The Construction of *Assassin's Creed: Syndicate* Characters as Gendered and Classed

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Tiivistelmä – Abstract

Sukupuoli on yksi keskeisimmistä aiheista videopeleistä puhuttaessa; luokka sen sijaan saa vain vähän huomiota osakseen. Tämä tutkimus kuitenkin yhdistää nämä kaksi, sillä sen tavoitteena oli selvittää kuinka videopelihahmojen sukupuolta ja luokkaa rakennetaan *Assassin's Creed: Syndicate* -pelissä, joka sijoittuu pääasiassa viktoriaaniseen Englantiin.

Pelistä valittiin kuusi hahmoa, joita analysoitiin sukupuolen ja luokan näkökulmasta karakterisointitaksonomiaa (characterisation taxonomy) käyttäen. Taksonomiaan sisältyi seuraavat kategoriat: fyysinen ulkonäkö, eleet ja liikkeet, tavanomainen käyttäytyminen, psykologiset ominaisuudet, puhe, sosiaalinen vuorovaikutus, ympäristö, affordanssi ja biografia.

Hahmojen sukupuolta ja luokkaa rakennettiin monipuolisesti eri kategorioiden avulla. Sukupuolen kohdalla esille nousivat ulkonäkö, puhe, psykologiset ominaisuudet, käyttäytyminen ja affordanssi: hahmojen sukupuolta rakennettiin esimerkiksi feminiinisillä vaatteilla ja maskuliinisella käyttäytymisellä. Luokkaa puolestaan rakennettiin melko tasaisesti eri kategorioilla, mutta päällimmäiseksi nousivat hahmojen kouluttautuneisuus, rationaalisuus, sekä tunteikkuus, joita hyödynnettiin esimerkiksi hahmojen puheessa ja käyttäytymisessä. Lisäksi hahmot sekä toistivat että rikkoivat viktoriaanisia sukupuoli- ja luokkanormeja; etenkin naiset tuntuivat poikkeavan näistä. Kategorioita käytettiin myös rakentamaan hahmojen nousua luokkahierarkiassa.

Tutkimus tarjoaa uudenlaisen lähestymistavan sukupuolen ja luokan tutkimiseen videopeleissä. Jatkotutkimuksissa luokkaa ja sukupuolta olisi hyvä tutkia esimerkiksi videopeleissä, joiden tapahtumapaikka on erilainen, tai jotka edustavat eri genreä. Lisäksi olisi kiinnostavaa tutkia muita sosiaalisia kategorioita, kuten etnisyyttä tai seksuaalisuutta, hyödyntäen tämän tutkimuksen lähestymistapaa ja menetelmiä.

Asiasanat – Keywords game studies, video games, gender, class, characterisation, character construction, Assassin's Creed, Assassin's Creed: Syndicate, intersectionality

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1. INTRODUCTION

Video games are constantly increasing in popularity, and the global games market keeps growing year after year. According to the estimates by Newzoo (Wijman 2019), there are over 2.5 billion gamers around the world. In addition, Entertainment Software Association [ESA] (2019) states that 65% of American adults play video games and that 70% of families have a child who plays video games; moreover, 75% of Americans have at least one gamer in their household. As the popularity of video games keeps increasing, so does the worth of the video game industry: the global games market revenue is estimated to reach $152.1 billion in 2019 (Wijman 2019); in comparison, the estimation for 2018 was $134.9 billion (Warman 2018). It is also significantly more than the global consumer spending in the film industry, which was $96.8 billion in 2018 (Motion Picture Association of America 2019). Thus, video games are one of the main forms of entertainment today, and it is therefore important to include them in the academic discussion as well.

Moreover, in the same way as films, tv shows, and other media, video games also represent and reconstruct the world surrounding us. According to Kendall (2011: 11), by repeating certain kind of portrayals, the media can either reinforce or challenge the audience's beliefs about inequality, even when the audience knows that the media product is fiction. This most likely applies to representations of other issues as well, such as gender and ethnicity. Kendall (2011: 11) also notes that the heavier the consumption of the media is, the more the repetition of the images influence us; furthermore, she (2011: 6) suggests that for some people it can be difficult to separate reality from media images, which leads to them constructing their ideas of reality based on the media portrayals available to them. Since video games are interactive in nature, it is suggested that they are more likely than other media forms to influence their audience: allowing the player to control the characters and their behaviour enhances the experience and makes it easier to identify with what is happening on the screen.

For example, based on social cognitive theory, Downs and Smith (2010: 730) propose that by performing actions in-game, the player might repeat them in the real world more readily than if they were only watching the actions happen without their own input. This is further emphasised by Dill et al. (2005: 116), who note that the media, including video games, are agents of socialization; in other words, players learn cultural rules from the stories told in the video games they play. In addition, Kondrat (2015: 176–177), relying on cultivation theory, draws attention to how video games might

affect players' perception of reality, especially with their interactivity. She points out that the more a person plays video games the more likely they are to be affected by them and to force themselves to fit the representations video games offer. Nevertheless, Downs and Smith (2010: 731) add that more research is needed on the impact of repeated exposure to video game portrayals. However, it might be difficult to separate the effect of video game portrayals from the effect of other media portrayals, unless one is a heavy consumer of video games and not so much of other media. Other factors, such as age and critical media literacy skills, might also make a difference on how much video game portrayals affect people. Regardless, it is important to study how video games represent the world, what kind of ideologies they convey, and what kind of realities they construct, as they are an integral part of the media portrayals that surrounds us.

The present study focuses on how the characters are constructed as gendered and classed in the video game *Assassin's Creed: Syndicate* (Ubisoft Québec 2015). The social categories of gender and class were chosen, because gender in video games continues to be a central issue in both academic and non-academic discussion, and because class in video games, in contrast, has not received much attention in either. By looking at the construction of gender and class, it is possible to make a more detailed analysis of the different elements that are used in creating gender and class representations. The present study, therefore, aims to join the scholarly discussion by drawing attention to the complexity of character portrayals in video games, as well as by filling the gap in research on class in video games.

The video game, which provides the data for the present study, is *Assassin's Creed: Syndicate* (Ubisoft Québec 2015). This particular video game was chosen for a variety of reasons: first, it has both a male and a female playable protagonist, which is the first time a main instalment in the *Assassin's Creed* series has included the latter. Second, the story is mainly set in Victorian London, which is known for its strict gender roles and stratified class system. Third, the game features characters of different genders and classes. The game should, therefore, provide interesting data for the analysis of how the characters are constructed as gendered and classed.

The present study uses a qualitative approach to the analysis of the video game: the data are analysed using a characterisation taxonomy, in order to examine the characters in depth and from different angles. The data consists of various segments of the game and multiple characters who appear in it. Thus, it is possible to see a character's development throughout the game, as well as their behaviour and appearance in different situations. This kind of an approach is also different from the previous

studies on gender and class in video games, as many of them have used a combination of quantitative and qualitative methods; moreover, most of them have examined short segments from various video games. In comparison, the present study provides a more in-depth analysis of a video game and its characters.

Next, previous research on gender and class in video games are reviewed; in addition, since class in video games has not received much attention, class in films will also be looked into. Then, the central concepts of intersectionality, gender, and class are explained from the perspective of social construction. This is followed by a description of characterisation and Pearson's (2007) character taxonomy, which is used as the basis for the present study's own characterisation taxonomy. Afterwards, the video game series *Assassin's Creed* and the instalment which the present study focuses on, i.e. *Assassin's Creed: Syndicate* (Ubisoft Québec 2015), are introduced. Then, the set up of the present study will be explained, followed by the analysis. Finally, the present study ends with a discussion.

2. GENDER AND CLASS IN VIDEO GAMES

This chapter reviews previous research on gender and class in video games and films. First, the approaches and findings of studies examining gender in video games are discussed. Second, because of the lack of research on class in video games, a more detailed look into a central study on the topic will be provided. Finally, class representations in films will be briefly explored for insights applicable to the study on class in video games. It is assumed here that film studies can be in this respect helpful because of their similarity with story rich video games in that they are both driven by a narrative and characters are typically a central part of the plot in both.

2.1. Gender Representation in Video Games

Gender in video games has received attention in both non-academic and academic discussions at least since the 1990s. In the academia, the topic has been studied in a variety of fields, including gender studies, media studies, and game studies. Gender has often been accompanied with other research foci, most commonly race, violence, and sexualisation. Usually these have been studied by analysing the characters that appear in video games, but there are also studies on gender portrayal in video game covers (e.g. Burgess, Stermer, and Burgess 2007) and video game magazines (e.g. Fisher 2015); in addition, the gender of players (e.g. Bryce and Rutter 2002), the effects of video games' gender representations on players (e.g. Breuer et al. 2015; Matthews, Lynch, and Martins 2016), and players' attitudes toward gender portrayals in video games (e.g. Kondrat 2015; MacCallum-Stewart 2014) have been studied. In this section, the focus will be on previous research on gender representations in video games. First, in this section there will be a brief review of the kind of data and the methods of analysis used in previous studies. Then, their findings will be discussed.

The most common approach to studying gender representations in video games seems to have been content analysis. The focus in these studies has usually been on the most popular video games of the time of the research, but some studies have included additional criteria for the games they selected. For example, while Dietz (1998: 432) analysed the portrayal of gender and violence in a selection of 33 most popular console games in spring 1995, Jansz and Martis (2007: 144) narrowed down their sample to 12 popular console games with the requirement for diverse casts (concerning gender and race) and storylines. As is evident, the size of the samples in these studies has varied considerably. One of the most large-scale studies was conducted by Lynch et al. (2016: 7) who analysed a selection of 571 video games released between 1983 and 2014. The criteria for their sample included playable

anthropomorphic female protagonists and non-erotic video games. In addition, they randomly selected 20 qualifying games per year, with the exception of the years between 1983 and 1989, which had fewer than 20 games that qualified. While excluding video games that do not have (playable) characters of certain gender or race, it was possible for them to compare the existing portrayals, but it also makes it easy to overlook the possible lack of representation in video games. Focusing on the most popular games, on the other hand, provides information on the kind of representations the majority of players see, but it also ignores the possibly different portrayals in smaller games.

In addition to the selection of video games, the methods for collecting data from the video games has varied. The most common approaches seem to be the researchers either playing the game themselves (e.g. Beasley and Standley 2002: 283–285; Dietz 1998: 432), watching someone else play the game (e.g. Dill et al. 2005: 119; Downs and Smith 2010: 724; Lynch et al. 2016: 7–8), or watching non-playable cinematic sequences (cutscenes) from the game (e.g. Jansz and Martis 2007: 144). When the data are collected from multiple games, it is necessary to narrow down the amount of data collected from each game to make the research manageable. For the studies with a selection of a few dozen video games, 20 minutes seems to be a common length of gameplay or video data collected. For example, with a sample of 47 games, Beasley and Standley (2002: 283–284) coded 20 minutes of gameplay. Dill et al. (2005: 119), on the other hand, recorded each of their 20 video games for a minimum of 10 minutes and a maximum of 30 minutes. With their considerably larger selection of 571 video games, Lynch et al. (2016: 7–8) derived data from only 5 minutes of gameplay from each game.

While it makes sense to collect less data from each game timewise, it also means considerable sections of each game remain unseen and their results might not be applicable to the game as a whole. Moreover, in most of the studies discussed above, the data were collected from the beginning of the game, which means that character development and characters appearing later in the game are ignored. For example, Jansz and Martis (2007: 144) explain their decision to analyse only the introductory cutscenes in their sample of games by claiming that the cutscenes provide "a clear outline of the game, its main characters, and the dominant storyline". However, it could be argued that depending on the game the introduction can be rather cryptic and not tell much of the game's characters or story. For instance, the opening scene of *Final Fantasy X* (Square 2001), which was used in the study by Jansz and Martis (2007), does not feature all of the main characters and tells very little of the plot and the characters' roles in it. On the other hand, not showing important female characters in the introductory scene can be significant as well. Downs and Smith (2010: 731) also

note the importance of the finale, because it works as a reward for the player. Based on the discussion above, I have decided to focus on only one video game, in order to conduct a comprehensive analysis of the characters as a whole, rather than looking at only a short segment at the beginning of the game.

The methods for analysing video game characters in previous studies share some similarities. Typically, in addition to their gender, the characters have been evaluated for their species, race, and appearance (e.g. Beasley and Standley 2002: 284; Dill et al. 2005: 119–120; Downs and Smith 2010: 725–726). For the latter, the interest has often been in stereotypes and sexualisation through body proportions, clothing, and nudity. For example, Beasley and Standley (2002: 284–285) analysed necklines, length of sleeves, lower body clothing, and breast size in order to determine whether or not the female characters were portrayed in stereotypical female clothing and if the clothing sexualised them by, for example, directing the player's eyes towards the character's cleavage. Downs and Smith (2010: 725–726) analysed the characters' clothing in a similar manner, paying attention to sexually revealing clothing and appropriateness of attire. In addition, they evaluated the characters for their body proportions (including muscularity), breast and waist size, and sexual behaviour and talk. Lynch et al. (2016: 9) continued in the same manner, looking at the characters' chest, buttocks, waist and leg regions. They also evaluated whether or not the movements of those areas were sexualised, for example, by unnecessary jiggling. In general, female characters' bodies and appearances have received much more detailed attention than male characters'.

However, MacCallum-Stewart (2014: no page given) argues that many video game characters are created in an idealised form, not just female characters; therefore, physicality should neither be the only nor the main examined feature of a character. For example, Lara Croft, the main character in the *Tomb Raider* series, has received a great deal of criticism because of her appearance, even after her sexualised physicality was toned down in the 2013 remake of *Tomb Raider* by Crystal Dynamics (MacCallum-Stewart 2014: no page given). There are some studies that have considered other aspects of the characters in addition to their visual appearance. For example, Dietz (1998: 432–433) examined the appearance of female characters as sex objects, prizes, victims, and heroes, and in feminine roles. She also noted the existence of violence directed at women. Jansz and Martis (2007: 145), on the other hand, evaluated characters based on eight different roles (hero, villain/evil, helper, princess, tough, mother, housewife, victim) and three different power positions (dominant, equal, submissive) in the narrative of the game. While categorising characters under premade labels can be useful in revealing patterns, it can also pave the way for a one-dimensional character analysis, especially when only a brief section of a character's narrative and appearance is examined. Hence, in the present study,

the characters will be analysed as a whole, aiming for a detailed investigation of the characters' features, rather than a superficial categorisation based on their first appearance.

In the same way as with the methods and data, the findings of previous research have also been quite similar. First, studies have confirmed that women have been underrepresented in video games throughout the years. For example, Dietz (1998: 433) states that the most common portrayal of women in her sample of games was the complete absence of women, followed by women as victims or damsels in distress. She (ibid. 438) argues that the lack of representations and the portrayals of women as incapable demonstrate the value given to women in society. Other studies (e.g. Beasley and Standley 2002: 289; Downs and Smith 2010: 727) also note the underrepresentation of women in comparison to men; for example, Downs and Smith (2010: 727) found that only 14% of the characters in their sample were female. Lynch et al (2016: 11–12) note that while the number of playable female characters has increased over time, women are still more often in a secondary role than in a primary role.

On the other hand, Jansz and Martis (2007: 145–147) report that in their selection of video games there was an equal distribution of male and female leading characters, while supporting characters were mostly male. They also state that there were no female characters in submissive positions; rather, women were equal to men or dominated them. Unfortunately, it is rather unclear how they estimated the characters' power positions. Nevertheless, they label the appearance of a strong and competent female character in a dominant position as the 'Lara phenomenon', after the aforementioned Lara Croft. While all the leading women were in the roles of heroines, the supporting women were either friends, villains, or heroines as well (Jansz and Martis 2007: 146). According to them, the male characters followed the same pattern, but there was also one leading man in a tough role and two supporting men as victims (ibid.). However, the small sample in Jansz and Martis' study and the fact that they examined only the introductory films could have limited the number of roles the characters belong in.

Second, female characters have often been victims of sexualisation. According to Lynch et al. (2016: 13), video games released in the 1990s and the early 2000s featured the most sexualised characters, while the ones released between 1983 and 1990 had the least sexualised characters. They explain the increase in sexualised characters in the 1990s by technological advances, which made it easier to create more anthropomorphic bodies. After 2006, however, there was a decrease in the sexualisation of female characters. Lynch et al. (ibid.) suggest that the reasons for the decline could be an increasing

interest in video games among women, and the criticism towards the video game industry and its masculine hegemony. Nonetheless, female characters remained sexualised: Jansz and Martis (2007: 147) state that despite being strong and capable, female characters are sexualised similarly to their powerless predecessors. Lynch et al. (2016: 14), on the other hand, found that secondary characters are sexualised more than primary characters. However, they propose that it is more problematic than the sexualisation of primary characters, because it underscores the characters' secondary role and reduces their importance to their physical appearance. As for the sexualisation of primary female characters, Lynch et al. (ibid. 15) acknowledge the possibility that they can empower female players, but they argue that, if sexualisation is required to bolster the characters' merit, it becomes problematic. In addition, they (ibid. 13) note that some video game genres, such as fighting games, feature overtly sexualised female characters, because they are targeted primarily to a male consumer market.

The common ways to sexualise female characters seem to be their body proportions and clothing. For example, Dietz (1998: 435) writes that women are portrayed as "visions of beauty with large breasts and thin hips". The findings of Beasley and Standley (2002: 289) support this, as 40% of the female characters in their sample had large breasts. In addition, Downs and Smith (2010: 727) found that 40% of the female characters in their sample had a small waist. They also note that 25% of female characters had unrealistic body proportions. Jansz and Martis (2007: 146) add that women's buttocks were also often emphasised. When it comes to clothing, 41% of female characters were dressed in sexually revealing clothing and 16% had clothes that were inappropriate for the situation. Male characters, on the other hand, only seemed to suffer from sexually revealing clothing, although notably less than female characters (ibid.). However, Jansz and Martis (2007: 146) suggest that some male characters wear explicit, sexy, and seductive outfits, are portrayed with emphasised musculature, and appear with "eye catching behinds". It is important to acknowledge that characters can also be sexualised in other ways than with body proportions and revealing clothing. For example, the material or structure of clothes can be used for the same purpose. In addition, facial features and expressions as well as behaviour and movements in general can sexualise a character.

When it comes to the present study, previous research will be used as a source of inspiration and guidelines. Firstly, instead of analysing a number of video games, my study will focus only on one. This allows for a more detailed and in-depth approach to gender in video games: when focusing on one game, it is possible to take into account each character in it and choose the most suitable ones for the analysis; in addition, it makes it possible to see the characters' whole narrative from the beginning

to the end. Instead of trying to get an overview of gender in video games nowadays, the present study thus aims to examine the chosen game in a detailed manner – with an aim that it could be useful for future researchers and game designers. However, similarly to previous studies, the present study will pay attention to the characters' visual appearances and the possible stereotypes and sexualisation. As suggested by MacCallum-Stewart (2014: no page given), the characters' physicality will not be the main focus. Rather, the characters' behaviour, personality, et cetera will also be examined (see Section 4 for detailed description of the characters' features), in order to construct a comprehensive analysis of each character as a whole.

2.2. The Representation of Class in Video Games

Unlike gender, class has received almost no attention in game studies. A notable exception is Ivănescu (2018: 232) who argues that, even though discussions of social classes and power relations are often implied within broader conversations on how virtual economies and virtual worlds reproduce real world economic systems and real-world ideologies, social classes and power relations are rarely in the centre of the conversations. She (2018: 235) also notes that the class system in video games is often portrayed heavy-handedly and explored only superficially; for example, games might use visions of poverty, such as child labour in *Assassin's Creed: Syndicate* (Ubisoft Quebec 2015) or slums in *Final Fantasy VII* (Square 1997), to confirm the need for a player-hero to intervene.

In her own study on class representation in video games, Ivănescu (2018) analyses the relationship between class and music in *Beneath A Steel Sky* (Revolution Software 1994). The story of the game takes place in a dystopian future and features two distinct environments, one of which is a desert with scavenging tribes while the other one is a cyberpunk metropolis (Ivănescu 2018: 233–234). In the metropolis, the class system is portrayed by "a reverse high-rise structure, in which the working class occupies the highest level of the metropolis, the middle class the middle level, and the upper classes occupy the opulent lower level" (Ivănescu 2018: 234). Ivănescu (2018: 235) argues that the journey of the main character can be interpreted as a metaphorical rising through the class system, since his journey begins from the working-class level of the metropolis and continues to the upper-class level. According to Ivănescu (2018: 238), the class system is neither the focus of the game nor overtly discussed in the game, but it is evident through environmental storytelling.

The core of environmental storytelling, as suggested by Fernández-Vara (2011: no page given), consists of how space is used to construct a narrative and vice versa, and how the player constructs the story by interpreting the objects and events in the space. In order to analyse how environmental

storytelling is used to construct class relations in *Beneath A Steel Sky*, Ivănescu (2018: 235) also utilises the concept of affordance to describe "what the different levels of the metropolis afford the NPCs—and, to some degree, the player—dictate what they are able to do, and how they are able to affect the world around them". In *Beneath A Steel Sky*, each of the classes seem to have distinct portrayals: as Ivănescu (2018: 236–237) describes, the working class level emphasises (factory) work and repetition, while the middle class level offers a variety of work spaces, private apartments, and opportunities for rest and reflection, and the upper class level provides even more diverse and luxuriously decorated spaces. These become apparent not only in the types of spaces in the areas, but also in the visual and auditory design of each level.

First, the working-class level features a limited colour palette dominated by greys and a repetitive background music with a march rhythm, both of which emphasise the inescapable and repetitive nature of the work the lives of the working class revolve around (Ivănescu 2018: 236). In addition, the working-class inhabitants often cannot leave their own level and their access to the other levels can be completely blocked (ibid.). Second, the middle-class level has brighter and livelier colours and a more relaxed and playful music in the background; in addition, the music in the middle-class level features a version of the working-class music, which suggests the increased mobility available for the middle class (ibid.). Their mobile freedom is also evident in the fact that they are able to move between the different levels freely, unlike the working class (Ivănescu 2018: 238). The middle-class ideal of individualism is also emphasised through decor, private possessions, and private apartments (Ivănescu 2018: 236) Moreover, silence is used to signify the availability of personal aural space, in contrast to the continuous sounds of workspaces (Ivănescu 2018: 236–237).

Finally, the upper-class level uses a variety of colours from bright to dark and has a variety of decor, creating a luxurious atmosphere which suggests the greater affordances of the upper class (Ivănescu 2018: 237). Whereas the locations available for the working class are all related to work, the areas the upper class has access to range from formal institutions to leisure spaces (ibid.). The level also features diverse soundscapes, including the background music, which incorporates the music from the other two levels and is influenced by classical music, and a jukebox, which has a selection of a variety of genres (ibid.). As Ivănescu (2018: 237) explains, these suggest the greater access the upper class has both to every area in the city and to music, and also the possibility of choice they have regarding them. Silence is also utilised on the upper-class level, but only in the darker areas, such as a church and a morgue, to emphasise the absence of life and the disconcerting nature of the spaces (ibid.)

In summary, class in *Beneath A Steel Sky* is signified through affordances, visual design, and sound and music. Ivănescu (2018: 238) argues that the class representation in the game has similarities with Marxist and Weberian class situations: on the working class level, the life conditions and personal life experiences are limited to labour, while the middle class and the upper class have more possibilities for life experiences, such as travelling, and personal space. Visually, on the other hand, class is marked by the diversification of colour palettes and decorations, and also the types of decorations from purely functional to elegant ornaments, when moving towards the upper class areas (Ivănescu 2018: 239). The class differences are further emphasised through sound and music, which evolve from the repetitive music on a short loop in the working class area to the wider varieties of music and the inclusion of silence in the middle and upper class areas, highlighting the relationship the inhabitants of each area have with work and personal space as well as the availability of choice each of the classes have (ibid.). Ivănescu (2018: 239–240) also proposes that the class system in the game can be described in terms of economic, cultural, and social capital: economic capital is visible through the types of businesses in each level, social capital becomes apparent when the main character has to receive access to a members only club, and cultural capital is present in the form of access to art and music.

2.3. Class Representations in Films

Unlike class in video games, class in films has received a variety of attention. Research has been done not only on the way class is portrayed visually in films (e.g. Dole 2001; Lloyd and Stacey 2014; Sullivan 2014), but also on the type of narratives typically associated with different levels of class structure (e.g. Gandal 2007; Kendall 2011). This section will first look into the visual representations of class in American and British films mainly taking place in contemporary Western societies or 19th century England, after which some common types of class narratives in American media will be considered.

Dole (2001) discusses the visual portrayal of the British class system in films based on Jane Austen's novels. The visual reminders she identifies include the presence of working-class labour, surroundings and décor, the characters' visual appearance, and camera work. For example, in *Persuasion* (Michell 1995)[1], the viewer is reminded of the class differences by the presence of the

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[1] *Persuasion* (Michell 1995) is a British period drama film directed by Roger Michell and based on Jane Austen's 1817 novel of the same name. It is set in 19th century England and follows Anne Elliot, a daughter of a baronet, and Captain Frederick Wentworth, whose proposal of marriage Anne was persuaded to reject eight years earlier because of his lack of

working class, who are shown serving their masters or working in the field while the wealthier characters are at leisure (Dole 2001: 61). According to Dole (2001: 60), *Persuasion* exposes the raw edges of everyday life by showing the flaws of the wealthy, as they are, for example, shown to have bad teeth and to live in poorly lit houses. In addition, the emotional relationship between the classes is hinted at visually: for example, the contempt the servants have towards their master is suggested by their stony facial expressions (Dole 2001: 60). Furthermore, Dole (2001: 71) notes the effect the camera shots have on the portrayal of class differences: in *Persuasion*, the working class are shown in close-ups, which, according to Dole (ibid.), implies their dissatisfactions.

Similar methods are used in portraying class in the British version of *Emma* (Lawrence 1996)[2]. For example, servants are shown to be at work and having simple meals while the wealthy are at leisure and dine elegantly (Dole 2001: 70). In addition, the British *Emma* uses thieves in the beginning and the end to remind the audience of the hunger and violence the poor suffered from (Dole 2001: 71). Camera shots are also used, but to different effect than in *Persuasion*: the working class is featured in full or long shots, removing them of subjectivity instead of emphasising their emotions (Dole 2001: 71). The American version of *Emma* (McGrath 1996)[3], on the other hand, almost completely erases the existence of the working class labour, showing luxurious furniture and decorations and picturesque views and manors but no servants who make sure everything is as grand as it should be (Dole 2001: 70). Class can therefore be constructed by using a variety of visual methods, some more subtle than others, but it is also important to take note of what is excluded. The American *Emma*, for instance, seems to glorify the class system by removing the hardships experienced by different classes.

While *Persuasion* has a somewhat similar approach to class portrayal as the British *Emma*, *Sense and Sensibility* (Lee 1995)[4] seems to be closer to the American *Emma*. In *Sense and Sensibility*, the class differences are exaggerated in order to clarify the social distinctions between the characters (Dole 2001: 63). Dole (ibid.) explains that there are scenes in the film that have been added for this purpose: for example, the sisters are shown shivering from cold and worrying about the household bills.

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wealth; however, since then he has become enriched from serving in the Royal Navy, whereas Anne and her family are facing financial problems.
[2] *Emma* (Lawrence 1996) is a film adaptation of Jane Austen's 1815 novel of the same name, directed by Diarmuid Lawrence and dramatized by Andrew Davies for the British television network ITV. It is set in 19th century England and follows Emma Woodhouse, a rich young woman who is more interested in organising marriages for others than getting married herself.
[3] The American film adaptation of Jane Austen's *Emma* is a period comedy film written and directed by Douglas McGrath.
[4] *Sense and Sensibility* (Lee 1995) is an American period drama film based on Jane Austen's 1811 novel of the same name, and it is directed by Ang Lee and written by Emma Thompson. The story follows the wealthy Dashwood sisters, who suddenly fall into poverty and are forced to seek financial security through marriage.

Despite the exaggerated class differences, however, Dole (ibid.) argues that the film underplays the consequences of the class distinctions. The differences in *Persuasion* and *Sense and Sensibility* are possibly caused by the same reason the two versions of *Emma* portray the class system in different manners: while *Persuasion* is a British production, *Sense and Sensibility* is an American one. This could imply that films with British origins are more likely to portray the class system realistically and in a more raw manner, perhaps because they are more familiar with the class structure and its realities; on the other hand, in my own experience, British films and television shows tend to be rougher and harsher than American ones, which could also explain the differences in the ways class is portrayed in the media. .

Sullivan (2014), on the other hand, examines the role fashion has in the class system in *The Hunger Games* (Ross 2012) and its sequel *The Hunger Games: Catching Fire* (Lawrence 2013), which are based on the books by Suzanne Collins. The setting for these films is the fictional, post-apocalyptic nation of Panem in North America. Panem is divided into the Capitol, the luxurious metropolis in control of the nation, and the thirteen districts with varying economies surrounding it. The story follows 16-year-old Katniss, who volunteers as the District 12 female tribute to the Hunger Games, a government-organised battle royal consisting of teenagers. In these films, fashion is only available for the wealthy and the elite, who live in the Capitol: while the workers in the districts wear practical clothing, the Capitol residents have spectacular outfits suited for a life of leisure (Sullivan 2014: 184).

For example, Sullivan (ibid.) describes the clothes worn by the District 12's miners as sober, practical and roughly hewn, and argues that they stylistically embody historical moments of economic and social disadvantage. In addition, he (ibid.) maintains that their outfits, consisting of hard hats and grimy overalls, together with their dust blackened faces and the rail wagons of 'Capitol Coal' emphasize "the regime of hard physical labour, abject poverty and pain" the District 12's workers face. In the Capitol, on the other hand, the citizens enjoy "a spectacular array of fashioned excess", wearing heavy make-up and colourful outfits inspired by the 18th century baroque and rococo styles as well as other more modern subcultural fashions and fads (Sullivan 2014: 185). For them, appearance seems to be all, and they have all the time in the world to devote to it (Sullivan 2014: 186). The luxurious lifestyle of the Capitol's inhabitants is further accentuated by the ultra-modern glass and steel structures and skyways among which they live in (Sullivan 2014: 184). According to Sullivan (2014: 185), the clothing of the Capitol and District 12 residents reference periods when fashion was most explicitly drawn into the dynamics of class struggle, thus affecting a decadence. The contrast in the clothing is apparent: as Sullivan (ibid.) states, while Katniss is merely 'dressed'

in a simple grey dress, Effie, Katniss's chaperone from the Capitol, is 'fully fashioned' in a bright magenta outfit, heavy makeup, and high heels.

The consensus seems to be, then, that the higher classes have more luxurious and extravagant appearances and surroundings than the lower classes who wear outfits suitable for work; in addition, the wealthy have more free time and do not need to take part in manual labour, which the lower classes are responsible for. The type of clothing and décor are the most obvious visual indicators of class, but colour palettes can also be used: for example, in *The Hunger Games*, in scenes featuring the Capitol, the colour palette tends to be brighter and more varied, whereas in the scenes about District 12, the colour palette is more limited, featuring greys, browns, and blues. These findings are similar to Ivănescu's (2018: 236–237) observations on class portrayal in the video game *Beneath A Steel Sky*: as the player travels from the working class level to the middle and upper class levels in the game, the colour palette changes from a limited one dominated by greys to a palette consisting of a variety of brighter and livelier colours.

The rest of this chapter focuses on the narrative representation of class in films. First, Gandal (2007: 6) discusses different types of classploitation narratives, by which he means stories about the poor which seem to come out of middle-class fantasies and serve those fantasies instead of having another social aim, thus making them exploitative. In addition, these stories aim to generate envy, laughter, or horror in its audience in the treatment of their subject classes. (ibid.). He describes three genres as examples of classploitation: the slumming drama, the class trauma, and the slumming trauma.

The slumming drama portrays the poor and the lowlifes in a positive light, possibly even romanticising them: they have it better than the other classes, because they are "free of status and money concerns and live for enjoyment, love, and art and music in a primitive social harmony" and the upper classes have a lot to learn from them (Gandal 2007: 6). By 'slumming' he means "any voluntary class-crossing foray into a lower-class domain"; i.e. stories in which individuals or groups from other classes experience the lifestyle of the poor or the lower classes (Gandal 2007: 7). An example of a slumming drama film is *Titanic* (Cameron 1997), which also features a slumming romance: a rich girl, Rose, meets a poor boy, Jack, who liberates her from upper-class social constraints and pettiness. Afterwards, the boy needs to be cast off, for example, by death as in Jack's case, because the class-crossing and downward mobility is desirable only as a momentarily escape. (Gandal 2007: 6, 8, 34). This way, the girl can enjoy the liberation she experienced without the burden

of the class-crossing. Gandal (2007: 12) notes that it is more common for a man to be the saviour and a woman the saved, but it is possible for the gender roles to be reversed.

While class-crossing is a central theme in the slumming drama, it is not necessary for the class trauma, which can take place entirely among the poor or the lowlifes. Contrary to the slumming drama, the poor and the lowlifes are portrayed negatively in the class trauma: they are seen as repulsive and immoral and they are vulnerable to irreversible psychological damage. (Gandal 2007: 7). An example Gandal (ibid.) gives of a class trauma film is *Kids* (Clark 1995), which portrays the life of a group of hedonistic lowlife teenagers in New York City. A class trauma romance is similar to the slumming romance in the sense that a girl meets a poor or a lowlife boy, but the rest is much more negative: instead of the boy liberating her, he trashes and traumatically humiliates her, as Telly does to Jenny and other girls in Kids. The girl is not necessarily from an upper class, but she is less socially degraded than the boy and she is weak, vulnerable, innocent, naïve, or socially exalted. (Gandal 2007: 8). Whereas in the slumming dramas the gender roles can be different, in class traumas it is unlikely (Gandal 2007: 12). In contrast to the characters in the slumming dramas, class trauma characters cannot rise above and overcome their humiliation: instead of being sympathetic, they are more pathetic, and the good cannot fight against the evil because it has been traumatically degraded and paralysed by evil (Gandal 2007: 97–98, 102). In class traumas, the basis for the characters' traumatisation is their class inferiority; if, on the other hand, the characters belong to middle or upper classes, they are traumatised by competition for status, making the term 'status trauma' more suitable than class trauma (Gandal 2007: 97).

Finally, the slumming trauma combines the slumming drama and the class trauma: they are class-crossing tales in which the poor and the lowlifes live in difficult and dangerous environments which cause them to be tougher, (street) wiser, cooler, and more effective (Gandal 2007: 7). The slumming trauma is separated from the slumming drama by defilement and degradation, as in the slumming trauma the protagonist discovers "the resources of a deeper self" through self-defilement, degraded sex, and violence (Gandal 2007: 11). In addition, they are simultaneously degraded and liberated by poverty (Gandal 2007: 12), because, while the absence of money and status lowers their place within the class system, it also frees them from their class related problems. Whereas slumming dramas avoid the sordid and class traumas use the sordid to repulse, slumming traumas mystify or romanticise the sordid: identification with decay is purifying and identification with the degraded is transcendent, and filth and defilement are often lyrically embraced (Gandal 2007: 158, 160). Similarly to slumming dramas, in which the temporarily downward mobility often comes to an end by death, the slumming

traumas tend to have a death or a symbolic death near the end (Gandal 2007: 167). An example Gandal (2007: 7, 155) gives of a slumming trauma film is *Fight Club* (Fincher 1999), in which the narrator, the unnamed protagonist, is "in the process of rejecting his corporate and consumer identities and discovering a deeper, more vibrant and authentic self (in the persona of his alter ego, Tyler Durden)". Typically to slumming traumas, the film ends with the mystical death of Tyler and leaves the protagonist physically harmed.

Another method of identifying different approaches to portraying classes is media framing, which Kendall (2011: 17–18) uses to examine the class portrayals in American media, mainly newspapers, television shows, and films. First, according to Kendall (2011: 18), the poor and the homeless are typically portrayed in a negative light. Despite sometimes being pictured as sympathetic, as in the slumming drama, they are often shown as dependent on others or with deviant behaviour and lifestyle, similarly to Gandal's (2007) class trauma. Other types of common narratives about the poor are inspirational stories about people who have escaped poverty and found happiness in the working or middle classes, and charitable stories about how to help the poor after disasters or during holidays (Kendall 2011: 18). The media image of the working class seems to be typically negative as well. Kendall (ibid.) identifies five media frames for the working class, which are shady framing (greedy workers, unions, and organized crime), fading blue-collar framing (out of work or unhappy at work), caricature framing of white trash, caricature framing of television's buffoons, bigots, and slobs, and heroic framing (working class heroes and victims), which seems to be the only positive one. Unlike Gandal (2007), Kendall (2011) does not seem to recognise the narratives of downward mobility and romanticised working class.

For the wealthy, on the other hand, Kendall (2011: 17–18) finds four positive media frames: the consensus frame (they are like everyone else), the admiration frame (they are generous and caring), the emulation frame (they personify the American Dream), and the price-tag frame (they believe in the gospel of materialism). However, the wealthy are not portrayed only in positive ways, as there are also two negative frames which are used for them: the sour-grapes frame (they are unhappy and dysfunctional) and the bad-apple frame (some are scoundrels and criminals). In negative representations, the wealthy are often portrayed as greedy and using their money to solve all of their problems. On the other hand, in positive representations, the wealthy can be shown as interesting and deserving of their possessions. (Kendall 2011: 17–18).

Finally, for the middle class, Kendall (2011: 18–19) identifies three key media frames: middle class values framing (the middle class core values should be the norm and the middle class the ideal model), squeeze framing (caught between the cost of their lifestyle and the ability to pay for it), and victimization framing (the actions of the other classes potentially endangering the middle class way of life). Thus, the media frames used for the middle class are mostly positive, as are the media frames used for the upper class: whereas the upper class might be admired for their possessions and achievements, the middle class is seen as the norm and harmless. On the other hand, in their negative portrayals, both middle and upper classes can be seen as greedy and in pursuit of a lifestyle they might not be able to afford. However, while the other classes are sometimes portrayed as unhappy, dysfunctional, or criminals, the middle class avoids similar negative treatment – instead, the other classes are portrayed as threats to the middle class. These narrative portrayals of different classes can be further emphasised by the visual methods described above. For example, the supposed quality of life of the wealthy and the poor can be accentuated by the environments they are living in, the clothes they are wearing, and the colours and camera shots used in the scenes they appear in.

The studies discussed above provide guidance and inspiration for the present study, when it comes to conducting analysis: in addition to showing what kind of features can be used when constructing class representations in films, they provide examples on how these different elements can be interpreted. Considering that especially story rich video games resemble films as an (interactive) audiovisual media, it is most likely that similar elements appear and can be analysed in video games as well. In addition, the studies discussed in this section showcase common class narratives in different types of media; being aware of these can also help in recognising salient features of the characters and their narratives.

3. INTERSECTIONALITY

The term intersectionality was originally coined by Crenshaw in 1989 to draw attention to the struggles of women of colour and how their experiences were (and still are) shaped by both their gender and race (Davis 2011: 68). Since then intersectionality has evolved to address a variety of differences among women (ibid. 70) and other groups of people. These differences are related to social categories, such as gender, race, class, and age, and the ways they interact and intersect with each other to produce and transform power relations (ibid. 71). In addition to examining how social categories and power structures are related to each other, intersectionality explores the complex identities created by the ways people are positioned and position themselves in multiple social categories at the same time (Christensen and Jensen 2012: 110).

When it comes to video game characters, intersectionality can be a very useful tool, since their complexities are often forgotten in academic discussion. Often the focus has been on gender while other social categories have been marginalised or ignored. Using an intersectional approach can help us avoid this issue. As Davis (2011: 79) maintains, "intersectionality initiates a process of discovery, alerting us to the fact that the world around us is always more complicated and contradictory than we ever could have anticipated". This is important to remember when studying fictional characters as well.

The rest of this section focuses on gender and class, which were chosen as the most central social categories for the present study. Both concepts are understood as socially constructed. What this means in terms of gender is explained first, before moving on to the description of class as socially constructed.

3.1. Socially Constructed Gender

Gender can be a difficult and confusing topic, if one does not define it beforehand, as there are many different perspectives from which it can be approached. In gender and feminist studies, it is common to see gender as a social construct. In order to do this, one also needs to acknowledge the idea of the distinction between gender and sex: West and Zimmerman (2002: 4–5) suggest that sex is determined through the "socially agreed upon biological criteria for classifying persons as females or males", while gender is "the activity of managing situated conduct in light of normative conceptions of attitudes and activities appropriate for one's sex category". In other words, whereas sex is considered

to be biological, although this biologicality is also socially constructed, gender is produced socially and interactionally in relation to the existing norms and one's biological sex.

West and Zimmerman (2002: 4, 6) propose that gender is a routine, methodical, and recurring accomplishment, which is constructed through interaction. They (ibid. 4) argue that gender is an emergent feature of social situations: it is done individually in the virtual or real presence of others through activities that express or reflect gender and, at the same time, each individual perceives the behaviour of others in a similar manner. An example of gendered behaviour could be wearing jewellery, which can be seen as feminine behaviour in some cultures (ibid. 17–18). In addition, they (ibid. 9–11) explain that individuals are labelled as sexed and gendered based on their appearance: even if a person's biological sex organs are not visible, they are given a sex based on the available visual cues, such as clothing, hairstyle, and figure, as well as aural and behavioural cues. They (ibid. 13) also describe how gender differences are constructed in the physical features of social settings, such as gendered bathrooms.

Beauvoir (1949/2011) and Butler (1990/2006) share some similar ideas with West and Zimmerman (2002). Beauvoir (1949/2011: 330), for example, famously states that one is not born woman, but rather becomes one. By this she means that, as children grow up, they are taught how to be men or women in such a way that they will be accepted by the society (ibid. 342–343). In other words, gender is encouraged through upbringing and education, which in turn are affected by the society. Butler (1990/2006: 8, 34, 45, 191; 2011) continues the notion of gender as socially constructed by suggesting that gender is produced performatively through a stylized repetition of acts. This repetition works both as a reenactment and reexperiencing as well as the legitimation of an already socially established set of meanings (ibid.). She (1990/2006: 191) explains that "the illusion of an abiding gendered self" is constituted through bodily gestures, movements, and styles of various kinds. This is rather similar to West and Zimmerman's idea of gender being done in social situations and appearance, guided by the established norms in the society.

However, West and Zimmerman (2002: 13) note that doing gender does not necessarily mean living up to the normative conceptions of femininity or masculinity; instead, it can mean engaging in behaviour at the risk of being assessed as one gender or another. This could mean that every action and decision can be seen as an act of doing gender, even if they are not meant to be seen as such. Similarly, Butler (1990/2006: 45; 2011) argues that gender is being produced and reproduced all the time. Therefore, as West and Zimmerman (2002: 13) state, doing gender is unavoidable. However,

the ways we do gender can have different consequences: they can either sustain and reproduce the normative conceptions of gender while rendering legitimate "the institutional arrangements that are based on sex category" (ibid. 22), or they can challenge and transgress the existing norms, possibly changing and reconstructing them. Doing gender differently, i.e. not living up to the normative conceptions of femininity or masculinity, can raise suspicion or even stronger reactions, however, and those individuals might need to explain their character, motives, and predispositions (West and Zimmerman 2002: 22).

The perspective of gender as a social construct can be applied to video games as well. The way characters look, behave, and interact with each other produces gender in a similar manner as real humans' looks, behaviours, and interactions. The reasons behind each character's traits are not only tied to the setting the characters exist in, but also to the society in which the game's creators belong. In other words, the characters can be designed according to (or as challenging) the normative conceptions of femininity and masculinity within the game world and/or the real world. It is interesting to examine whether or not the ways video game characters do gender indeed reflect the ways real humans do gender, and if they follow the existing gender norms of the present Western society or some other society. In the case of *Assassin's Creed: Syndicate* the question is even more interesting, because it is set in Victorian England, which had more conservative gender norms compared to the present day. For example, it raises the question of which societal setting's gender norms are closer to the way the characters' genders are constructed.

In addition, the construction of gender in video games not only reflects the attitudes of their creators and the surrounding society (and the game world), but also produces conceptions of gender. The construction of characters as gendered can be seen as an act of doing gender, as it either sustains the normative conceptions of femininity and masculinity or somehow challenges them, similarly as we do in our own behaviour, interactions, and appearance. As a form of media, video games, like television shows and films, can affect the way we ourselves think of gender and do it in our everyday lives.

3.2. Socially Constructed Class

One of the most common ways of grouping people into hierarchical social classes is to categorise them based on their economic status. However, class can be much more than one's wealth or profession: as suggested by Bourdieu (1984/2010), cultural capital is also an important marker of

one's class status. According to Skeggs (2004: 16), Bourdieu's cultural capital has three forms in which it can exist: "in an embodied state, i.e. in the form of long-lasting dispositions of the mind and the body; in the objectified state, in the form of cultural goods; and in the institutionalized state, resulting in such things as educational qualifications". However, rather than using the term cultural capital, Skeggs (2004: 17) talks about cultural resources, which enables her to show that some of them have value for those who use and make them even if they are not exchangeable in the way the term capital suggests.

The relationship between class and cultural resources has its roots in education: because preferences in cultural goods and cultural practices are affected by one's upbringing and education, such things as taste and manners are indicators of class differences (Bourdieu 1984/2010: xxiv–xxv). Consequently, Skeggs (2004: 96) adds that class is used to differentiate between culture that is worth having and knowing, and culture that is not. Moreover, she explains that class distance is created through economic, political, and moral values (Skeggs 2004: 27–31). She also suggests, similarly to intersectionality, that class is closely related to other social categories, such as gender, race, and sexuality, and that it is continually produced through struggle (Skeggs 2004: 3–5). Hence, in addition to being one of the ways we know and evaluate ourselves and others, class is one of the major mechanisms of global and national inequality (Skeggs 2004: 44). It is therefore important to analyse class representations, as they can reveal what kind of values are attached to different cultural goods, practices, and groups of people. In the present study, the focus will be on cultural resources, but economic status will also be taken into account.

One of the central markers of class in Bourdieu's theory of distinction (1984/2010) is taste, i.e. preferences in cultural goods and practices. It affects the whole lifestyle of an individual and is therefore visible in everything a person surrounds themselves with, such as clothes, books, and furniture, as well as in their interests in sports, entertainment, et cetera (Bourdieu 1984/2010: 169–171). While taste unites people with similar preferences – most likely people who come from a similar background, as explained above – it also separates them from others with different tastes (Bourdieu 1984/2010: 49, 169–171). Distance between these groups of people is produced by the value attached to different goods and practices. At the very top are those which are rare and only the richest can achieve, while at the bottom there are those which are easy and common and therefore identified as vulgar; what is left in between is perceived as pretentious, because of the discrepancy between ambition and possibilities (Bourdieu 1984/2010: 171). Skeggs (2004: 107–109) adds that taste is defined by those who are in superior and distant positions, because they have the ability to criticise

others and display themselves as knowledgeable. While Bourdieu (1984/2010: 49) states that "aversion to different life-styles is perhaps one of the strongest barriers between the classes", Skeggs (2004: 109) argues that one can imagine oneself to be a part of another class by imitating their taste.

Taste between the social classes is also defined by necessity and luxury. Bourdieu (1984/2010: 373) argues that the taste for necessity is most evident within the working class, since they have an inevitable deprivation of necessary goods. Because of this, they prefer goods and practices that are needed in order to get by, choosing them based on how pragmatic, functional, easy to maintain, versatile, cheap, and long-lasting they are; in other words, they aim to save money, time, and effort (Bourdieu 1984/2010: 375–380). On the contrary, the middle and upper classes can afford a taste for luxury, spending money on extravagant items and making aesthetic choices instead of practical ones (ibid.). However, even though this could imply that the middle and upper classes have considerably more items than the working classes, Skeggs (2004: 99) points out that it is the latter which is associated with excess, whereas the middle class are seen as reasonable and modest. This difference is visible especially in women's appearance, in which excess denotes low moral value and potential disruption, which means that if one wants to imitate a middle-class woman one needs to leave behind their excessive style and become subtle and discreet (ibid.). However, one should be careful not to pay too little attention to one's appearance either, as dirty and careless appearance is associated with vulgarity (Skeggs 2004: 102). Because the middle class wants to maintain distance from the attributes they see as disgusting, they are used to signify the working class. This leads to the working class being seen as waste and excrement (ibid. 103).

An important factor that influences what is seen as negative or positive excess is the capability to control oneself. While the excess of the working class is seen as lack of discipline and self-control (Skeggs 2004: 102), the excess of the middle class is considered to be calculated and contained, which makes it acceptable and respectable (ibid. 104). For example, even though the middle classes appreciate natural appearances because of the higher cultural value given to nature than excess, naturality is achieved through work and labour that is not apparent in the appearance (ibid. 101). Self-governance is also related to sexuality. Because the working class is deemed to be uncontrollable, their excessive sexuality is seen as dangerous and immoral, when at the same time the excessive sexuality of the middle class is seen as exciting, new, and interesting, because they are able to control themselves (ibid. 105). In fact, the whole body of an individual and the ways of maintaining it and using it, one's manners, gestures, and appearances, are judged based on how they are controlled (Bourdieu 1984/2010: 188–191).

In order to be able to control oneself in an acceptable manner, one needs to have knowledge of new goods and their social and cultural value; moreover, one needs to know the proper way of using them, because it is the practice in which they are used that produces value (Skeggs 2004: 136). The middle class takes advantage of this by investing in new informational goods, such as clothing, which the lower classes have not yet found, and thereby creates distance between the classes (ibid.). The ability to invest in goods outside of their own class is related to choice, which is another concept to which some have less access than others, the middle class being the ones who are able to make the most choices (ibid. 139). Because of this, the middle class can be seen as "a mobile and flexible body that can access, know, participate, and feel confident about using a wide variety of cultures (from low to high)" (ibid. 143). This kind of omnivorousness is not related to only goods, but time, knowledge, information, bodily investment, and social networking as well (ibid. 144).

In addition to taste, control, and choice, location and mobility signify class status. According to Skeggs (2004: 49–50), the middle class used to desire a secure, private home in a fixed location, which was the opposite of the working class which was considered as dangerously mobile. While the middle class still shares the same ideal of locatedness, they have also started to appreciate mobility, which is seen as a positive resource to which everyone does not have equal access (ibid. 48–50). Thus, the ability of the middle class to be voluntarily mobile separates them from the poor, who live in areas from which it is difficult to leave (e.g. by the means of public transport) and to which others do not want to enter (Skeggs 2004: 50). In other words, the mobility of classes has turned upside down: because the middle-class desires to be mobile, the working class is made immobile by those in power. The negativity of immobility is further emphasised by its associations with defeat and failure (ibid.). On the other hand, on a global level, mobility is nowadays common among the poorest and the most distressed as well. Mobility is closely related to connectivity, which is also more difficult for the poor to access; for example, the internet connection might not reach the poorer areas (ibid.). Similarly to mobility, connectivity is also in the hands of the authorities, as they decide which places have good public transport and internet connections. In addition, mobility and location are related to gender: whereas the local is associated with femininity, because it is seen as the natural basis of home and community, mobility is associated with masculinity, since while women have been fixed in one place, men have been able to travel (Skeggs 2004: 51).

In conclusion, class markers can be roughly grouped in three categories: the ways a person treats and modifies their body and appearance (including clothing and makeup); their behaviour, manners, and

gestures; and their surroundings and mobility (including location, decorations, etc.). These are all affected by the social norms which determine which kind of appearance, behaviour, or environments are valued and which are not. This is very similar to how gender is produced, as it is also constructed through appearance and behaviour, and social norms of femininity and masculinity play an important role in how different appearance and behaviour are judged as gendered. These similarities between socially constructed class and gender enable their examination in a similar manner, as the same analytical framework can be used for both, thus considerably benefiting the present study. Moreover, by understanding gender and class as socially constructed, it is possible to analyse what kind of elements are used, and how they are used, to construct the game's characters as gendered and classed.

In the next chapter, the concepts of socially constructed gender and class, together with some ideas from previous gender and class studies on games and films, are combined with theories on characterisation in order to create a suitable framework for the present study's analysis.

4. CHARACTERISATION

Story rich video games have a great deal in common with television series and films: the goal of each is to tell a story in an audiovisual format. A central part of their narrative are the characters whose story is being told. According to Ryan (1994: 12, as cited in Pearson 2007: 40), if the audience experiences genuine emotions for the characters, they relate to them as human beings rather than literary creations or semiotic constructs; in other words, the line between fictional characters and real human beings becomes blurred. Pearson (2007: 41) explains that television writers model their characters based on their cultural conceptions of people, making them thus more realistic and humanlike psychologically. This means that the characters' actions and psychological traits shape each other, and because of this the characters reveal their psychological traits in their actions (ibid.). This becomes especially apparent if a character is tagged with a detail of speech or behaviour that defines a major trait, which, according to Bordwell (1985: 13–14, as cited in Pearson 2007: 41–42), is used in Hollywood cinema to reinforce the individuality and consistency of each character. These kinds of techniques could be used by video game designers as well in order to create memorable and realistic characters.

One method of analysing how characters are constructed is characterisation. Culpeper (2001: 2) defines characterisation as a process of forming impressions of characters in our minds. Pearson (2007: 42–43) suggests that our minds are the only place where television characters exist as a whole, because each character is composed of tiny fragments that are spread across every scene in every episode in which the character appears, and in our minds we juxtapose each fragment with the others and form a complete impression of each character. In other words, a character becomes whole through the process of characterisation, and by deconstructing the characterisation process it is possible to examine how the characters are constructed the way they are. As Pearson (2007: 43) maintains, "anatomising a televisual character requires identifying the elements that constitute a character -- in the minds of the producers and audiences, rather than conducting a close textual analysis of individual scenes/episodes/codes". The characterisation process is also affected by the prior knowledge we can apply to the characters, such as ideas related to their gender, occupation, or, on a more general level, the genre of the work of fiction (Culpeper 2001: 36–37). In addition to prior knowledge of fictional characters, Culpeper (ibid. 87) argues that prior knowledge of real-life people is crucial for understanding fictional characters.

Characterisation applies to video game characters as well, especially to the characters in story rich video games which tend to be several hours long; many of them reach and some surpass the length of one or two seasons of a television series.[5] Thus, it is reasonable to say that video game characters become whole in a similar manner to television characters and therefore can be anatomised similarly.

For her characterisation study, Pearson (2007: 43–48) created a taxonomy of six key elements which constitute a character: psychological traits/habitual behaviours, physical characteristics/appearance, speech patterns, interactions with other characters, environment, and biography. These have similarities to Culpeper's (2001) ideas on characterisation and Rughiniș, Rughiniș, and Toma's (2016) suggestions on examining femininity in video games. Firstly, Culpeper (2001: 167–226) describes explicit and implicit cues that give information on characters, the former including self- and other-presentation, and the latter including conversation styles, speech patterns, visual features, and a character's company and setting. Secondly, Rughiniș, Rughiniș, and Toma (2016: 5–11) propose three perspectives from which femininity could be analysed: aging, social world, and sociability. They suggest that instead of focusing only on adult protagonists, other age categories and background characters should be considered as well. Sociability, on the other hand, refers to the nature of the interactions between characters. Next, each of Pearson's (2007: 43–49) six key elements, which she uses to analyse CSI's Gilbert Grissom, will be discussed together with the aforementioned concepts of Culpeper (2001) and Rughiniș, Rughiniș, and Toma (2016). In addition, the elements will be considered from the perspectives of socially constructed gender and class, as described in the previous chapters.

First, psychological traits and habitual behaviours entail personality traits (e.g. loyalty and protectiveness), motivations (e.g. intellectual curiosity), desires and goals (e.g. being smarter than a criminal), areas of expertise and passion (e.g. entomology), hobbies (e.g. classical music and poker), and moral values (e.g. despising men who hit their wives) (Pearson 2007: 43–44). As Pearson (2007: 44) points out, while these traits and behaviours are based on details which make the character more realistic, they are also constructed on existing cultural tropes, such as the dedicated professional, which makes the character legible to a wide range of viewers. Other kind of prior knowledge, such as stereotypes, character roles or stock figures, can also be utilised for this purpose (Culpeper 2001: 47–52). For example, some traits and behaviour can be seen as gendered or classed: while sensitivity

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[5] In general, television dramas often have around 10 or 20 episodes, each lasting between 40 and 60 minutes. Story rich video games, on the other hand, might take anywhere between four to hundreds of hours to complete. For example, the first season of *CSI* consists of 23 approximately 44 minutes long episodes (CBS Interactive 2018), lasting thus almost 17 hours, whereas Assassin's Creed: Syndicate takes roughly 18 hours to complete (HowLongToBeat.com).

and nurturing behaviour are often considered as feminine, strength and assertiveness are typically seen as masculine traits; on the other hand, whereas violence might be associated more often with the working class, intelligence might be seen as a sign of a person from a higher class. In addition, the amount of work or free time can indicate a character's class status, as the upper classes tend to be portrayed at leisure more often than the working classes (see chapter 2.3.). When it comes to video game characters, psychological traits and habitual behaviours have not been analysed much in this manner. However, Rughiniș, Rughiniș, and Toma (2016: 8–10) acknowledge the diversity of female characters in video games and suggest that more attention should be paid on the characters who inhabit the game world. For example, they (ibid. 8–9) noticed that *80 Days* (Inkle 2014) is full of female characters with different occupations and personalities.

Second, physical characteristics/appearance refers to the character's facial configurations and expressions, body posture and gestures, vocal quality and mannerisms, physical defects and disabilities, and costumes (Culpeper 2001: 221; Pearson 2007: 44). When it comes to television characters, at least the first three pairs are dependent on the actor who plays the character (Pearson 2007: 44). In video games, however, the characters are created digitally, which means that game designers have more freedom when constructing these aspects of characters. In order to create more realistic looking characters, they can be modelled after real human beings; for example, in *Until Dawn* (Supermassive Games 2015) the characters look almost exactly the same as their voice actors. In addition, motion capture is often used to ensure that the characters' movements and expressions are more realistic.

However, even if the characters are made to resemble real, existing people, they can be modified in ways the game designers deem necessary. For example, a character's negative qualities could be emphasised by making the character look unattractive or have certain features that might be associated with negativity, such as a very round or long face (Culpeper 2001: 224). Visual aspects of a character are also important when it comes to the character's gender and class, as they often are the most conspicuous features of a character and work as the basis for a first impression. As discussed in chapter 3, a character's clothing and manners can affect how we view them as gendered and classed; for example, dresses and jewellery can be seen as feminine, and dirtiness or excessive make up can be associated with the working class. However, in some video games the player is given the possibility to customise their character's appearance to varying degrees. For example, in *Assassin's Creed: Syndicate*, the player can change the outfit of the two main characters, whereas in some other games, such as *Saints Row: The Third* (Volition 2011), the player can customise the playable character's

body and facial structure, hair and outfit, gender, skin colour, et cetera. As a consequence, in researching characterisation in games, the focus points of an analysis should be varied depending on the control the player is given over the character's appearance; for example, the available options and the choices the player makes could be examined.

Third, speech patterns include the (in)formality of speech, the kind of utterances that are typical to the character, the use of aphorisms, quotes, and allusions, and the topics that the character talks about (Pearson 2007: 44–45). For example, Pearson (ibid.) describes how Grissom's emotional distance is emphasised by his use of formal language, and how he conforms to the intellectual cultural trope by his use of literary and historical quotes and allusions. The way a character speaks in the presence and absence of others is also relevant, as they can reveal different aspects of the character (Culpeper 2001: 168–170). In addition, a character's idiolect, which consists of dialectal and sociolectal features (i.e. pronunciation, grammar, and lexis), can tie the character to certain regional or social groups (Culpeper 2001: 166), which might have gendered or classed connotations, thus constructing the character as gendered or classed as well. As Culpeper (ibid. 16) explains, the linguistic behaviour of people can change depending on with which group they identify, want to identify, or do not want to identify; similarly, the linguistic behaviour of fictional characters can be created in a manner that connects them to specific social, regional, gendered or classed groups. However, similarly to visual appearance, the voice and dialect of a video game character can sometimes be customised by the player, such as in the aforementioned *Saints Row: The Third* (Volition 2011). In addition, some games, perhaps most notably *The Sims* series (Maxis 2000–), feature no, or almost none, comprehensible spoken or written language produced by the characters.

Fourth, interactions with other characters encompass their professional and personal interactions; for example, how they act towards their subordinate and superordinate colleagues and vice versa. This also includes the characters to whom they have the strongest emotional ties, such as closest friends or romantic interests. (Pearson 2007: 45–46). In addition to the contents and contexts of the interactions, the relationship and social distance between characters can be implied by the way a character is positioned in relation to the others physically (Culpeper 2001: 222). A common way of examining character interactions, mainly among women, is the Bechdel test, which was popularised by Bechdel's 1985 comic strip *The Rule* (Bechdel Test Movie List). The test asks the question of whether or not a film has at least two female characters who talk to each other about something else than a man. Rughiniș, Rughiniș, and Toma (2016: 10–11) build on this with their concept of sociability, by which they refer to the networks created by the characters. Nixon (2013), on the other

hand, proposes a version of the test that asks if there are at least two named female characters that are meaningful to the story or gameplay, at least one of them being a player character, a playable character, or a non-playable character in the player's party, and if these female characters interact with each other in a manner representative of the dialogue/conversational style of the game, the topic of their interaction being something other than a man. These can be applied to some extent when examining the nature of a character's interactions.

Fifth, environment refers not only to the locations that are central to the character, such as their workplace and home, but also to the way the character behaves in each location. The way the places are furnished and decorated can be used to reveal different sides of the character, such as their personality or class, while their behaviour in these environments can indicate a difference between the character's public and private self. (Pearson 2007: 46–47). While Pearson (ibid). refers to physical surroundings when talking about environment, Culpeper (2001: 226) includes human surroundings into the consideration as well: the people the characters surround themselves with are as important as the physical surroundings. As Culpeper (ibid.) notes, certain choices related to surroundings are associated with certain types of people. For example, Pearson (2007: 46–47) argues that the chaotic decor of Grissom's office points to his mad scientist aspect, while the harmony and modernity of his home emphasises his intellectual side. A character's class, on the other hand, can be deduced by examining the environments, for example, from the perspective of necessity and luxury (see chapters 2.3. and 3.2.).

In video games the matter of character environments and their decoration might be somewhat trickier than in television series, as the characters might be constantly moving from one place to another in order to complete quests. Often these places are locations that are not directly related to the characters themselves, such as public spaces or buildings occupied by their enemies. Even if they have headquarters or a central location they return to time after time, such as home or office, they might not spend much time in there or go there very often. However, if this kind of a place exists, it should not be ignored as it can tell something about the character's personality. In addition, the character's behaviour in different types of environments can certainly be inspected. One way to do this is to examine the character's affordance, i.e. where the character can go to, what they can do in the different environments, and how they can affect their surroundings (Ivănescu 2018: 235). For example, in *Beneath A Steel Sky* (Revolution Software 1994), the working class characters can mainly access areas related to work, whereas the upper class can freely visit different areas ranging from a courthouse to a bar and a church (Ivănescu 2018: 236–237). In addition, the colour palettes and

soundtracks used in different environments can suggest specific classes: for example, greys are often associated with environments and scenes related to working class, whereas upper class environments feature more and often brighter colours (see chapter 2.2.).

Finally, biography includes details that deepen the character but might not have much narrative consequence, such as their education, previous achievements, or past relationships (Pearson 2007: 47–48). These can give information about a character's past as a gendered or classed being, as well as the possible changes they have faced, such as class-crossing. Pearson (2007: 49) points out that while her taxonomy can be used to examine characters in all moving-image formats, the function of each of the six elements varies depending on the narrative structure of the medium. For example, she claims that biographical details are largely narratively irrelevant in video games, despite producing a reality effect; as an example she gives *Resident Evil* (Capcom 1996) and states that the protagonist "continues to kill zombies no matter what his backstory is" (Pearson 2007: 49). While there is little information on his background, it is rather clear that the main characters of Resident Evil continue their fight against zombies, because they are members of the city's police department's Special Tactics And Rescue Service (S.T.A.R.S.) and were sent to the location to investigate the disappearance of another S.T.A.R.S. team. Thus, it can be argued that enough backstory and biographical details are provided to justify the characters' actions and their narrative. Nevertheless, the significance of biographical details varies between video games, as some might provide extensive background information on the characters while others leave it to a minimum. For example, in *Dragon Age: Origins* (BioWare 2009), throughout the game the player receives codex entries, which provide information about the game world. These include information about and backstories of the characters. In addition, the player's choices related to their character's gender, race, and class during the character customisation at the beginning of the game affect some features of the game's narrative during the game.

Pearson (2007: 48) argues that these six elements are weaved together in order to create "convincingly 'real' pseudo-human beings". The construction of realistic characters is shaped by prior cultural and societal knowledge. She (ibid.) suggests that through the use of cultural tropes ideology affects character construction; for example, some cultural tropes are strongly associated with one class or gender over another, for example, emotional repression is typically thought to be a male trait rather than a female one. For the purposes of this study, it is beneficial to develop Pearson's taxonomy to make it more suitable for analysing video game characters and to make clearer distinctions between different aspects of the characters. The taxonomy is developed further by combining it with ideas

presented in the previous studies on gender and class in video games and films as well as the theories on socially constructed gender and class. Based on the discussion above, the following changes are made to Pearson's (2007) taxonomy: first, the element of physical appearance is divided into two, separating movement from the more stationary features, thus forming the category of movements and gestures; second, the element of habitual behaviour and psychological traits is divided into two, as they both include a variety of aspects to consider; third, the category for affordance is added to separate the fixed environments from the character's mobility and to make the taxonomy more suitable for video game characters. The evolved taxonomy is summarised in Table 1.

Table 1 Character taxonomy

Element	Description
Physical appearance	Clothing and (in)appropriateness of clothing; hair; body proportions (incl. muscles, breasts); physical defects and disabilities
Movements & gestures	Facial configurations and expressions; body posture and gestures; manners; bodily movements (e.g. jiggle physics)
Speech patterns	Vocal quality and mannerisms; (in)formality of speech; typical utterances and topics; the use of aphorisms, quotes, and allusions; idiolect and dialects
Habitual behaviour	Hobbies and occupation; areas of expertise (skills) and passion; typical actions and activities; work vs leisure; violence
Psychological traits	Personality traits; motivations; moral values; desires and goals
Interactions with others	Professional and personal interactions; social distance; interactions with the characters with the strongest emotional ties; monologue (interactions with the player)
Environment	Central locations; furnishings and decorations; human surroundings
Affordance	Mobility; access and choice; behaviour in the environments; what the characters and the player can do in different environments and where the character and the player are allowed to go to

Biography	Additional narrative details, e.g. education, upbringing, economic status, previous achievements, past relationships, age, race

5. THE *ASSASSIN'S CREED* SERIES

Assassin's Creed is an action-adventure and stealth video game franchise developed and published by Ubisoft, a French video game company with several development studios across the world. In general, it is one of the best-selling video game series of all time. The first game in the series was published in 2007 and the latest, at the moment, in 2018. In addition to video games, the franchise includes comics, novels, films, board games, and encyclopaedias.

The narrative of the franchise combines fiction with fact, featuring both fictional and historical characters as well as fictional and historical events. The narrative follows two fictional secret societies: the Assassins, who want to ensure individual freedom, and the Templars, who want to achieve peace by controlling the society. Both of the secret societies are inspired by real-life orders, which have been fictionalised in the *Assassin's Creed* franchise: the Assassins are based on the Nizari Isma'ilis, a Shia Muslim community which formed in Iran and Syria in the 11th century and which spawned legends of assassins (Bosman 2016: 11–13); the Templars, on the other hand, are based on the Knights Templar, a Catholic military order established in the 12th century to protect pilgrims on their journey to the Holy Land ("Templar", no date given).

In the *Assassin's Creed* video games, the struggle between the two secret societies has lasted for centuries all around the world; hence, the stories within the series take place in different settings and time periods throughout history. This allows the player to visit historical locations and events and to meet famous historical figures along with fictional characters. While the games utilise real historical settings, events, and figures, some details are altered in order to better fit the story; thus, the games provide reimaginations in which many historical events are explained as consequences of the struggle between the Assassins and the Templars. The present time also plays a part in each story, as the fictional modern-day Assassins and Templars have created devices with which they can simulate the past and have users experience the memories of their ancestors. The secret societies use these to seek historical artefacts which can be used for controlling the minds of the people; while the Templars wish to use the artefacts themselves, the Assassins want to prevent the Templars from having them. The player usually takes the role of a character who uses the device to relive their ancestors' memories

in the past. Typically, the stories are told from the point of view of the Assassins, making the Templars the enemy.

Because of its historical settings, the series has received some academic attention. For example, Dow (2013) analyses the representation of historical locations in *Assassin's Creed II* (Ubisoft Montreal 2009), which is set in Renaissance Italy, whereas Hammar (2017) studies the representations of marginalised identities in *Assassin's Creed: Freedom Cry* (Ubisoft Québec 2014), which takes place in the 18th century Caribbean. Shaw (2015) examines historical realism and the representation of history in *Assassin's Creed III* (Ubisoft Montreal 2012), which is set in colonial North America during the latter half of the 18th century. Menon (2015), on the other hand, discusses the narrative structure and history as memory in the series in general, while Bosman (2016) analyses the role of religion and the representation of the historical Nizari Isma'ilis, the inspiration for the Assassin's. As a final example, Gilbert (2017) explores the possibilities of using the series in social education, taking *Assassin's Creed: Syndicate* as an example and suggesting media literacy and critical inquiry into the representation of history as something that the game could be used to teach.

6.1. *Assassin's Creed: Syndicate*

Assassin's Creed: Syndicate[6] is the ninth major instalment in the series. It was developed by Ubisoft Quebec and published by Ubisoft in 2015 for PlayStation 4, Xbox One, and Microsoft Windows. The story takes place in Victorian era London, beginning in 1868, and follows two Assassins: the twins Jacob and Evie Frye. The goal of the twins is to regain the city of London from the Templars. While Jacob aims to achieve this by uniting the criminal underworld, Evie searches for information on a powerful historical artefact that they could use to achieve their goal. In addition to a variety of fictional characters, Jacob and Evie receive help from notable historical figures, such as Alexander Graham Bell, Frederick Abberline, and Florence Nightingale. In the same way as Jacob and Evie themselves, the main antagonist, Crawford Starrick, is fictional, and his subordinates include both fictional and real historical figures, such as John Elliotson and James Brudenell, the 7th Earl of Cardigan. The game also includes a few short sections set in the present day, which showcase the never-ending struggle between the fictional Assassins and Templars. The name of the game, *Syndicate*, could refer to either the gang formed by Jacob, or the larger forces behind everything – the Assassin and Templar organisations, or possibly even the then still growing British Empire.

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[6] From now on abbreviated as *AC:S*.

This particular game was chosen for the present study, because it is interesting from the point of view of gender and class for multiple reasons. First, unlike most games and the previous games in the series, *AC:S* features both a male and a female playable protagonist. Second, the game's setting, Victorian England, also makes gender an interesting subject, as the era is known for its conservative gender roles. Third, the strict class system of the Victorian era makes the game interesting from the perspective of class. Finally, the game's narrative also features class, as it portrays a struggle between the classes and features characters from a variety of backgrounds.

6. GENDER AND CLASS IN THE VICTORIAN ERA

Since *AC:S*, the video game in focus in the present study, takes mostly place in one specific time and space in history and features real historical figures, events, and locations in addition to the fictional ones, knowledge of this era, and of gender and class in Victorian England, in particular, can provide helpful insights for the benefit of the analysis of the game characters. The main interest in my analysis lies in the sections of the story that take place in Victorian London in 1868. As Queen Victoria's reign lasted from 1837 to 1901, this means that the game is set in the mid-Victorian era.

The Victorian era was preceded by the Industrial Revolution, and the growth of urbanization and suburbanization. In the 1850s, England was indeed increasingly urban, with the mechanization causing the towns to develop. Also the manufacturing, transport, and service industries had an urban basis. In addition, the higher wages for fewer hours in the towns attracted people more than the countryside (Matthew 2010: 520, 533). However, it was mainly men who left the rural areas, as women were less employable in the towns; although some were able to find their way into domestic service in the towns with the help of agencies such as the Girls' Friendly Society (Matthew 2010: 533–534). The town centres were connected to the suburbs by the railways, making it possible for the better offs to live in the suburban areas instead of the town centres (Matthew 2010: 530). By the end of the Victorian era, 80% of the English and Welsh population was urbanized (Matthew 2010: 529). Simultaneously, the significance of agriculture in the economy declined towards the end of the era, due to the urbanization and the great depression of the 1870s (Matthew 2010: 533).

In addition to becoming increasingly urban from the 1850s onwards, England became increasingly non-Anglican and, consequently, more liberalist. The Liberal Party seemed attractive to those who supported non-Anglicanism (Matthew 2010: 521, 525). In the 1850s and 1860s, daily and Sunday

newspapers expanded, spreading liberal views further (Matthew 2010: 523). According to Matthew (2010: 522), the keynotes of mid-Victorian liberalism were individualism, self-respect, self-reliance, and the organization of voluntary and co-operative societies. These were tied to free trade, which was desired by the manufacturing middle classes (Matthew 2010: 522). The demand for free trade began with the Anti-Corn Law League in 1838, which, according to Harvie (2010: 497), "both represented and in part created the commercial-minded individualistic middle class". The manufacturers' aim was to lower the price of bread in order to lower the wages (Harvie 2010: 497).

However, half a century later, the real wages of the majority of the working classes began to increase, and, consequently, the standard of living also began to rise: by the 1880s, many were able to enjoy leisure time, as the increase in wages was accompanied by a fall in the birth-rate, leaving them with more extra money (Matthew 2010: 536–537). Moreover, their diets and the quality of housing improved a little, and they were able to keep themselves and their houses cleaner as soap became cheaper and generally available (Matthew 2010: 540). They were also able to decorate their homes a little and enjoy travelling as a recreational activity; in addition, betting on horses and football gained popularity among the working classes (Matthew 2010: 540–541). Through the shared leisure activities, in addition to trade unionism, the working classes, or at least working-class men, began to grow a sense of solidarity (Matthew 2010: 539).

The middle classes experienced a change as well: the second half of the Victorian era saw their expansion, as the fairly small and reasonably easily identified middle class of the 1851 evolved into a complex group of the middle classes (Matthew 2010: 542). The deep gulf between the middle class and the working classes was filled with the lower middle class, which consisted of white-collar workers who managed and served in the retailing, banking, accounting, advertising, and trading sectors (ibid.). Women also received new opportunities for employment in shops, offices, and telephone exchanges (Matthew 2010: 543). The lower middle class typically followed the Liberalist ideals of individualism, merit, competition, respectability, efficiency, and sense of purpose (ibid.). Hence, in some places, especially in smaller towns with nonconformist tradition, the lower middle class ran the town and helped to keep it Liberal; in the larger towns, however, it collaborated with the aristocracy and the upper middle class in exchange for recognition and status (ibid.).

The upper middle classes, on the other hand, consisted of the professional classes (doctors, lawyers, the clergy of the established church, and civil servants of the administrative grade) and the manufacturing classes (Matthew 2010: 544). The professional classes had a common background of

university education and, increasingly, public school education; they also had a habit of sending their children (or rather, sons) away to boarding schools. The education they received was dominated by Greek, Latin, and ancient history, thus neglecting the more practical skills needed in the industrial state. (Matthew 2010: 544). The professional classes were also able to live more exclusively and move out to villas in the suburbs; in addition, they enjoyed games, such as rugby football during the winter, and cricket and athletics during the summer (ibid.). The manufacturing middle classes were affected by the professional classes so that they began to send their children into the same educational process; however, this made their children more interested in commerce than manufacturing, causing them to abandon the manufacturing life and instead joining the expanding banking sector (Matthew 2010: 544–545). Eventually, this caused the British economy to rely more on the service industries rather than the manufacturing industries (Matthew 2010: 545).

For the middle classes, the decrease in family size happened somewhat earlier than for the working classes: from the 1870s onwards, respectability, the need to maintain the house and to pay the servants and school and university fees, as well as the evolving interests of middle-class women encouraged the restriction of the family size (Matthew 2010: 546). Instead of, or perhaps in addition to, staying at home taking care of the children and the household, women found other callings, such as taking part in charities, local politics, and the arts; in addition, some managed to attend lectures and take examinations in universities. In the late 1870s women's colleges were also found, in Oxford, Cambridge, and London; however, professions remained out of reach for women, and the upper levels of nursing were the nearest most women could get to a professional career. (ibid.). Furthermore, whereas men's suffrage was increased both in the 1867 and 1884 Reform Acts, women were only partially enfranchised in the 1918 Representation of the People Act, much after the Victorian period had ended (Matthew 2010: 525; Morgan 2010: 760, 762).

In addition to legal and economic reasons, gender differences were enforced by Victorian world views of hierarchy: the adult middle-class (or aristocratic) man represented the governing or ruling group and was thus seen as the head of the social system; moreover, he was the head of his household, which represented the society (Davidoff 1979: 89). Below the head were the "unfeeling" and "unthinking" hands who did menial work while the head did brain work (ibid.). Middle class women, on the other hand, represented emotions, morality, and tenderness, and were therefore seen as the heart or the soul; moreover, they were "the keepers of the hearth in the home" (ibid.). Femaleness was also equated with the body, thus making women to be seen as closer to nature than the rational middle class men were. This made women's position even lower, since natural forces were seen as threats to rational

order (Davidoff 1979: 90–91) and "the flesh must be subject to the spirit in the right ordering of nature" (Ruether 1974, as cited in Davidoff 1979: 91). Another natural force that was feared as a possible cause of disorder was (male) sexuality, as it connected men with animals; in order to control middle class male sexuality, middle class women were seen as agents of salvation, especially within marriage (Davidoff 1979: 90–91). To further accentuate the role of middle class women as desexualised saviours, a distinction was made between middle class "ladies" and working class "women", which were further associated with the dichotomies of respectability/unrespectability, purity/impurity, cleanliness/dirtiness, whiteness/blackness, fairness/tan, virginity/sin, and femininity/masculinity (Davidoff 1979: 91, 111, 114).

Whereas the middle and the working classes experienced some changes during the Victorian era, the aristocracy and the gentry maintained their former characteristics: they continued to have considerable political power and gain wealth, first from prosperous farming in the 1850s until the 1870s and then by urban land investment; in addition, some increased their fortune by marriages with the new aristocracy of wealth in the United States (Matthew 2010: 546–547). According to Matthew (2010: 549), the British monarchy "represented the timeless quality of what was taken to be a pre-industrial order – the more urban Britain became, the more stylised, ritualised, and popular became its monarchy". Furthermore, the aristocracy was seen as people of leisure, who spent their time, for example, racing, hunting, shooting, and fishing in the country, and gambling in London (ibid. 548).

In conclusion, the class stratification and gender differences were rather apparent in the Victorian era. The game, *AC:S*, takes place in a time when urbanization was well in progress, non-Anglicanism was widely supported, and Liberalist values such as individualism and self-respect were greatly appreciated. The middle class had evolved into the lower and upper middle classes, of which the latter was more educated and had more chances for leisure than the former. The decrease in family size had not yet started for either the middle classes or the working classes, and the wages and the standard of living of the latter would not increase until later either. The aristocracy had the most political power, fortune, and leisure. For the game's setting, the differences between men and women are also relevant: the gender differences at the time were notable, for instance, in their affordance for education, professional careers, and political rights: while men were able to attend schools and universities and pursue careers, women stayed at home, although some might have found employment in domestic service or shops, offices, and telephone exchanges. Nevertheless, women were made subordinate to men through a dichotomy of natural and rational, and further repression was imposed on women through the distinction between "ladies" and "women".

7. THE PRESENT STUDY

This section describes the set-up of the present study. First, the aims and research questions will be introduced; second, the process of data selection and collection will be explained; and finally, the methods of analysis will be spelled out.

7.1. Aims

The aim of the present study is to analyse how the characters in the video game *AC:S* are constructed as gendered and classed, using the concepts of socially constructed gender and class. For this purpose, intersectionality is applied to the extent of acknowledging the characters' complex identities created by multiple social categories interacting and intersecting with each other. As Christensen and Jensen (2012: 112–113) note, it is necessary to choose a number of categories that work as the starting point for the analysis, in order to keep it manageable. For the present study, the most important social categories are gender and class, but other categories might also prove to be relevant.

The decision to focus on gender and class was based on their significance in the data source, *AC:S*. Contrary to most video games, the game features both a male and a female protagonist and a diverse cast of characters representing different genders and classes. Class is also a central theme in the narrative, as it portrays a struggle between the lower and upper classes. In addition, there is a lack of research on class in video games, which makes it an even more important category to include in the present study. Moreover, the game is set in Victorian England, which is known for its conservative gender roles and stratified class system. Hence, gender and class were selected as the most central categories for the study.

Since the aim is to analyse the characters from the perspective of socially constructed gender and class, the following research question was formed:

RQ1. How are the characters constructed as gendered and classed?

With this aim and research question, the present study aspires to join the discussion and provide new information on gender and class in video games. By analysing the construction of characters as gendered and classed, the present study can also be useful for game and character designers.

7.2. Data Selection & Collection

The data for the present study were collected from the PlayStation 4 (PS4) version of *Assassin's Creed: Syndicate* (2015). The game was played through personally during spring 2019. Following the suggestions of Bizzocchi and Tanenbaum (2011: 301-304) on close reading of video games, the data selection and collection process involved experiencing the game as a player while making observations of it as a researcher. Due to time limits, the game was played through only once, as a single playthrough of the main story in *AC:S* takes over 18 hours on average (HowLongToBeat.com 2019). This makes apparent the challenge the size of the game can lead to (Bizzocchi and Tanenbaum 2011: 300). To make up for this, the game was recorded in video and image form (as screenshots), as suggested by Heidbrink, Knoll, and Wysocki (2015: 76-77). Some of the screenshots will be used to accompany the analysis; according to Ubisoft's video policy (Ubisoft 2016), this kind of usage of their game content is permitted to be published in creative works. Moreover, according to the recommendations from the Digital Games Research Association (DIGRA) (Lastowka and Ogino 2014), it should be allowed to use video game screenshots in scholarly publications if they are used in a transformative manner. In addition to screenshots, detailed notes were taken during the playthrough, and some sections of the game were replayed when necessary. The difficulty of the game was not an issue, as I am familiar with the *Assassin's Creed* video game series by having played the previous instalments. I also have the required skills for playing PS4 games and I am familiar with the action-adventure genre in general.

The data consist of the in-game database as well as both playable sections and non-playable cinematic sequences (cutscenes) from the game, the emphasis being on the latter. The in-game database and the playable sections were selected because they provide information on the characters' skills, environments, outfits, and gear; moreover, the in-game database gives additional details about the characters' backgrounds. Cutscenes were the main focus of the analysis as they are always the same in content for each player each time the game is played. This solves the issue of indeterminacy, which can be a problem when analysing video games (Bizzocchi and Tanenbaum 2011: 298–301). Furthermore, as Ensslin (2011: 123) notes, cutscenes reveal information about the game makers' ideologies behind the game and therefore the way in which the game is supposed to be understood.

The cutscenes to be analysed were chosen following the suggestions by Downs and Smith (2010: 731) who emphasise the importance of introductory and closing scenes in games. They instruct future studies to pay attention to possible sexual tones, such as sexual talk or sexual behaviour, especially

in the finale of a game, because it works as a kind of a reward for the player. Since the focus is on characters, the introductory and final scene for each chosen character was analysed, which makes it possible to examine the first impressions the characters give and their development as characters. Additional scenes throughout the game were chosen based on how important they are for the construction of gender and class. The scenes, as well as the characters' outfits and gear, were restricted to those which appear within the main game; in other words, everything received from DLCs[7] were excluded from the data.

In order to narrow down the characters for the analysis, every named character who appears within the Victorian setting of the game was first counted, excluding the characters who can be added to the game through DLCs. This follows the suggestion of Beasley and Standley (2002: 290) to narrow down the number of characters based on their importance. While Beasley and Standley (ibid.) seem to associate a character's importance with their screen time, the present study also uses the setting as a factor for importance. In addition, since gender and class are at the core of the present study, it was also considered how interesting a character might be for the analysis of gender and class construction. The 81 named characters were ultimately narrowed down to six: the two main playable protagonists, the two main antagonists, and two allies.

The two main protagonists, Jacob and Evie Frye, were chosen first, as they are the main characters and thus the most important ones; moreover, they represent different genders, and they seem to have an upward class mobility. The two main antagonists, Crawford Starrick and Lucy Thorne, were chosen next, as they seemingly belong to a higher class than Jacob and Evie, thus creating a class contrast between the antagonists and the protagonists; in addition, similarly to Jacob and Evie, Crawford and Lucy represent different genders. After some deliberation, the minor character Agnes MacBean was also chosen, since she seems rather clearly to be a working-class character, contrasting the other characters chosen for the analysis. Finally, since Agnes seems mainly interesting for her class construction, a sixth character was chosen based on how interesting they could be from the point of view of gender construction, to balance the two characters out: Ned Wynert, as a transgender man, seemed like a good choice; however, since he appears in the game only in a few brief segments, Henry Green was chosen instead. Henry is the Frye twins' closest ally and Evie's romantic interest and appears in the game frequently. What made him stand out, from the perspective of gender, was his reluctance for aggressive behaviour and fieldwork, as well as his role as a 'damsel in distress' in one mission.

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[7] Downloadable content, such as missions, outfits, and weapons.

7.3. Methods of Analysis

In order to answer the research question, the present study uses qualitative methods: the analysis is conducted using the character taxonomy constructed in chapter 4 and summarised in Table 1. The taxonomy consists of eight main categories: a) physical appearance, b) movements and gestures, c) speech patterns, d) habitual behaviour, e) psychological traits, f) interactions with others, g) environment, h) affordance, and i) biography.

These categories were chosen based on their appearance and prominence in Pearson's (2007) taxonomy, as well as previous studies on gender and class in video games and films, and the theories on socially constructed gender and class. The categories provide a framework for a comprehensive analysis, making it possible to see how different elements are used in constructing gender and class.

The six key characters were analysed one by one, in a random order. The analysis of each character was started from their introductory scenes and followed by the last scenes they appear in; if necessary, additional scenes where the character appears between their first and final scenes were analysed. This order makes it possible to see each character's whole storyline and possible character development, which can be supported by findings from the additional scenes.

The taxonomy provided structure and guidelines for the analysis: each category was considered systematically, one by one, in the analysis of each character. Table 1 (in chapter 4) presents a variety of subcategories for each category, such as clothing for physical appearance, manners for movements and gestures, and (in)formality of speech for speech patterns. These subcategories were utilised in the analysis as inspiration and directions; rather than focusing on each of them, they presented examples of what kind of things to pay attention to and, in turn, to analyse. Hence, while each category is more or less present in the analysis of each character, the subcategories vary depending on their salience for each character's construction as gendered and classed.

8. ANALYSIS

This section consists of the analysis carried out in the present study. First, every character who is named in the in-game encyclopaedia and progression log and appears in the game's Victorian setting is counted and categorised based on their gender and age in Table 2, based on Bleichenbacher's (2008: 97) age categories, in order to give an overview of the characters in the game. This is accompanied with brief descriptions of a selection of the most prominent characters in the game's main missions, in order to provide some further context for the rest of this section. Second, the chosen key characters are analysed in more detail utilising the character taxonomy constructed in chapter 4 and summarised in Table 1.

Table 2 Age and gender of named characters

	Male	Female	Other	Total
Child (0–10)	0	0	0	0
Teenager (11–19)	1	1	0	2
Young adult (20–35)	7	3	1	11
Middle-aged adult (36–50)	5	2	0	7
Senior adult (51–65)	5	2	0	7
Elderly person (66+)	3	1	0	4
Adult (undefined age)	34	16	0	50
Total	55	25	1	81

As is evident in Table 2, most of the characters with a specified age are young adults, and there are twice as many male characters than female characters. These are similar to the character patterns in video games in general: children and elderly characters are rare, and male characters typically dominate by their quantity (e.g. Downs and Smith 2010: 727; Williams et al. 2009: 826). More uncommonly, however, there is one character who is described in the in-game encyclopaedia as transgender. However, besides that, his gender identity is not brought up in the game; moreover, the

other characters' behaviour does not seem to be affected by his gender, and he is presented positively as an ally of the protagonists.

The six characters that were chosen for analysis belong into three different age groups: Jacob and Evie Frye (20), Henry Green (24), and Lucy Thorne (31) are young adults, Crawford Starrick (41) is middle-aged, and Agnes MacBean (53) is a senior, following the age groups presented in Table 2. It is no surprise that the main characters (the main protagonists, their main associate, and their main antagonists) are adults, since that is the age group most video game characters seem to belong in (Williams et al. 2009: 826). Agnes, on the other hand, is significantly older than the two main protagonists, and has only a minor presence in the game; this could be seen as reflecting the representation of older characters in video games, since they appear in games in smaller quantities.

Before moving on to the more in detail analysis of the chosen key characters, it might be beneficial to provide more context for the reader by briefly describing some of the most prominent characters that appear within the game's main missions, including the key characters. The descriptions include the characters' roles and some of their main actions and goals. In addition, if a character is based on a real historical figure, their real-life counterpart is briefly introduced as well.

- **Jacob Frye** (main protagonist) is a young Assassin from Crawley, England, who goes to London with his twin sister Evie Frye in order to take back the city from the Templar Order. In London, he founds a gang called the Rooks and assassinates various Templars to lessen the Templar influence in the city.
- **Evie Frye** (main protagonist) is, like her twin brother, a young Assassin who leaves Crawley for London in order to free it from Templar control. In London, she seeks the Shroud of Eden and aids her brother and the Rooks to fight against the Templars.
- **Henry Green** (supporting character) is the leader of the Assassins in London and thus becomes a mentor for the Frye twins after their arrival in the city. He assists the twins in building a social network and helps Evie in her search for the Shroud of Eden. In addition, he quickly becomes the romantic interest of Evie. Henry's real name is Jayadeep Mir and he is the (fictional) great-grandson of the Maharaja Ranjit Singh.
- **Crawford Starrick** (main antagonist) is the Grand Master of the British Rite of the Templar Order in London. He also owns the (fictional) Starrick Industries. Nevertheless, he desires even more power, which he plans to gain by finding the Shroud of Eden. However, soon after

he discovers the artefact, the Frye twins catch him and manage to assassinate him after a long struggle.

- **Lucy Thorne** (antagonist) is the Templar second-in-command to Crawford Starrick. She is an expert in the occult and focuses on researching the Pieces of Eden and finding the Shroud of Eden. Because of this, she develops a rivalry with Evie, who, in their final confrontation, manages to assassinate Lucy.

- **Pearl Attaway** (supporting/antagonist) is a Templar businesswoman, who owns the (fictional) Attaway Transport. She aims to gain a monopoly on English transportation; in order to achieve this goal, she forms an alliance with Jacob. However, he ends up assassinating her after discovering her Templar relations.

- **John Elliotson** (antagonist) is a doctor, who works for the Templars in the (fictional) Lambeth Asylum. He creates a concoction called "Starrick's Soothing Syrup", which is marketed as a cure for all ailments, but also renders the user mentally weak. Jacob assassinates John in order to stop the production of the Soothing Syrup. The character is based on the real historical figure of the same name (1791–1868), who is best known for his experiments and skills as a clinician.

- **Lord Cardigan/James Brudenell** (antagonist) is a Lieutenant General, a Conservative politician, and a Templar. He plans to have Benjamin Disraeli murdered, but is stopped by Jacob, who manages to assassinate Lord Cardigan instead. The character is based on the real historical figure of James Brudenell, the 7th Earl of Cardigan (1797–1868), who is best known for leading the Charge of the Light Brigade at the Battle of Balaclava.

- **Alexander Graham Bell** (supporting) is an inventor and innovator, who helps the Frye twins by creating weapons for them; in return, the twins assist him with issues related to the telegraph. The character is based on the real historical figure of the same name (1847–1922), who is best known as the inventor of the first practical telephone.

- **Frederick Abberline** (supporting) is a Sergeant, who works with the Frye twins to capture various Templar criminals around London. He also helps the twins to foil a plot by Crawford to assassinate Queen Victoria. The character is based on the real historical figure of the same name (1843–1929), who became the Chief Inspector for the London Metropolitan Police Service in 1890 and who is best known for his involvement in the investigation into the Jack the Ripper murders.

- **Agnes MacBean** (supporting) is the owner of the train which becomes the Assassins' main hideout in London. She takes care of the train, makes improvements to it, and informs the Frye twins of various matters where their help is needed.

- **Charles Darwin** (supporting) is a naturalist, who the Frye twins help with various tasks, such as finding out the creator of the Soothing Syrup. The character is based on the real historical figure of the same name (1809–1882), who is best known for his theory of evolution.

- **Charles Dickens** (supporting) is a writer, with whom the Frye twins investigate local mysteries with supposed paranormal causes. The character is based on the real historical figure of the same name (1812–1870), who is regarded as one of the greatest novelists of the Victorian era.

- **Karl Marx** (supporting) is, among others, a philosopher, economist, and sociologist, who the Frye twins assists in various tasks, such as defending him from attackers. The character is based on the real historical figure of the same name (1818–1883), who is best known for his critical theories on society, economics, and politics, which are central in Marxism.

- **Florence Nightingale** (supporting) is a nurse, who Evie assists by recovering necessary supplies and medicine. The character is based on the real historical figure of the same name (1820–1910), who is best known as the founder of modern nursing and as "the Lady with the Lamp", a title she earned after tending to wounded soldiers during the Crimean War.

- **Benjamin Disraeli** (supporting), the Prime Minister of the United Kingdom, and his wife **Mary Anne Disraeli** (supporting), are assisted by Jacob who defends them from various attacks; in return, the couple helps the Frye twins to gain access to Buckingham Palace. The characters are based on the real historical figures of Benjamin Disraeli (1804–1881), a Conservative politician who served as the Prime Minister twice, and Mary Anne Disraeli (1792–1872), his somewhat eccentric wife.

- **Duleep Singh** (supporting) is Henry Green's great-uncle, who was exiled to Britain when he was 15 years old. Before the exile, he was the last Maharaja of the Sikh Empire. Duleep assists Henry and Evie in finding architectural plans for Buckingham Palace; in return, Evie helps him by recruiting politicians for his cause. The character is based on the real historical figure of Sir Duleep Singh (1838–1893), who was the youngest son of the Maharaja Ranjit Singh and the last Maharaja of the Sikh Empire. During his exile, he befriended Queen Victoria.

- **Queen Victoria** (supporting) knights the Frye twins and Henry Green into the Order of the Sacred Garter after learning about how they saved her life by foiling the plans of Crawford Starrick. The character is based on the real historical figure of Queen Victoria (1819–1901), the Queen of the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Ireland (1837–1901) and the Empress of India (1876–1901).

Next, the six key characters will be analysed from the perspective of gender and class construction, following the characterisation taxonomy in Table 1 (which is presented in chapter 4).

8.1. Jacob Frye

Jacob Frye is one of the playable main protagonists in the game. He is 20 years old and the younger of the Frye twins. He was raised as an Assassin since he was six years old, but, according to the in-game character profile, he was not very interested in the Assassin education and instead wanted to exercise and explore the world. This could suggest masculinity, since muscularity was one of the main features emphasised in Victorian imagery of men (Davidoff 1979: 118). It is not mentioned in Jacob's profile whether or not there was any other form of education available for him than the Assassin education provided by his father, and since Assassins seem to accept initiates regardless of their class[8], Jacob's education as an Assassin does not necessarily suggest a higher class.

Jacob's description in the in-game biography supports his personality and behaviour elsewhere in the game: in general, Jacob seems to prefer hands-on action to careful planning and stealth. This is already established in the scene where the Frye twins are first introduced, when he states that everything he needs is his Hidden Blade[9] (see example 1). In addition, in his first mission, he invades a factory with no pre-made plans, or, if there are plans, they are not shown to the player; in contrast, in Evie's first mission, she is first shown making careful plans. This points towards Jacob's carelessness and lack of education, which are implied in the in-game profile, and which are also apparent in examples 2 and 3. These suggest that he is a working-class character, since in the Victorian society the working classes were seen as the unthinking "doers" who were responsible for the manual and menial work (Davidoff 1979: 89).

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[8] For example, Ezio Auditore da Firenze was born into a noble family (Ubisoft Montreal 2009), whereas Edward Kenway was born into a farmer family (Ubisoft 2013).

[9] Hidden Blade is a characteristic Assassin weapon, which they wear on their forearm and generally use for assassinations.

Example 1
[Jacob and Evie are hiding with their fellow Assassin George Westhouse behind a railway carriage near the Ferris Ironworks in Croydon.]
George: The iron ships from here. The Templar running things is Rupert Ferris, and our target one. Target two is Sir David Brewster, who's got his hands on a bauble that could ruin us in this wretched war. <u>Think you both can handle it?</u>
[While George was looking away, Jacob and Evie had climbed on top of the railway carriage.]
Jacob: <u>What a question</u>.
George: Oh, right, my mistake. Ladies and gentlemen, the unstoppable Frye twins; see them nightly at Covent Garden!
Evie: George, honestly, I've studied the plans of the laboratory and have every route covered.
Jacob: And <u>I've got all I need right here.</u> [Flicks his Hidden Blade.][10]

Example 2
[The twins are having an argument in their train hideout.]
Evie: I have been repairing your mistakes. "Too much haste is too little speed."
Jacob: Don't you quote Father at me.
Evie: That's Plato! And I am sorry this doesn't involve anything you can destroy.[11]

Example 3
Evie: This is… my God this is Michel Reuge's vault.
Jacob: Gasp! Michael Reuge's vault? It can't be!
Evie: You have no idea who that is, do you?
Jacob: Not the foggiest. [12]

Jacob's preference for manual work and action is also displayed in his first mission, as it includes a segment in which he engages in combat with multiple enemies on the roof of a moving train, as shown in Figure 1. In addition, it is implied in his character-specific skills, which make him deadlier (e.g., a skill called "Gunslinger II" makes his countershots automatic headshots) and tougher (e.g., a skill called "Defense III", which makes him take less damage overall). From the beginning to the end, Jacob's missions focus more on action and fighting, while Evie is more research and stealth oriented, as is evident in examples 1 and 4, which are from the first and the last main story missions, respectively. Jacob's actions often have chaotic consequences, such as the train from the first mission derailing and collapsing. These violent and chaotic tendencies construct him as masculine, as they are the opposite of the Victorian tender and moral femininity (Davidoff 1979: 89). In addition, they suggest that he is a member of the working classes, since during the Victorian era they were seen as uncontrollable and dangerous (e.g. Skeggs 2004: 49, 105). On the other hand, these kind of actions are rather common in action video games, and the Assassins tend to act violently as well in order to achieve their goals – as their name suggests, they typically assassinate their targets, and it is not uncommon for them to attack their targets' subordinates or their other enemies either.

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[10] From AC:S Sequence 01 A Spanner in the Works. Underlining added for emphasis.
[11] From AC:S Sequence 09 Double Trouble.
[12] From AC:S Secrets of London.

Figure 1 Jacob Frye fighting against enemies on the roof of a moving train[13]

Example 4
[The twins walk into the outdoor ballroom in Buckingham Palace, unarmed and dressed up for the ball the Queen is having.]
Evie: I shall go and find the Piece of Eden.
Jacob: As you wish. I am off to meet Freddy.
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[Jacob meets sergeant Frederick Abberline, their ally, on the rooftops.]
Abberline: Starrick peppered the regulars with his own men and took several guards hostage. Your weapons are in there.
[Jacob retrieves his weapons from the hiding spot and puts on his Assassin gear.]
Abberline: Look. [Abberline gestures towards the snipers on the rooftops.]
Jacob: Right. I'll kill the impostors and rescue the captives.[14]

Moreover, Jacob seems adamant that forming a gang of his own is the right way to achieve the goal of freeing London from the Templars, further associating him with the poor (see examples 4 and 5). The desire for leadership could also be interpreted as a way to construct his masculinity, because in the Victorian era the middle-class man was considered to be the head of society (e.g. Davidoff 1979: 89). However, despite his willingness to become a leader, he shows no interest in strategic thinking: his lack of interest in planning ahead and his ignorance regarding their enemy's strength and power are evident in examples 5, 6, and 7, in which he does not seem to accept or even consider other kind of approaches to solving their problem. This separates him from the Victorian middle-class man, who

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[13] Screenshot from AC:S Sequence 01 A Spanner in the Works..
[14] From AC:S Sequence 09 A Night to Remember.

was implied to do the brain work, and instead brings him closer to "the hands", who did the menial work (Davidoff 1979: 89).

Example 5
Jacob: I've always thought of myself as a gang leader. Firm, but fair. We'll have uniforms. And I'll unite a mix of disenfranchised outsiders under one name. That's it, Evie! We can rally them to our side.
Evie: Oh, like the way that you rallied those card players at the Oakbrook Tavern into the river?
Jacob: That was different, they beat me at whist. I can see it now! We'll call ourselves the Rooks.
Evie: You were never good at chess, either.
Jacob: Have you got a better plan?
Evie: Find the Piece of Eden.
Jacob: Ah… [Throws his hands in the air][15]

Example 6
Evie: Splendid! We'll need focused aid-
Jacob: Focused aid? Pf. We take over Starrick's gangs, we cripple his control.
Evie: You're not aiming high enough. Starrick has influence in every branch of society, we need to match him.
Jacob: I see what you're saying, Evie. We need the Rooks.[16]

Example 7
Evie: Let us return to locating the Piece of Eden.
Jacob: We need to reclaim London from Starrick. Who are my targets?
Evie: It's not time for that yet.
Jacob: I didn't come to London to hunt curios![17]

Jacob's working-class status is also implied by his default outfit, which consists of, among other things, a grey jacket, blue vest, and a white shirt, which are all shabby; in addition, he is wearing a cap, trousers, and boots, all of which are brown. This fits Sullivan's (2014: 184–185) observation about the type of clothing the working classes wear in the film adaptations of *The Hunger Games* and its first sequel. Jacob's outfit therefore suggests that he is someone who cannot afford to take care of his clothing and who prefers practicality over luxury, i.e. as part of the working classes. He is also wearing a gauntlet that conceals his Hidden Blade on his left forearm, which indicates his occupation as an Assassin and thus his readiness for violence. Furthermore, he seems to have a scar on his left cheek and his right eyebrow, suggesting his engagement in violent behaviour. In addition, his face and nose are long and he has facial hair, which are typically seen as more masculine than feminine biological features, thus further emphasising his masculinity.

While Jacob's physique and facial features stay the same throughout the game, it is possible for the player to change his clothing: throughout the game, the player is rewarded with better-looking and more useful outfits, accessories, and weapons for both characters. For example, the default outfit Jacob wears has the following description when inspected in the in-game inventory: "Jacob has no

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[15] From AC:S Sequence 03 Somewhere That's Green. Underlining added for emphasis.
[16] From AC:S Sequence 03 Somewhere That's Green.
[17] From AC:S Sequence 03 Freedom of the Press.

love of flashy clothes and this standard outfit suits him well", whereas the final outfit he can craft after finishing a main story mission is described as follows: "Few outfits are as imposing or as regal. Truly the mark of a man at the height of his power". The visual differences of the outfits are demonstrated in Figure 2: while the default outfit is bland and ragged, the final outfit is more decorated and includes an impractical-looking long coat as well as a top hat. It is also possible for the player to unlock different colours for the outfits by collecting pressed flowers, which are optional collectables. In other words, if the player wants to, they can customise to some extent the visual appearance of the Frye twins. Furthermore, the twins have character-specific accessories, which for Jacob are belts, and which also improve in quality and appearance as the player receives new ones throughout the game. This, as well as the outfits' descriptions and better qualities, indicate a change in his class status. Even if the player does not change Jacob's or Evie's outfit and gear, the twins' affordance increases, as they have more and better choices available. Hence, it is suggested by these that the twins are upwardly mobile in the class system, in a similar sense as Ivănescu (2018: 235) explains the protagonist in *Beneath A Steel Sky* (Revolution Software 1994) to be.

Figure 2 Jacob Frye in his default (left) and Maximum Dracula (right) outfits

As for weapons, it is mentioned in the game that Jacob prefers using the brass knuckles as his weapon, but he can also use a cane-sword, which is Evie's preferred weapon, or a kukri, if the player so wishes. The weapons have three attributes, which make them different from each other: while the kukri has the highest lethality and attack, the cane-sword has the highest stun; the knuckles, on the other hand,

are the most balanced in all three. Despite the brass knuckles being Jacob's favourite weapon, the player makes the final choice in which one he (and Evie) uses. In addition to these, the twins have a gun, a hidden blade, smoke bombs, throwing knives, voltaic bombs, and hallucinogenic darts. All of the weapons can be upgraded, which improves their attributes (such as damage and attack); moreover, throughout the game, the player receives better versions of the knuckles, cane-swords, kukris, guns, and hidden blade gauntlets. Each new version also has a fancier design than the previous ones. As the selection and quality of the available weapons increase, so does the twins' affordance, suggesting that their class status rises as well.

The characters' upwards mobility is also constructed through the environments: both Jacob and Evie begin their journey in the factories in Croydon, and in London they start from Whitechapel, one of the poorer districts, until finally they both end up in the Buckingham Palace. In between, the locations Jacob visits range from a distillery and the harbour to the Bank of England and the Houses of Parliament. The variety and diversity of the locations indicate high mobility and thus high affordance; moreover, since the Frye twins are playable characters, they can access more locations than the other characters, most notably the rooftops and areas that have restricted access, such as the aforementioned Palace of Westminster and Buckingham Palace. However, they have to enter these location discreetly and their actions in them are limited and, especially in the Buckingham Palace, they can access only certain areas. The twins' mobility is also increased by a train they hijack in London and turn into their hideout. At first, the interior is messy and dark, whereas at the end, it is decorated with houseplants, souvenirs, and hunting trophies, and it has better furniture and lighting. The train's upgraded interior clearly indicates an increase in wealth, taste, and luxury, constructing Jacob, as well as Evie, as more middle class than working class. This kind of change in the environments is similar to how Ivănescu (2018: 236–237) describes the differences between the specific environments dedicated to each of the classes in *Beneath A Steel Sky* (Revolution Software 1994).

Similar upward mobility is also noticeable in Jacob's human surroundings. At the beginning of the game, he appears mostly with his sister Evie, but one by one his network expands, ranging from his gang members to Frederick Abberline, Charles Darwin, Benjamin and Mary Anne Disraeli, and, in the end, Queen Victoria herself. In other words, the people he associates with are higher and higher in the class system towards the end of the main story missions, thus suggesting that Jacob's class status rises as well.

The diversity of his social network is also reflected in Jacob's speech patterns. When he is interacting with characters who perhaps are closer to his own class status, i.e. working-class or middle-class characters, he often uses a more informal tone; moreover, he tends to be blunt and straightforward. For example, when the twins meet Alexander Graham Bell for the first time, Jacob interrupts Henry, who had been using a formal and polite tone with Bell, to bluntly ask if Bell can fix a piece of their equipment (see example 8). In the twins' first meeting with Sergeant Frederick Abberline, he bluntly removes Abberline's disguise and shows his discontent in a direct manner, causing Abberline to comment on Jacob's lack of discretion (see example 9). However, sometimes his blunt remarks are interpreted as sarcasm by the other characters (as in example 10). He also shows his emotions openly with his facial expressions, for example, by raising his eyebrows in disbelief and shaking his head in dissatisfaction; in addition, he gestures frequently with his hands to add emphasis to his words. His lack of control and refinement in his speech and manners suggests that he is a working-class man, since his straightforwardness and bluntness is, in a sense, the opposite of sensitivity and gentleness, which can be seen as related to nurture and home, both of which were seen as women's areas in the Victorian era (Davidoff 1979: 89; Skeggs 2004: 51). On the other hand, his informal and direct manners could imply a social proximity and friendliness with the characters, which is perhaps suggested by his way of calling Abberline "Freddie".

Example 8
Henry: Aleck, I beg your pardon, these are friends of mine, Evie Frye and her brother, Jacob.
Bell: Oh, um... Alexander Graham Bell.
Henry: Linguist, inventor and technical expert. Aleck, I have something of a favour to ask of you.
[Jacob interrupts and shows Bell a rope launcher.]
Jacob: Can you fix this?[18]

Example 9
[Abberline approaches the twins, disguised as a woman.]
Abberline: Psst. (imitating the voice of an old woman) I may know a thing or two about that splendid fellow you're talking about.
[Jacob looks at him suspiciously]
Jacob: What's this? [Takes off Abberline's bonnet.]
Abberline: (angry) God's sake, are you trying to blow the gaff?
Jacob: (taken aback) What--
Abberline: (quietly) Sergeant Abberline at your service. I presume you're the Frye twins Green mentioned.
Jacob: (through his teeth) I was expecting you to be a policeman.
Abberline: I was expecting YOU to be discreet.
Evie: Henry Green said that you could help us go unnoticed.
Abberline: This is how it will work. I will give you the names of criminal gang members, you will bring them back to me. Quietly.
Jacob: We'll be as quiet as an old lady. A very hairy, strange old lady, that looks a lot like a policeman.
[Abberline leaves, and Jacob shakes his head.][19]

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[18] From AC:S Sequence 03 Freedom of the Press.
[19] From AC:S Sequence 03 Abberline, We Presume. Underlining added for emphasis.

Example 10
Bell: We can now defend the principle of impartial news and free speech.
Jacob: Free is fair, but free and brief is far better! [Glances at Evie with raised eyebrows]
Bell: (laughs) Hah, Frye, such caustic wit.
[Evie and Jacob laugh awkwardly.][20]

However, whenever Jacob is interacting with someone of a higher class than he is, such as the Disraelis or the Queen, he acts and speaks in a more formal and less direct manner. For instance, in example 11, he politely addresses Benjamin Disraeli by his title and Mary Anne Disraeli by "madam", and instead of telling them bluntly the true state of affairs, he tells them a white lie about his identity and the reason he is with them[21]. Moreover, he uses formal phrases such as "if you'll excuse me a moment" (in example 11), "perhaps you can help me with another inquiry, madam" (in example 12), and "that strikes me as a dangerous idea" (in example 12). However, he still seems to express his emotions rather openly with facial expressions, such as in Figure 3. In other words, Jacob seems to be capable of controlling himself when it is necessary, without completely limiting himself. His polite and formal tone with the Disraelis creates a social distance between the characters, as he cannot talk to them the same way he talks to others who are closer to his class status. It is also implied by Mary Anne that Jacob (and Evie) are far below them (see example 13). Hence, although he seems to be upwardly mobile, Jacob does not ascend beyond the middle class.

Example 11
[Jacob enters the Disraelis' carriage uninvited and sits next to Mary Anne, who gasps.]
Benjamin: What's the meaning of this? Who the devil are you?
Jacob: Prime Minister, I'm your new bodyguard. Jacob Frye-
Benjamin: I wasn't informed of any new bodyguard. Who is your commanding officer?
Mary Anne: Let the boy speak, Dizzy. [Giggles and smiles at Jacob.]
Jacob: Madam. Apologies, [turns back to Benjamin] but we've learned of a threat on your life, and the Met thought it best to move quickly.
Benjamin: Threat? What sort of threat?
[The three of them hear gunshots outside the carriage.]
Jacob: That sort. And if you'll excuse me a moment.[22]

Example 12
Jacob: I assure you, madam, Gladstone is innocent in this.
Mary Anne: But he tried to kill my husband.
Jacob: Well, we'll look into Gladstone. Perhaps you can help me with another inquiry, madam.
--
Mary Anne: And are you familiar with the poorer districts of our city?
Jacob: Roughly.
Mary Anne: Wonderful! As it happens, I've been eager to tour the Devil's Acre. If you were to escort me, I'd be happy to assist you in your inquiry.
Jacob: That strikes me as a dangerous idea.[23]

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[20] From AC:S Sequence 03 Freedom of the Press.
[21] Even though his intent is to protect the Disraelis, he was not sent by the Met to work as their bodyguard.
[22] From AC:S Sequence 07 The Bodyguard.
[23] From AC:S Sequence 07 The Bodyguard.

Example 13
Jacob: What my sister's failing to say, is that we require entrance into the ball tonight.
Mary Anne: Impossible! Even if there were any invitation cards remaining, which there are not, someone of your... lowly station...[24]

Figure 3 Jacob Frye reacting to Mary Anne Disraeli's unexpected proposition[25]

In conclusion, it seems that Jacob's class and class-crossing are constructed mainly through his physical appearance, habitual behaviour, psychological traits, environment, interactions with others, speech patterns, and affordances, i.e. his mobility, access, and availability of choice. Firstly, his default outfit is ragged and bland, suggesting that he is a working class character, but as the player progresses in the game, he receives new outfits and gear of higher quality and fancier design, which gives him the ability to choose and hence increases his affordance. The increased quality and design of his outfits and gear also suggest his increasing taste for luxury. Secondly, his preference for manual work rather than brain work aligns him more with the Victorian norms for the working classes than the middle classes (Davidoff 1979: 89). Secondly, his journey in London starts in Whitechapel, which is one of the poorer districts, again highlighting his working-class origins. However, new areas become available to him one after another, and he finally reaches Westminster and the Buckingham Palace. Simultaneously, his social network expands from his gang to include middle-class and upper-class characters, too. In other words, his surroundings seem to reflect his upwards class journey.

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[24] From AC:S Sequence 09 Double Trouble.
[25] From AC:S Sequence 07 The Bodyguard.

Finally, his speech patterns indicate the difference in social distance between him and the other characters who are associated with various social classes: with working-class and (lower) middle-class characters he speaks in a blunt and straightforward manner, whereas with (upper) middle-class and upper-class characters he uses a formal and polite tone. Hence, it is suggested that he is closer to the lower half of the class hierarchy than the upper half.

His gender, on the other hand, seems to be most notably constructed through his physical appearance, habitual behaviour, psychological traits, and speech patterns. First, his facial structure and hair suggest a traditional masculinity. Moreover, his scars and weapons suggest his capability for aggressive or violent behaviour, thus adding to his masculine appearance. Second, the aggressive and violent tendencies are among his habitual behaviour patterns and psychological traits. He seems to be mainly interested in action and combat, and he does not seem interested in engaging in less aggressive kind of activities, such as strategizing or stealth. While these kinds of activities are typical for the Assassins as well as other characters in action video games in general, they also suggest Victorian masculinity rather than femininity (Davidoff 1979: 89, 118). Another trait he displays in the game is leadership, which shows in his interest in forming and leading a gang of his own. This is also closely associated with Victorian masculinity, since men were seen as the heads of society (Davidoff 1979: 89). Finally, his bluntness could be seen as marking him as traditionally masculine as well, since masculine speech is stereotypically considered to be more direct, in contrast to feminine politeness (Litosseliti 2006: 28–29, 38).

8.2. Evie Frye

Evie Frye is the other main playable protagonist in the game. She is 20 years old as well and the older of the Frye twins. Like Jacob, she was raised as an Assassin by their father since the twins were six years old. According to the in-game character profile, she was studious and technical, and specialised in research. She adopted her father's strong sense of social duty, and, according to the profile, she became valued among Assassins for her planning and problem-solving skills, as well as her "ability to see the human side of any equation". Her access and interest in knowledge and educating herself could be seen as constructing her as middle class, since the working classes, especially working-class women, rarely were able to access education (Matthew 2010: 544–546).

Her planning skills and interest in research are evident throughout the game, as seen in examples 14 and 15, which are from the first and the last main story missions, respectively. In her first mission,

Evie first plans her route with a map and then proceeds to approach her goal stealthily and cautiously. In the last main story mission, she studies her surroundings and makes plans accordingly. Moreover, she frequently emphasises the need for caution and research, when Jacob would rather go straight into the action (as in examples 16 and 17). Her character-specific missions are also more focused on her research and finding a Piece of Eden. In addition, she keeps a journal[26] and helps Henry collect pressed flowers[27]. These point towards her more academic and educated nature, as well as her affordance for leisure. She thus displays forms of behaviour that were typically associated with the higher class women in the Victorian era, especially since it was only from the 1870s onwards that the typical middle class woman was able to engage in activities outside her home (Matthew 2010: 546), and the game takes place in 1868.

Example 14
[Jacob and Evie are hiding with their fellow Assassin George Westhouse behind a railway carriage near the Ferris Ironworks in Croydon.]
George: The iron ships from here. The Templar running things is Rupert Ferris, and our target one. Target two is Sir David Brewster, who's got his hands on a bauble that could ruin us in this wretched war. Think you both can handle it?
[While George was looking away, Jacob and Evie had climbed on top of the railway carriage.]
Jacob: What a question.
George: Oh, right, my mistake. Ladies and gentlemen, the unstoppable Frye twins; see them nightly at Covent Garden!
Evie: George, honestly, <u>I've studied the plans of the laboratory and have every route covered.</u>[28]

Example 15
[The twins walk into the outdoor ballroom in Buckingham Palace, unarmed and dressed up for the ball the Queen is having.]
Evie: I shall go and find the Piece of Eden.
Jacob: As you wish. I am off to meet Freddy.
[Jacob walks off. Evie studies her surroundings.]
Evie: (to herself) The plans are located in the White Drawing Room. Which is most likely locked. The Captain of the Guard will have a key.[29]

Example 16
Henry: Over the years, I have established a number of connections across the city.
Evie: Splendid! We'll need focused aid-
Jacob: Focused aid? Pf. We take over Starrick's gangs, we cripple his control.
Evie: You're not aiming high enough. Starrick has influence in every branch of society, we need to match him.[30]

Example 17
Evie: Let us return to locating the Piece of Eden.
Jacob: We need to reclaim London from Starrick. Who are my targets?
Evie: It's not time for that yet.[31]

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[26] The journal is accessible in the in-game database.
[27] Although the flowers can be picked up as Jacob as well, Evie is the one who initiates the objective and talks about the flowers with Henry.
[28] From AC:S Sequence 01 A Spanner in the Works. Underlining added for emphasis.
[29] From AC:S Sequence 09 A Night to Remember.
[30] From AC:S Sequence 03 Somewhere That's Green.
[31] From AC:S Sequence 03 Freedom of the Press.

Evie's preference for strategy and caution are also implied in her character-specific skills, which improve her sneaking (e.g., a skill called "Chameleon" turns her invisible when she is stationary in sneak mode[32] and has no enemies in close proximity, as demonstrated in Figure 4) and throwing knife abilities (e.g., a skill called "Knife Master II" allows her to carry more throwing knives[33] and increases the damage they inflict). Moreover, her cloaks (i.e. her character-specific accessories) indicate her preference for stealth as well, since the better her cloak is, the higher its stealth level is. Her favourite weapon, which, according to the in-game encyclopaedia, is the cane-sword, is good for stunning, perhaps suggesting her reluctance for hands-on combat and action; on the other hand, her large supply of throwing knives, her Hidden Blade, as well as her access to guns and other weapons, indicate that she is nevertheless prepared for violence.

Her sneaking skills and stealthy outfits and gear could be seen as pointing towards her educatedness, as they require more planning and knowledge to utilise them the best; on the other hand, they could be a sign of her intelligence. Regardless, they suggest a tendency for rational thinking, which connects her with a Victorian middle-class masculinity, since Victorian middle-class men were seen as rational beings who did the brain work (Davidoff 1979: 89). On the other hand, her disinclination for hands-on combat and aggressive action could suggest a Victorian femininity, since one of the main features of it was tenderness and morality (ibid.). Regardless, it seems that she is closer to the rational "heads" than the menial "hands" of the Victorian society (ibid.). In addition, her stealthy and rational approaches contrast Jacob's more hands-on and manual approaches; they also emphasise the stealthy nature of the Assassins, who often prefer to work in the shadows rather than in plain sight. Nonetheless, she breaks the stereotype of the Victorian woman, who was most likely to mainly do activities related to taking care of the family and the household (Davidoff 1979: 89; Matthews 2010: 546; Skeggs 2004: 51) and who was associated more with emotions than rationality (Davidoff 1979: 89). Moreover, her competency, independency, and intelligence are signs of the Lara phenomenon (see Jansz and Martis 2007: 146), adding her to the increasing number of strong and capable female action heroines in video games.

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[32] The Assassins have a sneak mode, which increases their stealth and makes it harder for the enemies to detect them. In sneak mode, the character crouches and hoods themselves.
[33] Throwing knives make little noise and they can be used from a distance; they are therefore stealthier weapons.

Figure 4 Evie Frye with her Chameleon skill active[34]

Similarly to Jacob, Evie receives better and fancier outfits and gear as the player progresses in the game; in other words, like Jacob's, her affordances increase towards the end of the game. Her default outfit has some decorations, as is evident in its description as well: "Dramatic yet ultimately simple, this is Evie's outfit of choice". In its default colour, it includes a long black coat with red accents, short ruffled sleeves on top of long tight sleeves, and a corset back; in addition, she wears black boots with low heels. Her default cloak is red and has the Assassin symbol on it; moreover, it is described as "a plain cloak that looks nice enough but provides little protection". The final outfit she receives through the main story missions has a similar design to her default outfit: it includes a long coat with similar sleeves and a similar back as well as similar boots. The outfit has the following description: "To wear this outfit is to display one's status as a Master Assassin. The sharp silhouette and striking blood red highlights are a warning to enemies that they look upon Death itself". One of the highest-level cloaks is the Royal Cloak, which Evie receives as a gift from Queen Victoria; it is bright red with golden embellishments, and it features both the Assassin symbol and the royal coat of arms of the United Kingdom. It is no surprise the description reads "When you wear this cloak, you are wearing glory itself". Figure 5 showcases the default and the Master Assassin outfits with the default cloak and one of the highest-level cloaks, respectively. However, it is up to the player whether or not Evie changes her outfit and cloak during the game.

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[34] From AC:S Sequence 07 Unbreaking the Bank.

Figure 5 Evie Frye wearing her default (left) and Master Assassin (right) outfits

As is visible in Figure 5, already her first, default outfit suggests an affordance for luxury, as it has fine details that have no practical purpose; this provides an interesting contrast to Jacob, whose default outfit is ragged and more practical. The differences in their outfits suggest differences in their taste and thus in their class as well (Bourdieu 1984/2010: 169–171, 375-380): whereas the practicality of Jacob's default outfit indicates working class, the elegance of Evie's default outfit suggests a higher class. While Jacob's other outfits are clearly fancier than his first outfit, Evie's outfits do not seem to follow the same pattern, supposedly because her first outfit already has a sense of luxury to it – on the contrary, some of the other outfits have simpler designs than the default one. Every outfit, however, includes a long coat, which seems like an unpractical choice for an Assassin, thus making luxury more important than practicality; on the other hand, when Evie has to wear a ball gown to the Queen's ball, it is stated that her movements are restricted, and she clearly does not feel comfortable in it (see example 18). The upward class mobility, which is suggested by the changes in Jacob's outfits, is in Evie's case displayed more clearly in her cloaks, as the default cloak is plain and has a dull red colour, whereas the highest-level cloaks are brightly coloured and finely decorated (as can be seen in Figure 5). While the increased luxury of the twins' outfits suggests their change of taste towards that of the higher classes, for the player it indicates their progress in the game.

Example 18
Evie: (to Jacob) I'll catch up as soon as I'm rid of this infernal contraption.[35]

Another notable feature in Evie's appearance is the emphasis on her femininity: her coats have dress-like silhouettes with thin waists, wide hips, and long skirts, she wears some eye makeup, and her hair is braided into a bun. These further suggest that she is not aligning with a Victorian working class femininity, since she seems to afford to take care of her appearance, which might have been difficult for Victorian working class women, who most likely did not have enough money to spend on dressing up or cleaning themselves (Matthew 2010: 536–537, 540). Moreover, Evie seems to dress up somewhat modestly, at least when it comes to her makeup and hairstyle; in present day, this is typically associated with middle class women, who want to avoid working class excess (Skeggs 2004: 99). However, it is important to remember that many video game characters are idealised when it comes to their visual appearance (MacCallum-Stewart 2014: no page given), and Evie seems to be no exception: while her appearance can be interpreted in the context of Victorian values and standards, it is undoubtedly also influenced by modern day beauty ideals, perhaps to an even larger extent than by those of the Victorian era. The modern influence on her visual appearance is most notable in her physique, which is lean but also somewhat curvy, and her facial structure, which is round with a small nose, large eyes, thin eyebrows, and full lips. Moreover, her appearance resembles the appearance of other modern day video game heroines, such as Lara Croft in *Tomb Raider* (Crystal Dynamics 2013), Jodie in *Beyond: Two Souls* (Quantic Dream 2013), and Claire Redfield in the remake of *Resident Evil 2* (Capcom R&D Division 1 2019). This could imply that Evie's physical appearance is constructed more according to present day beauty standards than Victorian era reality.

Although her physical appearance does not show her upward class mobility the same way as Jacob's, Evie's environments follow the same pattern as his: she starts her journey in London in the Whitechapel district and eventually ends up in the district of Westminster. In between, she traverses around London, entering locations such as the Bank of England, Tower of London, and Buckingham Palace. In other words, she can access environments that are closed to the general public, suggesting increased affordances and mobility; these are also implied by the Assassins' train hideout, which is constantly moving and improves in quality (see chapter 8.1. for more details). While her high affordance indicates a higher-class status, her high mobility can also be seen as suggesting that she represents the working class, since they were perceived as dangerously mobile (Skeggs 2004: 49). On the other hand, working-class women were typically less mobile than working-class men, since it was common for women, regardless of class, to stay at home taking care of the household and the

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[35] From AC:S Sequence 09 A Night to Remember.

family (Davidoff 1979: 89; Skeggs 2004: 51). Thus, Evie seems to break the Victorian norms of women's norms by having high mobility.

The same way in which her access to different locations increases throughout the game, also her social network expands: her contacts come to include figures such as Alexander Graham Bell, Florence Nightingale, and, as the game progresses towards the end, Duleep Singh and Queen Victoria. While her relationship with Queen Victoria stays rather distant, her relationship with Singh is more relaxed and she works together with him on a few occasions. This reflects her upward class mobility, and further constructs her as a character of higher class than her brother Jacob, since her social circle includes more characters of a higher class status and she also interacts with them more often and on a more familiar level than Jacob. The class difference between the twins is also evident in their speech: while Jacob adapts his speech style depending on who he is with, Evie seems polite, gentle, and somewhat formal regardless of who she is talking to and even when she is alone (see example 19). Her politeness is also suggested by her tendency to help to others, such as Bell and Marx (see examples 20 and 21). In addition to her formal way of speaking, she often cites something that her father or other intellectuals have said (see examples 22 and 23). Her speech style, her sophistication and access to education and knowledge thus, suggests that she seeks a higher-class status,. Moreover, her politeness and helpfulness could be interpreted to index her as aligning with traditional Victorian middle-class femininity, which emphasized ladylike behaviour and respectability (Davidoff 1979: 91, 111, 114).

Example 19
Evie: (to herself) No loose ends. Now, to decouple the locomotive and create a diversion.
--
Evie: (to herself) That was far too close. I must find a way out.[36]

Example 20
Evie: Jacob, wait. Mr. Bell, allow me to help with your fuses.
Bell: Oh, you will not find me too proud to accept, Ms. Frye.[37]

Example 21
Jacob: You've got the look of a man who wants something.
Marx: -- I challenge you both to help those who REALLY need your assistance. The working people.
Evie: An interesting challenge. We accept.
Jacob: Shouldn't we at least talk about these things fir... sod it, we accept.[38]

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[36] From AC:S Sequence 02 A Simple Plan.
[37] From AC:S Sequence 03 Freedom of the Press.
[38] From AC:S Karl Marx memory: Cat and Mouse.

Example 22
Evie: "First understand the dance, only then become the dancer."
Jacob: Oh? So you're taking over where Father left off?[39]

Example 23
[The twins are having an argument in their train hideout.]
Evie: I have been repairing your mistakes. "Too much haste is too little speed."
Jacob: Don't you quote Father at me.
Evie: That's Plato![40]

However, there is one exception to Evie's politeness: her brother Jacob. Since they are almost the exact opposites of each other, they often banter and argue with each other (as shown in examples 24 and 25). At one point, while having an argument, they even decide to stop working together; however, they eventually are able to put their arguments aside. While Evie's less polite manners with Jacob are arguably due to their close relationship, she keeps her polite and formal tone with Henry, who she also becomes close with. While it is a way to show respect, it can also be a way to construct distance, which would most likely be due to her father's teachings, as seen in example 25. Her affection for Henry could be also seen as emphasising her femininity, since in Victorian society middle-class women represented emotions and were seen as the heart, in opposition to middle-class men who represented rationality and the brains (Davidoff 1979: 89). On the other hand, her attempt to prioritise rationality over emotions could be perceived as adding masculinity to her character, following the Victorian ideal of the rational middle-class man (ibid.).

Throughout the game she seems to be struggling to balance her feminine and masculine sides; for example, in one of her missions she fails to reach her goal, because she chooses Henry's safety instead of following her original plans, thus listening to her more feminine instincts of nurture; after the accident, however, she distances herself from Henry and tries to restrict her emotions, prioritising her mission as an Assassin. Nevertheless, she later on in the game comes to terms with her own emotions and realises what is important for her, allowing herself to behave more affectionately towards Henry. Finally, Henry proposes to her and Evie happily accepts; however, despite their marriage, it seems unlikely that Evie would abandon her lifestyle as an Assassin and become a Victorian housewife instead – indeed, as can be seen in the game's DLC called *Jack the Ripper* (Ubisoft Montpellier 2015), Evie continues her work for the Assassin Brotherhood.

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[39] From AC:S Sequence 03 Freedom of the Press.
[40] From AC:S Sequence 09 Double Trouble.

Example 24
Jacob: Did I hear something?
Evie: No. Just the voices in your own head.
Jacob: And yet they are so much more pleasant than yours.
Evie: Charming.
Jacob: Aren't I?[41]

Example 25
Evie: (annoyed) I don't require any company. And Mr. Green is following up on some leads of his own.
Jacob: (imitating Evie) "Oh, yes, Mr. Green. That's a fascinating idea." (walks closer) "Oh, please, Mr. Green, come and take a look at this book and stand oh-so-close to me, Mr. Green.
Evie: I do not-- (pause) Well, perhaps you have nothing better to do, but I am busy protecting the Assassins.
Jacob: Are you, really? What was it Father used to say...
Evie: Don't allow personal feelings to compromise the mission.
Jacob: Precisely.[42]

In conclusion, contrary to Jacob's more obvious upward trajectory, Evie seems to be constructed mostly as a character whose class does not change much during the game: her rise in the class hierarchy seems to be mainly suggested by her improving and broadening physical and human surroundings as well as her increased affordance (regarding outfits, gear, and environments). Otherwise, even from the beginning of the game, she seems to display features that align more with the middle or upper classes. First, she is constructed as well-educated, sophisticated, and rational, which suggests that she belongs to a higher class than the working classes, according to the norms of the Victorian society (Davidoff 1979: 89); these traits are visible in her biography, habitual behaviour, psychological traits, and speech patterns. Second, her physical appearance indicates that she can afford to take care of her looks and that she can afford luxury; however, despite her rather elegant-looking outfits, she is capable of running, climbing, and fighting, suggesting that her outfits are also practical. The only time when her movements are restricted by her outfit is when she is wearing a ballgown in the Queen's party, as she needs to blend in with the upper classes. Her discontent with having to wear the ballgown suggests that she does not identify with the upper classes. All these factors combined, her physical appearance can be seen as constructing her mostly as middle class, since it is a combination of luxury and practicality, reflecting the omnivorousness of the middle classes (Skeggs 2004: 143-144). Her high mobility, on the other hand, can be seen as making her an exceptional middle-class woman, since unlike most other middle-class women, she is not tied to a home or a family and is free to travel around London. Her high mobility does not align well with the working-class women either, since their mobility was related to work or family.

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[41] From AC:S Sequence 09 A Night to Remember.
[42] From AC:S Sequence 05 A Room with a View.

When it comes to gender, she seems to be constructed of a combination of feminine and masculine traits. First, her physical appearance most evidently constructs her as feminine, as it follows the present-day beauty standards and aligns with the common appearances of other popular video game action heroines. Her psychological traits, speech patterns, and interactions with others, on the other hand, consist of both feminine and masculine traits, as on the one hand, she is polite, helpful, and affectionate, which are related to the Victorian norms of women nurturing the home and the family, as well as the Victorian ideal of the middle-class woman as a respectable lady, and on the other hand, she attempts to restrict her emotions and think more rationally, which aligns with the Victorian norm of middle-class men being rational and acting as the brains of the society (Davidoff 1979: 89, 91). Moreover, her habitual behaviour, which includes violence and research, suggests that she breaks the norms of the Victorian woman, whose place was typically at home and who generally could not afford educational activities such as research. Despite this, she is sophisticated and seems to be well-educated, further indicating that she is an exception among the Victorian women.

8.3. Henry Green

Henry Green, or Jayadeep Mir, is the main ally of the Frye twins. He is a 25-year-old man, who, according to the in-game encyclopaedia, left his home country, India, for an Assassin mission in England sometime earlier. There, he adopted a series of fake identities, one of which the curiosity-shop-owning Henry Green is. He is described as good at keeping secrets and meeting people. Like the Frye twins, he was trained to become an Assassin; however, his preference for books over violence and its abnormality for an Assassin is emphasised, thus constructing him as an unusual member of the Assassins. While his education could be seen as a sign of him belonging to a higher class than the working classes, since it was unlikely for the working classes to be able to access education, the fictional Assassins accept initiates regardless of their class. His higher class background is, however, suggested by the fact that he is the son of a Maharaja's daughter.

His preference for books and gaining more information and knowledge over engaging in violent behaviour and other kind of physical action is reflected in his habitual behaviour during the game. For example, he is often shown reading books in the train hideout (as shown in Figure 6); moreover, he helps Evie in her research on a Piece of Eden and joins her on missions which focus on finding it. Despite his interest in the research, however, at first he joins the activity reluctantly: for instance, in example 26, he says that fieldwork is not his specialty, but decides to join her anyway; in example 27 (which takes place later), in turn, he offers to help Evie voluntarily. His habitual behaviour, therefore,

suggests that he is someone who is a part of a higher class than the working classes, since he prefers staying indoors doing brain work, rather than going outdoors to do manual activities (Davidoff 1979: 89, 111). His reluctance for fieldwork could also strengthen this interpretation, since it suggests that he is less dangerous and violent, i.e. the opposite of which the working classes were often seen at the time (Skeggs (2004: 49–50). In addition, it is suggested that he does not know how to use weapons very well (see example 28), which is perhaps somewhat abnormal for a male character in an action video game. Furthermore, his lack of aggression suggests femininity, since Victorian women were seen as representing morality and tenderness (Davidoff 1979: 89).

Figure 6 Henry Green doing research with Evie Frye in the Assassins' train hideout[43]

Example 26
[Evie investigates a notebook she found earlier.]
Evie: These look like directions! Are you coming?
Henry: Fieldwork is not really my speciality.
Evie: We've found a clue to a Precursor object - don't you want to follow it?
Henry: (smiles) Put that way, one can hardly refuse.[44]

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[43] From AC:S Sequence 04 Playing it by Ear.
[44] From AC:S Sequence 04 Playing it by Ear.

Example 27
Evie: We're going to need a plan.
Henry: I can provide a distraction for the guards while you find a safe way inside.
Evie: Oh? Really?
Henry: (smiles) For you, Evie, certainly.[45]

Example 28
[Henry hands Jacob a kukri.]
Henry: Here. I'm sure you can put this to better use than I can.[46]

Another situation he finds himself in a few times is being a liability: for instance, despite his increased confidence in example 27, he ends up getting kidnapped, causing Evie to change her plans and save him, which in turn causes her to get mad at him and tell him that he would be safer on the train hideout. Regardless, in the last mission, he attempts to save the Frye twins from Crawford Starrick by attacking him by surprise; however, he quickly gets knocked out. Because of this, after he regains his consciousness, he is worried he ruined the plans again, but Evie reassures him that he did the right thing and that he should join her again in the fieldwork (as is shown in example 29). Him getting kidnapped and Evie saving him is an interesting twist on the damsel in distress trope, which refers to the common plot of a female character being in trouble and a male character saving them. In this case, the roles are the opposite; hence, it could be argued that Henry is here a feminine character, and Evie the masculine one. Their contrasting roles are evident in Figure 7, in which Evie is shown looking after Henry after he has been injured.

Example 29
Henry: I came as soon as I could. Do not worry. I'll-- I'll head back to the train. Did I-- did I jeopardize the mission?
Evie: Henry, you saved it.
[Evie and Henry kiss.]
Evie: I think you belong in the field. With me.[47]

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[45] From AC:S Sequence 07 Change of Plans.
[46] From AC:S Gang war: Whitechapel.
[47] From AC:S Sequence 09 A Night to Remember.

Figure 7 Evie Frye tending Henry Green[48]

As is evident in the previous examples, Henry's closest relationship is with Evie. While Evie seems to become attracted to Henry almost immediately, it is less obvious when Henry develops similar feelings for her. However, they seem to become more evident towards the end of the game. While in example 27 it is heavily implied, in example 29 the two of them share a kiss. In addition, after completing an optional goal of collecting every pressed flower, the player is shown a scene in which Henry confesses his feelings for Evie and proposes to her (see example 30). Despite them being close to each other, Henry uses a rather polite and formal tone with her, as seen in examples 29 and 30; here, however, instead of creating social distance, it is more likely a way to show respect. Moreover, during his proposal in example 30, the formal language could indicate his seriousness of the situation. Regardless, it reflects his educatedness and shows his sophisticated manners, which are also evident when he interacts with other characters: for instance, in example 31, despite addressing Bell by a nickname, he uses a formal tone with him otherwise. Furthermore, he does not seem to have a strong Indian accent and he does not use Indian words or phrases, suggesting that he has adapted well to the English surroundings and is well-educated in the English language. Thus, his speech patterns and social interactions construct him as someone of a higher class.

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[48] From AC:S Sequence 09 A Night to Remember.

Example 30
[Evie finds a bouquet on her desk and begins to decipher the symbolic meanings of the flowers.]
Evie: A message... of hope. Perfection? A red tulip...
[Henry steps forward.]
Henry: ... a declaration of love. I- Miss Frye, you know that I hold you in the highest esteem... and regard. And I was wondering if you would do me the honor of-
[Evie steps closer to him and holds his hand]
Henry: If you would, give me your hand... in matrimony.
Evie: (smiles) Yes.
[Evie and Henry kiss.][49]

Example 31
[Henry and the Frye twins enter Alexander Graham Bell's office.]
Bell: Ah, blast 'em!
Henry: <u>Aleck, whatever is the matter</u>?
Bell: I have been intercepting nothing but poppycock propaganda about Soothing Syrup and whatnot. No, I swear to high heavens, if Starrick's monopoly continues-
Henry: <u>Aleck, I beg your pardon</u>, these are friends of mine, Evie Frye and her brother, Jacob.
Bell: Oh, um... Alexander Graham Bell.
Henry: Linguist, inventor and technical expert. <u>Aleck, I have something of a favour to ask of you</u>.
[Jacob interrupts and shows Bell the rope launcher.]
Jacob: Can you fix this?[50]

Henry is also suggested to be someone of a higher class by his interest in collecting flowers to fill an herbarium, which he describes as a British pastime (see example 32). However, he admits that he does not have the time for it, implying that he is too busy with his work to engage in leisure activities. Unlike the other aspects so far, this suggests that he is a part of a lower class, since if he belonged to an upper class he would most likely have time to spend on pastimes activities; for example, according to Dole (2001: 61, 70), the British film adaptations of Jane Austen's novels *Persuasion* and *Emma* typically portray the wealthy at leisure, whereas the working classes spend their time working.

Example 32
Evie: A herbarium? Are you collecting flowers for someone?
Henry: Only myself. I'm told it's something of a British pastime. Did you know they all have symbolic meanings?
Evie: I had heard, something of the sort.
Henry: Of course you have. Unfortunately, I have no time to fill the book.
Evie: I could collect some samples, if you would accept my help.
Henry: I would appreciate that. Thank you, Miss Frye.[51]

A lower-class status is also constructed with his central environment: his curio-shop is located in Whitechapel, which is one of the poorest districts available in the in-game London. On the other hand, he is shown inside his shop only once; moreover, it seems to be well-decorated and full of books, suggesting that he can afford some sense of luxury and that he has access to a large amount of information. Another location which seems central to him, and in which he is shown more often than

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[49] From AC:S Pressed Flowers.
[50] From AC:S Sequence 03 Freedom of the Press. Underlining added for emphasis.
[51] From AC:S Pressed Flowers.

his shop, is the Assassins' train hideout. Typically, he is either discussing their plans with the Frye twins or Evie; outside of cutscenes, he is sometimes standing around looking at a bookcase in the train. However, the train is not as closely connected to him as it is to the Frye twins, making its appearance less important for his character construction. It could, nevertheless, imply his mobility, since the train is constantly on the move; his high mobility is also suggested when he is standing on a rooftop with Evie, but, unlike the Frye twins, he is not shown in many different locations and he does not have access to, for example, the Buckingham Palace, implying that his mobility is lower than the twins'.

Although it is mentioned in the in-game character profile that he has a large social network, he is not shown interacting with many different characters: his vast connections are mainly indicated by him telling the Frye twins about his associates and allies. Nevertheless, it seems that he has connections with characters with different class and gender backgrounds. The most notable of these is perhaps Duleep Singh, a former maharaja, who Henry is shown to meet in person and introduce to Evie. This again suggests that he is a character with a higher class; it also points towards Henry's noble background as the son of an Indian princess.

His nobility is perhaps suggested by his physical appearance as well, as his mostly white outfit has what could be either golden or yellow decorations. In Victorian England, white was associated with home, familiarity, purity, and virtue, as well as the middle class (Davidoff 1979: 91–92, 114). Hence, the whiteness of his outfit could be seen as further emphasising his non-violent nature and his higher class status. It could also be used as a way to balance out his darker skin tone, which in Victorian standards might have been associated with black and its negative connotations, in contrast to the positive white (ibid.). On the other hand, the outfits of the *Assassin's Creed* video game series' previous protagonists have mainly been white; it could therefore be that his outfit is used mainly as a way to connect him with the other well-known Assassins, such as Altaïr Ibn-La'Ahad (Ubisoft Montreal 2007) or Ezio Auditore da Firenze (Ubisoft Montreal 2009). In addition, he is wearing earrings, which could be a sign of wealth; moreover, it constructs him as feminine, as women typically wear jewellery more than men, at least in the Western world. On the other hand, he seems to be wearing a gauntlet similar to the ones the Frye twins have, as well as some kind of a shoulder protection; these further suggest his identity as an Assassin, since they are common features in their outfits and equipment.

In conclusion, Henry seems to be constructed as classed through his habitual behaviour, psychological traits, speech patterns, interactions with others, physical appearance, and biography. First, he is shown to be well-educated and sophisticated by his research-oriented behaviour as well as his formal and polite speech and social interactions; these connect him with the rational Victorian middle-class man who was seen as doing the brain work (Davidoff 1979: 89). Second, he seems to have a large social network, ranging from the working classes to aristocracy, which suggests that he has high affordance when it comes to connections. Third, in his biography, the most notable piece of information is his mother, who is explained to be an Indian princess; his higher class background could also be hinted at in his clothing. While the fact that his mother is aristocratic suggests that he himself is also an upper class character, his lack of time for leisure indicates that he belongs to a lower class.

His construction as gendered, on the other hand, seems to be mainly done by his habitual behaviour and psychological traits. First, his affordance for education and information could be seen as constructing him as masculine, as those were more easily available for men than women at the time; in addition, men, especially those belonging to the middle class or the aristocracy, were seen as representing the rational, thinking head. Second, his preference to stay out of fieldwork and violence could be perceived as constructing him as feminine, since Victorian women represented home, morality and tenderness; on the other hand, this further aligns him with the Victorian middle-class or aristocratic men, who were seen as doing the brain work rather than the menial, manual work (Davidoff 1979: 89). His femininity, on the other hand, is further suggested by his tendency to not do very well when he does take part in the action: instead of being the hero, he becomes a "damsel in distress", thus diverting from the typical video game trope in which a female character is the one to be saved. However, in the final main story mission, he manages to attack the antagonist and thus engage in aggressive and violent behaviour, constructing him as more masculine than before, since his behaviour does not align as well with the Victorian norms of femininity anymore. Overall, it seems that he is constructed as a combination of feminine and masculine traits.

8.4. Crawford Starrick

Crawford Starrick is the main antagonist in the game, being the Grand Master of the British Rite of the Templar Order. In the in-game character profile, he is described as the younger son of a wealthy but unlanded businessman. When he was twelve, he was sent to a boarding school, in which he received the nickname "Lord Starrick". His competitive nature generated a desire for power, and he began to gather subordinates for himself already in the boarding school, after determining that people

can be divided into those who rule and those who are ruled, believing himself to belong in the former. After graduation, he invested in railroads until his fortune was large enough for him to expand into other industries throughout London. According to the biography, it seems that he was born into a middle-class family and managed to keep the class status throughout his life, perhaps nevertheless aiming for an upwards mobility in the class system.

During the game's events, Crawford is 41 years old and has a well-groomed physical appearance: his dark hair and curled moustache are neatly styled, and he is almost always dressed in a refined, black outfit with purple and white accents. His leather jacket has black fur cuffs and a fur collar, he wears black gloves, and he has a purple scarf and a silver and purple Templar necklace around his neck. All these combined suggest that he has an extravagant taste in clothing, something that only a wealthy person could afford. His affluence is further implied by the purple accents, as purple used to be an expensive and rare dye and is often associated with royalty. He also has a gun with a golden design, which not only constructs him as potentially dangerous and violent, but again as wealthy. Crawford's physical appearance is also reminiscent of the outfits Sullivan (2014: 185) notes the wealthy characters wearing in the film adaptations of *The Hunger Games* and its first sequel. While Crawford's outfit constructs him as a member of the middle or upper class, his facial structure and hair bring forth masculinity: he has a long, sharp face with a long nose, thick eyebrows, and a curled moustache.

Crawford's movements and gestures are mostly deliberate, which can be seen as connecting him with the middle classes who are seen as modest and reasonable (Skeggs 2004: 99). However, whenever he becomes frustrated, he can act on an impulse. For example, when he is mourning the death of his cousin, Pearl Attaway, who he once proposed to, he is interrupted by a servant, which causes Crawford to abruptly shoot him dead. Similarly, his facial expressions are often restrained: his stony face seems to express emotion only when he is angry or when he is saddened by the death of Pearl. The nature of his movements and gestures emphasise his role as an antagonist, portraying him as cold and ruthless. Considering that the upper class tends to be portrayed in a negative light more often than the middle class, at least in American media, in which the upper classes are often represented as greedy or criminals (Kendall 2011: 17–19), and Crawford is portrayed negatively in a similar manner, it could be argued that he is a member of the upper class rather than the middle class. Furthermore, his restricted emotions, movements, and gestures could suggest masculinity, as they were connected to femininity in the Victorian society (Davidoff 1979: 89). Crawford's violent impulses can be seen as further implying his masculinity, as Victorian women would most likely not have behaved in

similar aggressive and violent manner, considering that in addition to emotions they were seen as representing tenderness and morality (ibid.).

Crawford is typically seen in his office, which is shown in Figure 8. The office is decorated with paintings, houseplants, and bookcases, in addition, there is a grand piano and a globe. These indicate an easier access to information, art, and music. Furthermore, red and gold are the most prominent colours in the room: the wallpaper is red with golden decorations, the large windows are framed by red curtains with golden ornaments, and on the floor lie two large red carpets embellished with a golden pattern. The room is thus more aesthetically than practically furnished, having a sense of luxury and wealth. In addition, the surroundings construct Crawford as wealthy and as a member of a higher class similarly through environmental storytelling as Ivănescu (2018: 236) describes to be done in *Beneath A Steel Sky*. This is further supported by Crawford's tendency to stay in his own private room, following the middle-class ideals of individuality and personal space (e.g. Matthew 2010: 522, 543; Skeggs 2004: 49-50). The privacy of his office is further accentuated by the fact that the player is not allowed to enter the room with the playable characters; rather, the player can only see of the room that which is shown in the cutscenes. The only characters who can enter his office are his subordinates and servants. As for gender, the implied higher level of education as well as the availability of knowledge and cultural activities could be argued to signify Crawford's masculinity, as men had greater affordance regarding them in the Victorian era (Matthew 2010: 544–546).

Figure 8 Crawford Starrick playing piano in his office

In his office, Crawford is generally seen having meetings with his subordinates. After Pearl's death, he sings and plays the piano (see Figure 8), and when he plans to dissolve his partnership with Lucy Thorne, he dictates a letter. These activities highlight his strategic, intellectual, and cultural sides, suggesting that he is indeed a member of either the middle or the upper class, since he has people working for him and he can afford to be at leisure. Outside of his office he appears in a few different locations. First, he is shown meeting his cousin Pearl at a warehouse for a strategic discussion. Second, towards the end of the game, he attends a ball in the Buckingham Palace, aiming to launch an attack and kill the Queen; however, the Frye twins foil his plans, but while dancing with Evie Fry he manages to steal the key to the vault in which the Shroud of Eden is located in. After stealing the key, he leaves the ball and enters the vault, finds the Shroud and wears it. The scarcity of locations Crawford appears in outside of his office emphasises the importance of his own private space, thus constructing him according to the middle-class ideal of personal space (Skeggs 2004: 49–50); furthermore, when he leaves the space, he becomes vulnerable, as the vault is the only place where the player directly interacts with him, fighting against him as both Evie and Jacob. The vault is also the last location Crawford is seen in, as the player eventually removes the Shroud from him and kills him.

Throughout the game, Crawford's goal is to rule London and thus the whole world, and in order to do that he wants to find the Shroud. When he is first introduced in the game, another character describes him as follows: "-- a Grand Master so ruthless, so thorough, one might think Reginald Birch, himself, had returned. His name is Crawford Starrick. And he intends to rule the world."[52] This description already constructs him as a character of a higher class status: it mentions that he is a Grand Master (which is one of the highest ranks of the Templar order). He is also compared to Reginald Birch, who is a manipulative, deceitful, and ambitious Templar Grand Master who expanded the influence of the British Rite of the Templar order and established the Colonial Rite in *Assassin's Creed III* (Ubisoft Montreal 2012)*,* a previous game in the series (Assassin's Creed Wiki 2019: no page given), thus constructing Crawford as an ambitious, cunning, and cruel character. These are validated by his actions throughout the game: for example, he uses Lucy Thorne to find the location of the Shroud of Eden, but intends to dissolve his partnership with her afterwards via a letter; however, Lucy is assassinated unexpectedly, and Crawford seems to only care about the key she had to the vault. His interactions with others, therefore, seem calculating and distant, the only exception being his cousin Pearl, who was discussed above.

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[52] From AC:S Sequence 01 A Spanner in the Works.

In addition, Crawford seems to believe that he is above everyone else. For instance, in example 33, he describes how the people of London are under his control and work for him so that he and his subordinates can afford luxuries.

> Example 33
> **Starrick:** Gentlemen. [stirs his tea] This tea was brought to me from India by a ship, then, up from the harbour to a factory, where it was packaged and ferried by carriage to my door, unpacked in the larder and brought upstairs to me. All by men and women who work for me. Who are indebted to me, Crawford Starrick, for their jobs, their time, the very lives they lead. They will work in my factories and so too shall their children. And you come to me with talk of this Jacob Frye? This insignificant blemish who calls himself Assassin? You disrespect the very city that works day and night so that we may drink this. This miracle. This tea.[53]

Although he claims that "[he] would supply all of London if [he] could"[54], he also states that "the Shroud will be [his], even if [he has] to raise hellfire to do it".[55] This implies that only his own goals matter to him, and since he sees himself above everyone else, he believes that he has the right to achieve his goals in any means possible. Although this goes against his wishes of protecting London and preventing chaos (see examples 34 and 35), he seems to justify it by claiming that the Assassins have caused chaos in the city and that there is no other choice (see example 36). To solve the issue of going against his own morals, he aims to recreate London from the beginning. This kind of behaviour indicates that he certainly believes that he belongs in the upper class. In addition, his belief that emotions should be kept separate from decision making and "the lawful structures of society" (see example 34) could be seen as masculine behaviour, since preferring rational thinking over emotions was seen as the standard for middle class men in the Victorian era (Davidoff 1979: 89). Crawford's position as a leader also aligns him with the Victorian norms for aristocratic and middle-class men, who were seen as the head of the society (ibid.).

> Example 34
> **Starrick**: But we cannot let our emotions disrupt the lawful structures of society. (pause) If we do that, the enemy wins.
> --
> **Starrick**: (To Lucy Thorne) Increase the Templar presence in London. (pause) We alone protect this city of light.[56]

> Example 35
> **Starrick**: London deserves a ruler who will remain vigilant, who will prevent the city from devolving into chaos.[57]

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[53] From AC:S Sequence 04 Overdose.
[54] From AC:S Sequence 06 A Bad Penny.
[55] From AC:S Sequence 06 A Thorne in the Side.
[56] From AC:S Sequence 05 End of the Line.
[57] From AC:S Sequence 09 A Night to Remember.

Example 36
Starrick: Order has bred disorder. The sea rises to flood the pubs and extinguish the streetlamps. Our city will die. Twopenny has failed, Lucy has failed. Brudenell, Elliotson... Pearl. All have gone into the night. It is up to me now. -- The Assassins have brought nature's fury into our houses. Men have become monsters, barrelling toward us, teeth out. Our civilization must survive this onslaught. To prevent a return to the Dark Ages, I will start anew. London must be reborn.[58]

In conclusion, Crawford's class status is constructed visibly through multiple categories. First, his physical appearance is polished and excessive, showing that he can afford extravagant clothing; although his outfit is not completely impractical, it has a sense of luxury to it, meaning that he is a member of a higher class than the working class. Second, his typical environment, which is his own private office, follows the traditional middle-class ideals of personal space and individuality, which were also present during the Victorian era (Matthew 2010: 522; Skeggs 2004: 48–50). The room's decor reflects his individual affordance and taste: he has access to art through paintings and a grand piano, and knowledge through books and maps. Third, his habitual behaviour, which includes his hobbies of playing the piano and singing, his occupation as a Grand Master of the British Rite of the Templars, and his business meetings with his colleagues and subordinates, enforces his individuality and higher class status: he has time to be at leisure and he is clearly above the working class, with which he does not seem to be in direct contact. Fourth, his interactions with others are mostly business related and he keeps his distance to everyone; moreover, he seems to believe he is and should be above others. Fifth, his speech patterns are rather formal and deliberate, indicating an academic or otherwise sophisticated background. Finally, his movements and gestures are typically restrained, following the middle-class norm of modesty (Skeggs 2004: 99).

His gender, on the other hand, is mainly constructed through his physical appearance, psychological traits, and speech patterns. His facial features are sharp and long, which are typical biological traits for men. His desire for leadership and power, on the other hand, can be considered as enhancing his masculinity, since aristocratic and middle-class men were seen as the head of the Victorian society (Davidoff 1979: 89). In addition, he typically appears calm and collected, implying a preference for rationality over emotionality, which he also makes clear in his speech. This further constructs him as masculine, as Victorian middle class men were seen as the rational heads while women were seen as the emotional hearts (ibid.); however, he once becomes so overwhelmed with emotions of anger and sadness that he acts violently on an impulse. Nevertheless, the main emotion he shows is anger, which sometimes leads to violence; this can be seen as a form of more masculine than feminine behaviour, since Victorian women, despite representing emotions, also represented morality and tenderness

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[58] From AC:S Sequence 08 Final Act.

(Davidoff 1979: 89). Finally, him having access to knowledge, art, and power could also be seen as enhancing his position as a man, since during the Victorian era, especially before the 1870s, those were more readily available for men rather than women (Matthew 2010: 546).

8.5. Lucy Thorne

Lucy Thorne is the secondary antagonist in the game. She is 31 years old and second-in-command to Crawford Starrick. Figure 9 shows some of her outfit, which is similar to Crawford's: it consists of a black leather jacket with a feathered collar, black trousers, and long black leather boots. She also has a black mini top hat, underneath which her brown hair is tied to a bun; in addition, she wears some eye makeup and has a beauty mark on her cheekbone and another on her upper lip. These details, together with the skirt-like hem of her jacket, construct her visual appearance as feminine. Moreover, the purple details and feather decorations on her clothing, combined with the overall neat look, construct her as somewhat wealthy: while her outfit seems practical, it is decorated with some ostentatious details. Similarly to Crawford's outfit, hers also displays similarities with the extravagant outfits the wealthy wear in the film adaptations of *The Hunger Games* and its sequel. Hence, her outfit suggests that she is from a higher class than the working classes. In addition, she wears the Templar symbol on a band around her upper arm and on her necklace, showcasing her relations with the organisation; it is possible that they also display her rank within the Templar Order.

Figure 9 Lucy Thorne having tea in a meeting with Crawford Starrick

In her movements and gestures, Lucy seems rather stiff and formal; however, she is also capable of moving quickly when in close combat. Although it is not explicitly shown, she is agile, since she confronts Evie at the top of the St. Paul's Cathedral, which seems to be accessible only from the outside. When fighting against Evie, Lucy uses an ornate dagger and smoke bombs. While her typical restrained movements and gestures could suggest that she is middle class, since the middle classes are generally considered to be modest (Skeggs 2004: 99) and middle-class women are expected to behave ladylike (Davidoff 1979: 91), her physical abilities show that she is capable of breaking the norms of modesty; in addition, she breaks gender norms by behaving violently and aggressively, instead of displaying nurturing and caring behaviour typical of Victorian femininity (Davidoff 1979: 89). The ornate dagger she uses showcases her affluency and affordance for more exquisite weapons, and thus suggests that she represents a higher class than the working classes.

Similarly to her body movements, her facial expressions can be described as stiff, as she has a disdainful or almost angry look on her face most of the time, as is visible in Figure 9. While this can be seen as breaking the Victorian norms of women being sensitive and tender (Davidoff 1979: 89), it can also be seen as reinforcing the traditional norm of women as more emotional (ibid.), since she often shows her anger through her facial expressions. In addition, when she voices her wish for vengeance, Crawford tells her that her passion is most welcome, but that she should not let her emotions get the best of her (see example 37). On the other hand, her emotional scale does not seem very diverse and she seems to be very cold towards others. For example, when she enters Crawford's office after he has just killed a servant in the room, she walks by the body and continues to ignore it. After Pearl's death she is angry, but it is unclear whether her anger is caused by the death of her colleague or her dissatisfaction with Crawford's plans (see example 37). In addition to anger and indifference, she expresses violent tendencies in her speech: instead of justice, she speaks for vengeance, and her plans for getting rid of the Frye twins consist of violent executions, as seen in examples 37 and 38. While her coldness and indifference towards other could perhaps be seen as connecting her more with the rational middle-class men than the emotional women of the Victorian society (Davidoff 1979: 89), her motives seem to be at least partially driven by her emotions, thus suggesting a Victorian femininity.

> Example 37
> **Thorne**: Our beloved London shall not suffer such a bothersome fool for much longer.
> **Starrick**: And what of this sister I've heard of? Ms. Frye?
> **Thorne**: Ms. Frye shall be gutted. [drinks tea] Soon enough.[59]

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[59] From AC:S Sequence 04 Overdose. Underlining added for emphasis.

Example 38
Thorne: Crawford…
Starrick: Her luster stripped by the hands of that savage. (pause) He must be brought to justice.
Thorne: (angry) Pearl would not want justice. [walks closer to Starrick] Pearl would want <u>vengeance</u>!
Starrick: Your passion is most welcome, Ms. Thorne. (pause) But we cannot let our emotions disrupt the lawful structures of society. If we do that, the enemy wins.
Thorne: It shall happen in the shadows. (pause) <u>Ms. Frye will hang from the gallows, and I will flay her brother as he comes to save her</u>.
Starrick: I suppose it must be done. (pause) Take no chances. Increase the Templar presence in London. We alone protect this city of light.
Thorne: Yes, Crawford. [Takes a couple steps closer to Starrick, slowly] And then (hesitates) we shall enter the vault and cast aside the shadows together.[60]

Unlike Crawford, who mostly stays in his office, Lucy moves around in various locations. The one place she is seen visiting the most is Crawford's office, in which she discusses with him their plans against the Frye twins and for finding The Shroud. Since she is Crawford's second-in-command, she goes around giving instructions to their subordinates. When doing so, she seems to be strict and demanding; moreover, she often threatens the subordinates, showcasing her violent tendencies again and increasing her masculinity (see examples 39 and 40). Otherwise her speech seems rather formal and somewhat sophisticated, constructing a class difference between her and the subordinates with whom she talks. She has a similar tone when she is talking with Evie, but in addition to using threats she patronises her, as seen in example 41. This is also used for creating social distance between the characters. She seems to be closest to Crawford, as she calls him by his first name and he listens to her suggestions; regardless, she shows him respect by patiently waiting until it's her turn to speak and letting him make the final decisions, as seen in example 38. This suggests that from a hierarchical class point of view she is closer to Crawford than to the other Templars and those who work for them.

Example 39
Brewster: I need two more weeks with the device.
Thorne: Your questionable practices are beginning to draw unwanted attention. You've been given more than enough time to achieve results, Sir David.
Brewster: I was unaware that you expected me to perform like a cocker spaniel.
Thorne: Permit me to remind you of your obligation to the Order.
Brewster: Miss Thorne, you ride me like a racehorse!
Thorne: Sir David. I will return tomorrow. If you have not unlocked the device's secrets, forget your dogs and horses; <u>I will leave you to the wolves</u>. Good day.[61]

Example 40
Thorne: The contents of that box are worth more than your life and those of your entire family. Do you understand?
Templar: Yes, Ms. Thorne.[62]

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[60] From AC:S Sequence 05 End of the Line. Underlining added for emphasis.
[61] From AC:S Sequence 02 A Simple Plan. Underlining added for emphasis.
[62] From AC:S Sequence 04 A Crate Escape.

Example 41
Thorne: Welcome, Ms. Frye. Do you care to tell me where the Shroud is?
[Silence]
Thorne: As you wish. I shall find it without your help. And then, <u>I'll strangle you with it</u>. Watch her closely.
[Lucy turns her back to Evie.]
Thorne: If you're here, you haven't found the Shroud either. By all means, let me know if there's more information you'd like to share. However, <u>I suspect you don't have any</u>.
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Evie: You sought a tool of healing in order to extend your own power!
Thorne: Not mine, ours. <u>You are so short-sighted</u>. You'd hoard power and never use it, when we would better the condition of humanity. I hope you never find the Shroud. <u>You have no idea</u> what it truly can do.
Evie: Tell me, then.
Thorne: (smirks) No.[63]

Lucy's main goal in the game is to find the Shroud for the Templar Order, which is another reason she visits a variety of environments, ranging from warehouses and alleys to the St. Paul's Cathedral and Tower of London. Mobility can be seen as the opposite of the middle class ideal of private space, thus constructing Lucy as someone whose class status is lower than Crawford's; on the other hand, her higher mobility can be seen as a sign of affordance, as she is able to access a variety of locations and is free to choose where she wants to go to; moreover, she is mobile from her own free will, since in order to achieve her goal she needs to search different locations. In addition, through her mobility and occupation as the second-in-command to a Grand Master of the Templar Order, she diverts from the stereotypical Victorian middle-class woman who stays at home taking care of the household and the family (Davidoff 1979: 89).

In the in-game character profile, Lucy is confirmed to have a middle-class background: her father was a tea merchant and her mother a well-educated daughter of a minor noble house. Lucy is described to have been educated in "all of the qualities that should have ensured her a successful marriage", but instead she became interested in studying obscure religious knowledge, magic, and occult philosophy – eventually leading to her interest in finding the Shroud. When she was a teenager, her family encountered monetary issues, threatening their middle class status, but with Lucy's help in her father's business it seems that they were able to overcome the problems, as it is also mentioned that Lucy started collecting rare manuscripts and overspending on auctions of rare papers. In other words, according to the biography, Lucy seems to be a middle-class character, not only for her family and wealth, but also for her ability to access knowledge and information on a variety of topics that might not be as easily available for everyone else. In addition, she seems to have been breaking the gender norms throughout her life, as she abandoned the pursuit of marriage and instead followed her peculiar interests.

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[63] From AC:S Sequence 06 A Thorne in the Side. Underlining added for emphasis.

In conclusion, Lucy's class status seems to be mainly constructed through her visual appearance, movements and gestures, speech, and affordance. As a whole, she is rather stiff and deliberate, almost snobbish and arrogant. Her outfit has some superfluous details and decorations, constructing her as middle or upper class, although it still seems practical and it is possible for her to fight wearing it. Her movements and gestures are modest and rigid, enhancing her higher class status further. Similarly, her speech is formal and deliberate, and she creates social distance between those who are lower than her in the hierarchy by threatening and patronising them. Lastly, her affordance seems to be rather high, as she is able to access a variety of locations as well as information on peculiar subjects.

Her gender is mostly constructed through the same categories as her class. However, while her appearance is constructed as feminine with the use of beauty marks, makeup, and the skirt-like hem of her jacket, otherwise it seems as if she is more masculine than feminine. Although her movements and gestures are typically modest, which could be seen as feminine, she is also capable of fighting and she often expresses aggressiveness and violent tendencies, which can be seen as masculine traits. Furthermore, besides anger, she seems rather indifferent and cold, very unlike a feminine person who would most likely gentle and sensitive. Finally, Lucy's position as second-in-command to Crawford, a Templar Grand Master, and her high affordance and mobility construct her as a woman who deviates from the Victorian gender norms: instead of being a wife at home, she traverses London and pursues her occupational and scholarly interests.

8.6. Agnes MacBean

Agnes MacBean is a 53-year-old Scottish woman, who takes care of the train she calls "Bertha". In the in-game character profile, it is described that she aspired to be more like her father, who was an ironworker and worked in the Scottish rail lines; eventually, she took his place "inside his locomotive". According to the profile, she first pretended to be a man, but was later found out to be a woman and, as a punishment, sent to work in the Starrick Industries with her train, under the employment of a gang leader. Her train was later hijacked by Evie and Jacob, who then hired her and turned her train into their hideout. Based on her family background and occupation, Agnes is a member of the working class: her work sounds more hands-on, and she had to move across the country from Garnkirk, Scotland, to London, England, because of her work. Her occupation could be seen as constructing her as more masculine than feminine, since it is implied in the profile text that she was

only able to keep her father's job by pretending to be a man. In addition, even though she is 53, the text does not mention her having a family of her own, deviating from the gender norms of the time.

Agnes's physical appearance is rather bland, as seen in Figure 10: she wears a brown dress, a grey wrap, and a grey scarf. Her clothes are somewhat dirty, signifying her occupational and working-class status. Besides a blue flower decorating her scarf, there are no unnecessary details or decorations on her clothes, and she does not have any extra accessories either. These indicate that she prefers practicality over luxury, or simply cannot afford the latter. Thus, it is highly probable that she is a part of the working classes. Moreover, she has a heavy build, which can be seen as a sign of working-class excess (Skeggs 2004: 102) or Victorian working class femininity, which did not conform to the middle class ideals small fragility and roundness (Davidoff 1979: 112, 118). Overall, her physique, dirtiness, and loose short hair could imply that she cannot afford to take care of her appearance, therefore constructing her as working class. The flower decoration and her dress could be seen as features of a feminine appearance.
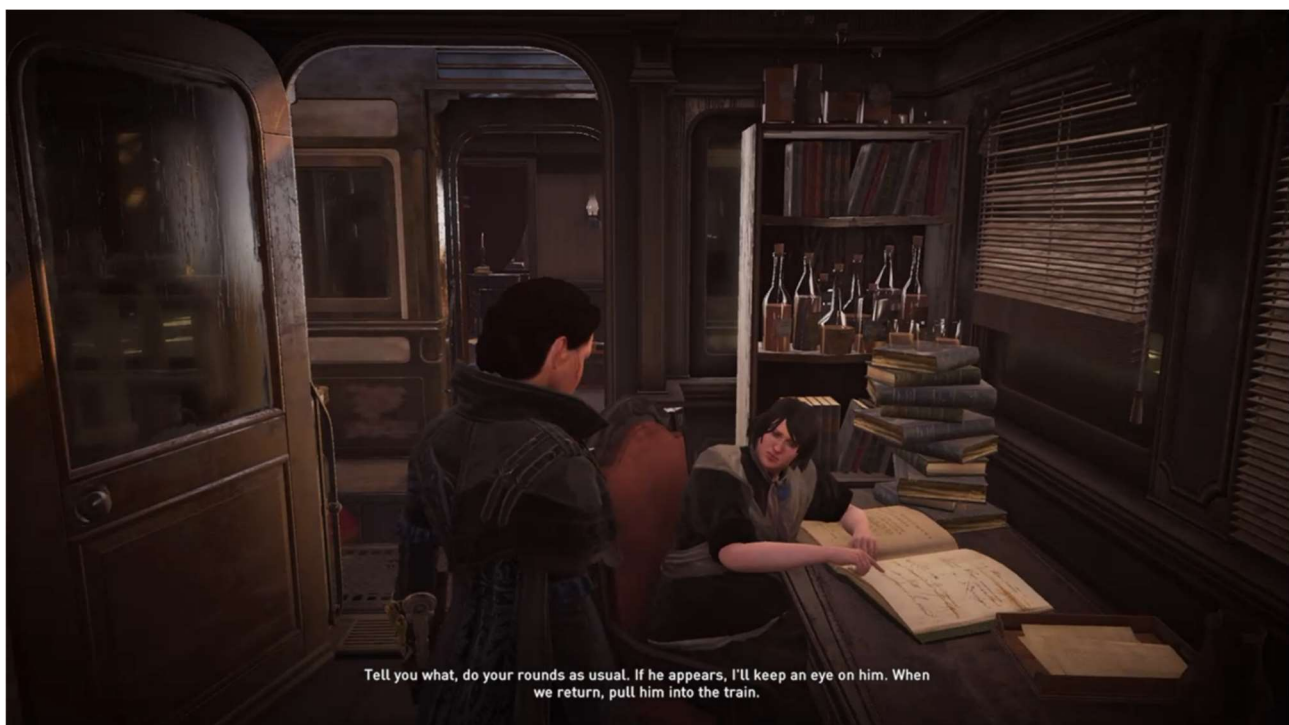

Figure 10 Evie Frye talking with Agnes MacBean

Most of the time, Agnes stays inside the train, and she can be found sitting at her desk (as shown in Figure 10). When the Assassins hijack it, it is messy and plainly decorated: there are papers and books scattered around, empty plates on a table, and the carpet is wrinkled; even though there are a few paintings on the walls and a bouquet of flowers on a table, the train interior is rather poor. During the

game, the train's interior gets upgraded a couple of times, adding more colour, decorations (such as plants, fancier carpets, a globe, and hunting trophies), better lighting, and better furniture. However, Agnes's visual appearance stays the same (see Figure 10). The original state of the train is thus more closely linked to her, perhaps emphasising her poorer background and living conditions. After the train becomes the property of the Assassins, however, it is connected more to them than Agnes, meaning that even though Evie and Jacob have an upwards class mobility, Agnes does not; instead, she keeps her working-class status throughout the game.

Agnes is seen outside of the train only once, when she goes to run some errands, visiting the harbour and a flower merchant. Besides this, she does not seem to have any other activities than working at the train, and even then, she is always sitting at her desk looking at a large book, perhaps doing some bookkeeping. In other words, it seems that she is constantly at work and has no leisure time; this further emphasizes her working-class affiliation. Furthermore, she is not shown to have a partner or children; since they are not mentioned in the profile either, it is perhaps safe to assume that she does not have a family of her own. On the other hand, she is not shown to have a home either. There is one bed on the train, but it is hard to tell if it is used by the Frye twins or Agnes. Nevertheless, from what is evident in the game, it can be assumed that she is breaking the Victorian gender norms by not having a family; moreover, her homelessness further constructs her as a working-class character, as she is constantly on the move with the train and the working class was associated with mobility, especially if it was work-related.

Since Agnes is not shown to go outside the train often, her social interactions are rather limited: she mainly interacts with the Frye twins and Nigel Bumble, a teenager who Agnes reluctantly accepts as a crew member on the train. Regardless of who she is talking to, she speaks in a thick Scottish accent, as examples 42, 43, and 44 show. Her regional dialect, informal tone, and vernacular grammar, such as "It's some eejit can't even follow me proper" in example 43, suggests that she is relatively uneducated and therefore, again, working class; on the other hand, uneducatedness could also be attributed to her being a woman, as it was harder for women to access education and knowledge in the Victorian era (Matthew 2010: 546). Some social distance is created between her and the Frye twins when she calls them "fancy pants" and bows to them (in example 42). Another detail that could be seen as creating distance between her and the twins is that when the twins talk to her to receive a mission, they are standing up while Agnes is sitting down at her desk, quite concretely showing the difference in their hierarchy.

Example 42
Agnes: Well! [stands up] <u>Hallo fancy pants</u>! And who might you two be?
Evie: I'm Evie Frye and this is my brother, Jacob Frye.
Agnes: (nods) Pleased to meet ye. I'm Agnes MacBean.
Jacob: A delight.
Agnes: I thought I was gettin' a promotion. I suppose I'm out of work now.
Evie: Come work for us instead.
Agnes: (laughs) <u>Awa an bile yer heid</u> (away and boil your head)[64]! You pay better than scraps?
Jacob: I'm sure we can at least match that. [Evie slaps him in the arm]
Agnes: Then may I present to you Agnes and Bertha. Lady and locomotive at your service. [bows] I'll be in the next car. [walks away][65]

Example 43
Flower merchant: Agnes! Are you all right, dear?
Agnes: Of course I am. Why wouldn't I be?
Flower merchant: There's a whole gang out to get you!
Agnes: Nah. <u>It's some eejit can't even follow me proper.</u>[66]

Example 44
Agnes: All right, laddie. I can use ya ta tidy up the train a bit, if ya dunna min' gettin' dirty.
Nigel: Really? Terrific! You won't regret it, miss![67]

Agnes's personality seems quite carefree, or perhaps even oblivious, as example 43 shows: even though she is told that she is in danger, she does not believe it and brushes it off; meanwhile, Evie is keeping her safe by assassinating those who are trying to assassinate Agnes. On the other hand, this is the only time she is shown to be in danger, and the situation is caused by a misunderstanding – not because of Agnes's own dangerous or suspicious behaviour. Her obliviousness could perhaps be argued to be a sign of her uneducatedness, as she does not seem to be aware of the current state of her surroundings. This could also be seen as connecting her with the Victorian working classes, who were seen as the unthinking "doers" (Davidoff 1979: 89) On the other hand, she seems to briefly be suspicious about Jacob and Evie when she first meets them, and she notices Nigel following her, so perhaps her momentarily obliviousness should not be read into too much. Instead, her suspiciousness and slight hostility towards the Frye twins and Nigel could indicate that she is temperamental and thus emotional, constructing her according to the Victorian idea of women representing emotions (Davidoff 1979: 89). At the same time, her temperamentality could be seen as constructing her as tough and masculine, even if she is not as aggressive as the other characters analysed above. Instead, she seems rather calm and relaxed most of the time.

Compared to Crawford and Lucy, who are clearly higher in the class hierarchy than Agnes, her movements are more free: she frequently uses her hands to gesture when she speaks and her posture

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[64] Translation included in the in-game subtitles.
[65] From AC:S Gang war: Whitechapel. Underlining added for emphasis.
[66] From AC:S Train hideout: Stalk the Stalker. Underlining added for emphasis.
[67] From AC:S Train hideout: Stalk the Stalker.

is more relaxed; for example, when she is sitting at the desk, her posture is somewhat hunched (see Figure 10). These can be seen as signs of her working-class status as well, as she does not control her movements and posture as much as the characters who represent higher classes; in addition, it can be argued to hint towards the lack of self-control the working class was deemed to have (Skeggs 2004: 102).

In conclusion, Agnes is constructed as a working-class character especially through her physical appearance, speech patterns, habitual behaviour, and affordance. She is characterised by working-class excess and lack of control and choice: her visual appearance is bland and unkempt, she is overweight, and she was forced to move across the country for her job. She is not shown to have any leisure time; instead, she seems to spend all of her time working. She does not seem very educated or sophisticated either, based on her occupation, in-game profile, and her speech patterns. Her affordance, therefore, is quite low: she cannot access education or leisure activities, her work seems to be the leading force in her life, and she cannot afford luxury in her clothing or surroundings. These aspects of her character also align her more closely with "the working-class woman" rather than "the middle-class lady", since the former is associated with masculinity, dirtiness, and work, among other things, while the latter is associated with femininity, cleanliness, and respectability (Davidoff 1979: 99, 111, 118).

Her gender, on the other hand, seems to be mainly constructed by her physical appearance, psychological traits, and biography. First, her physical appearance suggests a Victorian working-class femininity instead of a Victorian middle-class femininity, the latter of which emphasised small fragility and roundness (Davidoff 1979: 112, 118). Having a heavy build, Agnes, like many other working-class women, is thus closer to the Victorian imagery of men as large and muscular than the aforementioned imagery of women (Davidoff 1979: 118). Second, her biography constructs her as masculine, since it describes her pretending to be a man in order to do the work she wanted to. Third, her psychological traits suggest both as masculine and feminine features: her temperamentality could be seen as a sign of either femininity or masculinity, as Victorian women were thought to be more emotional, but it also suggests toughness, which is typically associated more with men (Davidoff 1979: 89). Finally, her regional speech suggests that she is not well-educated, aligning her more with the position of Victorian women than men, since it was easier for the latter to access education (Matthew 2010: 544–546).

9. DISCUSSION

The aim of this study was to examine how the characters in the video game *Assassin's Creed: Syndicate* (Ubisoft Québec 2015) are constructed as gendered and classed. In order to achieve this, a qualitative approach was chosen: the characters were analysed using a characterisation taxonomy, which combined elements from previous research on gender and class in video games and films, theories on socially constructed gender and class, as well as Pearson's (2007) characterisation taxonomy for characters in all moving image forms.

This method offers a more comprehensive way to study gender and class in video games, as it consists of diverse features related to the characters: while previous studies on gender in video games (e.g. Beasley and Standley 2002: 284–285; Dill et al. 2005: 119–120; Downs and Smith 2010: 725–726; Lynch et al. 2016: 9) have often emphasised aspects of the characters' physical appearance, violent and sexual behaviour, and roles and positions, the present study expands the list of salient elements by adding the categories of movements and gestures, habitual behaviour, psychological traits, speech patterns, interactions with others, environments, affordance, and biographies. This characterisation taxonomy works as a reminder that video game characters, especially in story-rich video games like *Assassin's Creed: Syndicate* (Ubisoft Québec 2015), are complex and multidimensional similarly to those of many films and television shows. In addition, instead of focusing on short segments from the beginning of the game, as has been the case in many previous studies (Beasley and Standley 2002: 283–284; Dill et al. 2005: 119; Jansz and Martis 2007: 144; Lynch et al. 2016: 7–8), the present study collected data from different sections throughout the game; this makes it possible to form an overall image of the characters' as well as to see each character's possible development.

In comparison to previous research, the present study thus provides a more comprehensive and in-depth analysis of gender and class. In addition, it fills a gap left by the lack of research on class in video games; this is one reason the game in question was chosen, as it mostly takes place in a setting with a strict class stratification, i.e. Victorian England, which is also known for its rather strict gender roles and norms. Another reason for choosing *AC:S* was that, unlike many other video games, it features both a male and a female playable protagonist.

The data consisted of the in-game encyclopaedia as well as playable and non-playable segments of the game. The scenes and characters which appear outside of the Victorian setting and are not named were excluded; similarly, the missions, outfits, and gear which can be added into the game as DLCs

were excluded. After this process, there were 81 characters left, which were then further narrowed down to six for the analysis. Each character was systematically analysed using the aforementioned characterisation taxonomy as a guideline for what kind of elements to pay attention to. After the analysis, it seems that each category is used to construct both gender and class to varying extents among the key characters. Next, a brief summary for the characters' construction as gendered and classed is provided, starting with class and continuing with gender.

First, physical appearance was central in constructing each character as classed: the quality and appearance of clothing indicated their wealth and access to luxury, or, especially in the case of Agnes, their lack of wealth and preference for practicality. The bland and dirty outfit of Agnes and the rather extravagant outfits of Crawford and Lucy were reminiscent of Sullivan's (2014: 185) findings on the representation of the working classes and the wealthy in the film adaptations of *The Hunger Games* and its first sequel. Furthermore, the characters' physical appearance suggested their (in)ability to take care of their looks and physique and therefore of their self-control or the lack of it, which can be seen as an indicator of class; for example, Agnes' heavy-build suggests a working-class excess (Skeggs 2004: 102–104). Second, their movements and gestures also implied their capability for self-control, as the more restricted their movements and gestures were, the higher class the characters seemed to be; for example, Agnes, the character most obviously constructed as a working-class character, moved in a rather relaxed manner, whereas Lucy, one of the higher class characters, typically had very stiff and controlled movements.

Third, speech patterns revealed the characters' level of sophistication and formality: while formal speech implied higher class and sophistication, vernacular speech indicated lower class and lack of education. Fourth, habitual behaviour, such as the characters' occupation and typical activities, suggested their position in the occupational class hierarchy, as well as the ratio between work and leisure. For example, unlike the other characters, Crawford was shown singing and playing the piano, which suggests that he has time to be at leisure; Henry, other hand, displayed his desire for collecting flowers, but admitted that he did not have the time for it. This is similar to Dole's (2001: 61, 70) findings on how the wealthy were shown to be at leisure while the working classes were at work in the British film adaptations of Jane Austen's *Persuasion* and *Emma*. In addition, the key characters seemed to be either action- or research-oriented, which connects them to the heads/hands division of the Victorian society (Davidoff 1979: 89): while Jacob and Agnes are clearly action and work based "hands", Evie, Henry, Crawford, and Lucy are closer to the rational and governing "heads", indicating a class difference between the characters.

Fifth, the characters' habitual behaviour was connected to their typical environments: while high mobility implied a lower-class status, a tendency to stay in their own private space suggested a higher-class status; for example, Jacob and Evie are free to traverse around London and can access a variety of locations, whereas Crawford, one of the characters most clearly representing a higher class, tended to stay in his own, private office. On the other hand, high mobility could also be seen as indicating a higher affordance, which would point towards a higher-class status as well. In Crawford's case, his identity as a higher-class character was further constructed by his office's decorations and furniture, which suggested a higher affordance for personal property as well as art, music, and information. This is similar to Ivănescu's (2018: 236–237) findings about class representation in the video game *Beneath the Steel Sky* (Revolution Software 1994). Sixth, psychological traits, which were most evident in the characters' habitual behaviour and speech patterns, suggested their level of education, aggression, and politeness. Suggestions of a higher education, such as an interest in research or the frequent use of formal language, implied a higher class; similarly, politeness was connected with formal speech and thus a higher class. Aggression, on the other hand, could be seen as a sign of breaking the class norms: although seemingly aligning more with the middle classes, Evie and Lucy displayed some aggressive behaviour, which deviates from the Victorian norm of middle-class women representing morality and tenderness (Davidoff 1979: 89).

Seventh, the characters' social interactions constructed the social distance and respect between the characters. For example, Jacob changed the formality of his speech depending on who he was speaking with: for instance, when talking to his sister Evie or his friend Frederick Abberline, he used direct and informal speech, whereas when talking to Benjamin and Mary Anne Disraeli, the Prime Minister and his wife, he used formal and polite language. Eight, the characters' biographies supported the ways the other categories constructed the characters as classed, by giving details about their family backgrounds, hobbies, personalities, and desires. Finally, affordances were most connected to the categories of physical appearance (mainly clothing), habitual behaviour (hobbies, skills, leisure), and environments (diversity, decorations). The higher quality clothing, the more leisure time and hobbies, and the wealthier environments the character could afford and access, the higher their class was suggested to be. For Jacob and Evie, the main protagonists, affordances implied an upward mobility in the class hierarchy: at the beginning of the game, their outfits and gear were poorer and duller, their skills were limited, and the environments they spent the most time in were poorer and more limited, whereas towards the end of the game, the variety of clothing and gear they

have available is increased and includes items of better quality and design, they learn more skills, and they are able to access wealthier environments.

When it comes to gender, some of the categories seemed to stand out more than others, these categories being physical appearance, speech patterns, psychological traits, and habitual behaviour. First, the construction of femininity and masculinity in the characters' physical appearance mostly followed their biological genders: the female characters facial features were rounder, whereas the male characters all had facial hair and longer and stronger facial features. In addition, Evie and Lucy seemed to align to the Victorian middle-class ideals of small and round women, whereas Agnes was closer to the Victorian imagery of men, which emphasised their largeness and muscularity (Davidoff 1979: 89) – although Agnes' heavy-build was probably more caused by her being overweight than muscular. A Victorian division of women into "middle-class ladies" and "working-class women" (Davidoff 1979: 91, 111) could also be seen in the different appearances of Evie and Lucy in comparison to Agnes, the former two being more ladylike and the latter being more masculine. In addition, it seemed possible that Evie's physical appearance was influenced by modern day beauty standards, since her appearance has similarities with many other heroines who appear in video games published both before and after *AC:S*, such as Lara Croft in *Tomb Raider* (Crystal Dynamics 2013) and Claire Redfield in the remake of *Resident Evil 2* (Capcom R&D Division 1 2019). Moreover, the female characters were wearing dresses or dress-like clothing, and two out of three were wearing at least some makeup. However, it was positive to notice that there did not seem to be any sexualisation of the female characters, unlike in many other video games (Downs and Smith 2010: 727; Beasley and Standley 2002: 289; Lynch et al. 2016: 13–15).

Second, the characters' speech patterns reflected their psychological traits and habitual behaviour: the more formal and polite their speech was, the more educated they seemed to be; in addition, the polite and formal language that Evie used could be seen as a sign of a stereotypical speech style associated with women (Litosseliti 2006: 28–29, 38). Considering that education was more readily available for men than for women in the Victorian era (Matthew 2010: 544–546), Evie and Lucy could be seen as breaking the gender norms of the time, since they both seemed to be well-educated. The characters' educatedness and access to knowledge and information was also reflected in their habitual behaviour; for example, Evie and Lucy focused on researching and finding the Shroud of Eden, a powerful historical artefact based on the Shroud of Turin. In addition, Henry, who also seemed well-educated and knowledgeable, was keen on research as well and preferred to avoid fieldwork and action. His preference to stay out of the action could be seen as suggesting the tender

and moral Victorian femininity (Davidoff 1979: 89); in addition, it could be argued that he is made more feminine when he becomes a "damsel in distress", a role which is typically reserved for female characters in video games (Dietz 1998: 433). However, otherwise he seems to align with the Victorian standard of middle-class men being rational and doing the brain work.

Evie and Lucy, on the other hand, further broke the Victorian norms by also aligning more with the rational Victorian man than the emotional Victorian woman, who was represented by the heart and tended to stay at home taking care of the family and the household (Davidoff 1979: 89). Their deviation from the Victorian gender norms was also enhanced by their independence and high mobility, as neither of them have a family and a household to take care of. In addition, for most of the game, Evie attempted to suppress her emotions because she wanted to follow her father's teachings of the importance of rationality, further diverting her from the Victorian femininity towards a Victorian masculinity. Similarly, Crawford seems to appreciate rationality more than emotionality, thus aligning with the Victorian standards of middle-class men as well; moreover, his position as the leader of the British Templars in London further connects him with the Victorian middle-class men, who were seen as the ruling heads of society (Davidoff 1979: 89). Jacob, on the other hand, with his carelessness and preference for action, is closer to the Victorian working-class men, who were seen as the unthinking hands who do the manual and menial work instead of the brain work (ibid.).

Interestingly, all of the characters, regardless of their gender, therefore seemed to be constructed as more masculine than feminine. The dominance of masculinity could be due to the overall domination of men and masculine characters in video games (e.g. Beasley and Standley 2002: 289; Downs and Smith 2010: 727; Lynch et al. 2016: 11–12); moreover, since *AC:S* is an action game, it could be argued that in order to be an action hero(ine), one needs to display at least some forms of masculinity, such as aggressive behaviour. On the other hand, it does not prevent the construction of characters as feminine, as engaging in action does not mean that a character could not be emotional or gentle; for example, even when Evie lets her emotions take over, she behaves in a heroic way and takes part in the action. An interesting twist on the traditional gender roles in video games was Henry's position as someone who needed to be saved, and Evie's position as his saviour.

For class, there was not as clear a distinction, but it can be noted that the working-class characters seemed to be in a minority. The most interesting finding related to class was, perhaps, the upward mobility of the main protagonists. Out of the two, Jacob's class-crossing journey seems more obvious. In the beginning of the game, his working-class identity is suggested by his rugged outfit, preference

for somewhat mindless action, informal and direct speech style, poorer environments, associations with gang members, and lower affordances (for clothing and gear, skills, and environments). As the game progresses, however, Jacob's affordances increase as he receives higher-quality and better-designed outfits and gear, he is able to access a variety of environments (including the wealthiest of Westminster), and he meets and spends time with some higher-class characters. Evie's class-crossing tale, on the other hand, did not seem to be as apparent as Jacob's, since she displays some behaviour and other features that were more associated with the middle or upper classes than the working classes already at the beginning of the game: she uses a formal speech style, her outfits are more intricately designed than Jacob's and seem to be more reminiscent of the outfits of the middle or the upper classes than the working classes, and she prefers rational thinking to simple-minded action. However, like Jacob's, her affordances increase as the game progresses, and she receives outfits and gear of better quality and higher design, learns more skills, gains access to a variety of environments (mostly the same as Jacob), and meets and spends time with some higher-class characters, including Queen Victoria and a former Maharaja. Thus, it could be argued that both Jacob and Evie travel from the working classes to the middle classes; however, it seems that Evie starts slightly higher in the class system than Jacob. In addition, it could be suggested that she ends up higher in the (middle) classes than Jacob, since she interacts more frequently and in more familiar terms with the Queen and the former Maharaja than Jacob does.

While the class-crossing tales of Evie and Jacob do not seem to align well with the class-crossing narratives that Gandal (2007: 6) describes as commonly appearing in films, they share some similarities with Kendall's (2011: 8) findings on class portrayal in American media, such as newspapers and television shows: since Evie and Jacob start as working-class characters and end up somewhere in the middle classes, their story is reminiscent of the inspirational stories of the poor who escape poverty and find happiness among the middle classes; in addition, Evie and Jacob are certainly framed heroically, which is one of the common portrayals of the working classes (ibid.), as they are portrayed as saving London from the criminal Templars. Furthermore, the class-crossing tale of Evie and Jacob is most likely present in many other video games as well, since it is common to reward the players and their progress in video games with new and better items, more in-game currency, and new and better skills for the characters. These rewards usually make the characters more powerful, and often they also make them better-looking. Hence, upward class mobility seems rather normal and common when it comes to video games.

Thus, the findings provide a multi-faceted answer to the research question, which asked how the characters are constructed as gendered and classed. Since the present study offers a slightly different approach to studying gender in video games, the present findings add new information to the discussion on the topic. Most notably, they showcase the complexity of video game characters and their gender construction. Nevertheless, the present study shares some similar findings with previous research on gender portrayal in video games. Firstly, men dominate in numbers and in prominence, and it can be argued that Jacob is more significant in the game than Evie, considering that there are more missions that only he can do; in addition, the main antagonist, Crawford, is a man. On the other hand, it seems that Evie and Jacob are constructed in many ways as the opposites of each other, thus complimenting one another: for example, while Jacob focuses on the hands-on action, Evie focuses on careful, rational planning. In addition, both of them are equally important in defeating their enemies and achieving their common goal, which is emphasised by them assassinating Crawford together, simultaneously. Secondly, there seems to be evidence of the Lara phenomenon (Jansz and Martis 2007), as there are at least two strong and capable women (Evie and Lucy). Similarly to many other video game heroines, their physical appearances are idealised; however, they seem to not be sexualised, unlike many other heroines in video games.

The construction of class in video games, on the other hand, has been significantly less researched than gender in video games. Ivănescu's (2018) study on class in *Beneath A Steel Sky* seems to be a pioneer in the field, but its focus is more limited than the present study's, as it mainly analyses the game's environments, affordances, and music. While the present study did not include music as one of the categories, it included environments and affordances. The findings related to these categories were similar to the findings of Ivănescu (2018: 236–237): the working classes had lower affordances and their environments were duller and more work-based, whereas the middle and upper classes had higher affordances, more colourful and decorated surroundings, and more opportunities for leisure. Since the other categories have not been studied in the context of class in video games, it can be reasonable to compare the present findings to those of previous research on class in films. Overall, it seems that the findings share many things in common, as class in films has also been constructed by environments, social interactions, speech patterns, and physical appearance; moreover, they have been used in a similar manner for the class construction, as the higher classes have had more luxurious surroundings and physical appearances as well as more opportunities for leisure, whereas the lower classes are shown at work and in poverty (e.g. Dole 2001; Sullivan 2014). The present findings also recognise the construction of class mobility, which is a common theme in class-centred films.

Hence, when it comes to gender, the present study offers information from a more comprehensive perspective than the previous studies, thus adding to the discussion on gender representation in video games. For class, the present study fills a larger gap, as class in video games has not received much attention. In addition, the present study and its findings show how class-crossing can be (and seems to often be) constructed in video games, filling another gap left by lack of scholarly interest on the topic. Furthermore, the findings of the present study can help character and video game designers in constructing their characters as gendered and classed in various ways, as well as constructing class mobility in video games and from a character's perspective.

Overall, the present study managed to find evidence for how the characters are constructed as gendered and classed, thus answering the research question and achieving the aim of the study. The characterisation taxonomy was well-suited for the task at hand, and its multiple categories helped in conducting an in-depth analysis. The six characters chosen for analysis provided interesting findings on the topic, but it could have been beneficial to include a character of distinctly higher class than the chosen characters, most of which seemed to belong somewhere within the middle classes; for example, analysing Queen Victoria could have provided more information on the construction of aristocratic characters and social differences. Therefore, in future studies, the construction of video game characters as classed could be studied further. Class construction could also be combined with other social categories, such as ethnicity; for example, in *Assassin's Creed: Syndicate*, there are characters with various different ethnicities, and it could be interesting for future studies to examine how class, ethnicity, and gender are connected to each other. Naturally, gender construction in video games could be studied further as well, as the present study was limited to a small portion of characters in one video game. The construction of class and gender could be examined, for example, in games with different settings than the one in the present data, and in games representing different genres than *AC:S*. For instance, it could be interesting to study how class is constructed in settings in which the class stratification is not as strict or obvious, and how gender is constructed in games in which the characters deviate from the gender norms more obviously.

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