that the data does not consist of isolated, uncommon incidents. Studying the whole of the game enables more applicable and trustworthy results.

The approach I chose for studying these two games has also its limitations. Even though this study is relatively extensive, it has its limitations. One could argue that it would offer more specific results if one focused on only one or two characters in the games. This is true; however, I decided to include all the main characters in the analysis as this would enable me to reach results that would offer a starting point for further research. One also needs to acknowledge that qualitative study methods rarely produce just one absolute result. As one relies on personal interpretations and evaluations, the subject can be approached through numerous ways. This means that another scholar might produce different results. However, this is definitely a positive aspect as it definitely enriches the field and enables discussion and debate as there are many ways to approach a single subject. Discussion on any topic enables better understanding of any phenomenon.

There is much to be researched in the field of game research. Not even the subject of gender, ethnicity and class in the two games discussed in this study is fully covered. These are important phenomena to understand as they offer valuable insights in how we

perceive and portray our reality. Moreover, the popularity of games is likely to only grow as playing games becomes more convenient with technological developments. One way to approach the subject would be to focus on one character and analyse more in depth the portrayal of that character. In addition, one could focus on the other characters besides the main characters. After all, one could argue that the other characters have less important roles in the games, thus they do not have to stand out so much. Furthermore, as video and computer games often have non-human characters, these non-human characters would be an interesting area of research. To begin with, what human characteristics these non-human characters have and why those particular characteristics have been chosen could offer informative study material. One could speculate that gender, ethnicity and class become particularly pronounced in non-human characters.

In this study it was discovered that in fantasy role-playing games the playable game characters tend to have equal roles with one another regardless of their gender, ethnicity or class. Some studies discussed in Chapter 3 stated that females tend to be victims and in subsidiary roles in games, which is contradictory to the results of this thesis. Therefore, it would be worthwhile to compare games of two different genres in order to see whether there are differences in how game characters are portrayed and what roles they have in relation to each other.

As was discussed in the beginning of this study, video and computer games offer versatile research material. For example, one could also study how players interact with one another in various forums and what subjects they discuss. Studying this would tell how players themselves experience the game characters. Furthermore, one could study how game enthusiasts portray game characters in fanfiction stories. One hypothesis would be that the fans emphasise certain aspects of identity such as gender and ethnicity of the characters. How the subject is approached depends on the interests of the researcher. Regardless of the standpoint, there is no question that the computer and video games will become only more popular and more people will play them. Thus it is important to keep studying the phenomena so that we might understand how they represent and possibly impact our society.

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Appendix I: Main Characters of *Lost Odyssey*



Kaim Argonar



Sarah Sisulart



Seth Balmore



Ming Numara



Jansen Friedh



Tolten



Sed



Mack and Cooke

Appendix II: Main Characters of *Final Fantasy XIII*



Lightning /
Claire Farron



Snow Villiers



Sazh Katzroy



Hope Estheim



Oerba Dia Vanille



Oerba Yun Fang

Appendix III: *Lost Odyssey* and *Final Fantasy XIII* Main Character Voice Actors

***Lost Odyssey* English speaking main character voice actors:**

Kaim Argonar: Keith Ferguson (American)

Sarah Sisulart: Kim Mai Guest (American)

Seth Balmore: Tara Strong (Canadian)

Ming Numara: Salli Saffioti (American)

Jansen Friedh: Michael McGaharn (American)

Tolten: Chad Brannon (American)

Sed: Michael Bell (American)

Mack: Nika Futterman (American, note that Nika is a woman)

Cooke: Kath Soucie (American)

Source: <http://www.imdb.com/title/tt0860917/>

***Final Fantasy XIII* English speaking main character voice actors:**

Lightning / Claire Farron: Ali Hillis (American)

Snow Villiers: Troy Baker (American)

Sazh Katzroy: Reno Wilson (American)

Hope Estheim: Vincent Martella (American)

Oerba Dia Vanille: Georgia Van Cuylenburg (Australian)

Oerba Yun Fang: Rachel Robinson (American)

Source: <http://www.imdb.com/title/tt0802988/>