Stories and Changing Social Norms: Representation of Gender in Video Games from 2007 to 2017

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ABSTRACT

This paper focuses on how a games' characters and story reflect changing cultural norms in the period during which a game series was developed and released. This is done through qualitative evaluation of the *Dragon Age* series (2009-2014) and compared to two other game franchises with similar release dates and production location: the *Mass Effect* Trilogy (2007-2012) and the *Uncharted* series (2007-2017). Stories reflect cultural and societal norms of the periods and places that crafted them, providing a unique avenue of second-person stories, containing bits and pieces of their creators and their sociocultural biases. Using these digital games as artifacts and texts of focus, a change in social and cultural values and norms of modern society appears when evaluating and comparing the content of previous games in a series to the current ones, as these works reflect the environment in which they were created.

Keywords

digital games, society, culture, gender, archaeogaming

INTRODUCTION

In video games, the embedded sociocultural material embedded is a snapshot of the time during which game was developed and released, allowing researchers to use them as a tool to study changing social and cultural norms (Alexander 2017; Brown 2015; Lambert 2013; Reinhard 2018). Intentionally or otherwise, game developers create a narrative which reflects the sociocultural norms of the time in which the story was crafted. For example, *Emily is Away* (Seeley 2015) intentionally tells a story using the social norms of the 2000s—the decade in which the game is set—but also reflects the time when the game was released in the theme of the nostalgia of gamers. Similarly, *What Remains of Edith Finch* (Giant Sparrow 2017) explores mental health and the perception of these issues in the present and in the past, reflecting values regarding mental health as they are held today and how these issues were viewed in the past. Games like *Horizon Zero Dawn* (Guerilla Games 2017) talk about the dangers of technology and climate change, developing ideas of human triumphs and dreadful failures. In this way, these games as artifacts and built digital environments to be studied archaeologically. There has been significant research on *Assassin's Creed* (Ubisoft 2018) (Atkinson 2017; Bregni 2018; Rodriguez 2014; Pringle 2015; Menon 2015; Westin and Hedlund 2015; Zarzycki 2016) and *The Elder Scrolls* (Bethesda Softworks 2011) (Bainbridge 2013; Martin 2011; Melnic 2018; Sirangelo 2014) as a tool to teach and interact with history as well as analysis of the themes of culture and change. This research recognizes stories and narrative of games, as well as the resulting assets, as the artifact and document of its time. Through this the narrative can be studied

using close-reading methods and the digital environment can provide material cultural elements as a basis for analysis, together which provide a more wholistic view of how sociocultural norms about sex and gender have changed throughout time.

In the past decade, the internal and external culture and themes in games have noticeably shifted to be more inclusive of women and minorities, which can specifically be evaluated in long-running game series. It is important to note that while women are more represented in video games, about half of self-identified gamers believe that women were still represented negatively in 2015 (Duggan 2015). One common trope in video games is the sexualization and marginalization of women and female characters (Brown 2015; Hepler 2017; Shaw 2015). This paper seeks to establish that there was change in sociocultural norms surrounding gender in gaming by evaluating three different contemporary game series. Two franchises were created by the same developers, with many team members working on both series, while the third is a separate company, providing evidence that the change in norms can be attributed to cultural change rather than simply an aspect of culture within the development teams. This research seeks to provide an analysis looking at North American cultural norms about sex and gender as it is presented and changes throughout the period of ten years (2007-2017). It is also limited to AAA developers and their presentation of sex and gender and inclusivity in their games, rather than independent studios, other temporal periods, and cultures outside of North America.

Gender and Gaming

Prior to exploring social changes, it is important to establish gender in the game spaces—both in terms of community and development. Gaming is thought of as a predominantly male activity, with the marketing of games historically being targeted at boys (Lien 2013; Shaw 2015). Sexism generated by this marketing tactic has been perpetuated and policed by the community, causing women to be less likely to identify as a gamer (Hepler 2017; Lien 2013; Shaw 2015). Some scholars have argued that men and women simply play different types of games and have different playstyles (Brown 2015; Hepler 2017; Mildner and Mueller 2016; Paaßen et al. 2017), though some scholars attribute this difference more to the type of person and player than to gender (Hayes 2005; Shaw 2009, 2012, 2015). While the latter may not hold water, it is important to note that women have been in gaming since the beginning, though remaining less visible (Kocurek 2017).

Statistically, the number of women and men who plays games has changed within the past decade and a half. In 2008, more men were playing video games than women, while recent studies show that more than half of gamers identify as women (Anderson 2015; Duggan 2015; Helper 2017; Lenhart et al. 2008). Despite the growing presence of women in gaming, women often remain marginalized and harassed in gaming communities and culture (Paaßen et al. 2017; Ruvalcaba et al. 2018). When it comes to game development, women are still underrepresented in the space, with only about 22 percent of the industry identifying as women in 2014 (Makuch 2014). Women generally work in production, writing, and more artistic positions, rather than the more technical positions like coders, largely due to unconscious and systematic bias which discourages women from pursuing careers in technology (Graser 2013; Hepler 2017; Shaw 2009). Women who work in game development experience sexism and harassment, often as microaggressions (Hepler 2017; Shaw 2009).

It seems remiss not to mention that the topic of this publication was inspired by my own reflections in playing these games in order of the release date for each franchise. While playing through the Dragon Age games, I felt a clear change in tone related to gender as the release dates become more recent. The tonal shift was an aspect that I reflected on and wanted to explore further. Simply growing up during the period from

2008 to today, a shift in sociocultural norms related to gender can be seen, and it was clearly reflected in this gaming franchise. In observing and reflecting on this, I sought to explore whether the change was solely related to Dragon Age or if it was present elsewhere in the storytelling in other games. The purpose of this paper is to demonstrate, using qualitative analysis, that this sociocultural change using three contemporary gaming franchises.

The goal of this paper is to show the occurrence of social change from 2009 until 2017 in terms of gender. Rather than to explicitly quantitatively evaluate the topic or suggest whether the change occurred in society first or if societal change was a result of these games, the research seeks to demonstrate and showcase the change within these specific North American AAA studios using qualitative observation. These analysis is also extrapolated to suggest a change in sociocultural norms surrounding sex and gender in North American society as a whole, rather than just keeping the argument to developers or gaming culture.

DRAGON AGE SERIES (2009-2014) – CASE STUDY

The three installments of the *Dragon Age* series, developed by BioWare and Entertainment Arts (EA), came out several years apart. *Dragon Age: Origins* (BioWare 2009)—the first game in the series—was released in 2009, *Dragon Age II* (BioWare 2011) was released in 2011, and *Dragon Age: Inquisition* (BioWare 2014)—the latest games in the series—was released in 2014. All three installments received similar high reviews at their time of release, however, *Dragon Age: Inquisition* obtained the highest rating (Metacritic 2009a, 2011a, 2014).

World of Dragon Age
Dragon Age takes place in a fantasy universe with similarities to other high fantasy worlds (Figure 1). The world contains various races other than humans, including dwarves, elves, and a race called Qunari, as well as other types of creatures, like dragons, spirits, and demons. The lore remains relatively similar throughout all three games, as does the map. *Dragon Age: Origins* and *Dragon Age II* are linear maps and stories, while *Dragon Age: Inquisition* is an open world with both linear and non-linear storytelling. It is of important to note that the linear style of the first two installments was typical style of the era in which they were developed and released while more current games strive to be at least somewhat open world.
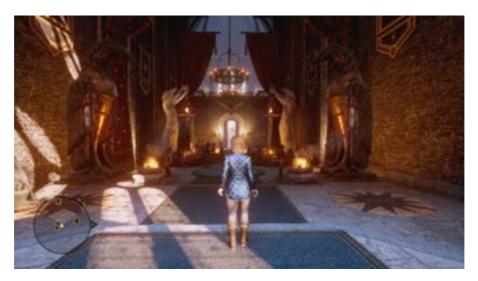

Figure 1: *Dragon Age: Inquisition*'s Skyhold, the main hub and castle for the player.

Each game features a different protagonist, location, and period in the world, effectively allowing BioWare to change the world however they desire while still playing within the established lore. Since the different games take place during different period in the world's history, the developers can pick that which they feel would be beneficial to carry over into the next game, providing the ability to explain away differences in the world state by using the timeline progression as the reason for the change in world layout or textures or in behavioral and cultural elements of the game's inhabitants.

While the world state is affected by player decisions in past games. EA allows the players to see how their decisions changed the game as well as what decisions they may have missed in the *Dragon Age Keep,* allowing players further freedom to explore the lore and alternate histories. For those players who did not play through the previous games, the developers chose a default choices and outcomes. While some of these choices are the preferred or expected action, the default world state produces a specific game state for new players—providing a specific way that the developers want the story to be viewed by a newcomer—which can and should be examined in the context of the era of the games' development. With a default world state, options that may be controversial or problematic today (but were not necessarily viewed as controversial or problematic in the past) can be relatively ignored. Default world states can show which decision or aspects of the game might be better left to the wayside in a changing cultural landscape, if any. In this way, the games present a change in sociocultural norms by bringing to the forefront certain game decisions which are not problematic in their portrayal of gender and pushing those decisions that are potentially problematic to the back.

It is due to *Dragon Age*'s fantasy setting which is removed from the "real world" through means of dragons, fantasy races, and the presence of magic, that these games become particularly useful in showing a change in the reflected sociocultural norms. In the setting of fantasy, there are no specific rules regarding gender that must be followed—the world can be created however one sees fit. Additionally, the construction of a unique fantasy world for the *Dragon Age* games—the world of Thedas—the developers are not beholden to anyone's previously established rules or lore. This is particularly clear in the need which is reflected by the publishing of several volumes on the history and lore of Thedas (Battye et al. 2015; Berry et al. 2013) as well as in the development of a tabletop role-playing game system designed specifically for the *Dragon Age* universe. For example, if the fantasy setting of *Lord of the Rings* or *Dungeons and Dragons* was used, the developers would be expected to follow established rules and cultures of these properties in the games. The literature on the fantasy genre suggests that fantasy tends to allow creators to justify discrimination of race, sex, and gender (San Nicolás Romera et al. 2016; Young 2015, 2016). However, its removal from other existing worlds shows that the *Dragon Age* series can change or include whatever the game developer's desire. Creating a unique fantasy setting allows the developers to take total control of how the players will experience aspects of in-game life and culture through the world building.

Sexism and Gender in Storylines and Player Interactions

In terms of gender, there is also a notable change in the inclusion and treatment of characters over time. While they are visible in the world, *Dragon Age: Origins* (2009) treats women as objects with little power and as religious leaders. Several of the topics in the game involve the objectification of and violence against women. When looking at many of the origins stories, for which the game is named, focus on the player character (PC) escaping a male aggressor, or, if the player is male, taking revenge on the non-player character (NPC) for violence against a female NPC.

For example, in the Dalish Elf origin story, the player character interacts with a male character who imprisons and rapes the elvish women with whom the player character is friends. While this was intended to show the discrimination and lack of value for elves in the setting, this is not the only way that the game developers could have expressed the world's disdain for the elvish population. This origin story could have easily been changed to be filled with people verbally insulting elves or with the character watching how working elves are treated by humans in a domestic setting. For example, in *Dragon Age: Inquisition* (2014), the beginning of the story, just after the tutorial section, shows an elf who is clearly concerned about the authority of Cassandra, one of the humans in charge. The player can hear people speaking about elves getting menial jobs such as cleaning and cooking in the following sequences. With these subtle lines and behaviors, the story about elves is clear to new players: that elves are not equal.

The Dwarven Noble story line in *Dragon Age: Origins* involves the PC being next in line for the throne while simultaneously being subjected to sexual harassment from her colleagues and friends. Since these situations are different depending on what gender the player chooses, it shows a specific design choice by the game developers and writers to purposely include these elements of sexism into the story. In *Dragon Age: Inquisition*, these levels of overt sexism and harassment towards an Inquisitor (the title of the PC) of any gender are not present.

Dragon Age II does not include the same level of overt sexism as the previous game. The origin story of the protagonist, Hawke, does not change depending on the gender of the character. Opening sequences and the origin of Hawke do not involve sexual assault or harassment from NPCs. While there are similar treatments and portrayals of women, the game designers were able to remove many sexist threads with little consequence.

Party Members and NPCs

When looking at companions—party members and friends (or rivals) of the PC—who identify as women in *Dragon Age: Origins,* feminine characters are treated as their own person, each being a relatively strong character. It is to be noted that the content and conversations with some women companions, like the companion's personal quests or origin stories, follow similar sexist themes. For example, Liliana, a female human roque, talks for an exceptionally long time about shoes, while a similar obsession about an item of clothing from a masculine companion is not present. Additionally, Liliana's origin story involves several instances of sexual assault and harassment against her which can be heard about or played through in a DLC (downloadable content) by the player.

The feminine companions are also strong individuals—as are many of the other women with which the player interacts in *Dragon Age II*. They focus of conversations with companions is more about the individual storylines and origins of these characters as well as a place to build personality. Origin stories for the feminine companions do not involve sexual harassment or assault. NPCs identifying as female are not necessarily frequent, but the presentations do not present stereotypes of gender as frequently without also providing a masculine counterpart partaking in similar activities.

Dragon Age: Inquisition also contains many strong women, both as the traveling companions and as other NPCs (Figure 2). Notably, the army that the player forms throughout the game is filled with a variety of men and women of various fantasy races and humans. This is a notable change from the preceding games. The overt sexism and inclusion of harassment and assault of female characters is not a major theme or issue as with previous games. These elements are not used as a side motivation for the actions

of the PC or the storyline. Companions and party members are of varying skills and abilities as well as backstories. The scientist to whom the player gives materials for research is a woman as is the enchanter whose skill is spoken of highly. Each feminine character becomes their own individual without the inclusion of sexist questions or actions against them.

Figure 2: A screenshot from *Dragon Age: Inquisition* at one of the first towns which the player encounters (the Crossroads in the Hinterlands), showing diversity among the character models.

Positions of Prestige and Power

Women in the positions of power in *Dragon Age: Origins* are almost exclusively religious leaders, with the only exception being Queen Anora who only gains power when backed for the throne by the player. This decision to install Queen Anora as an unmarried ruler, therefore her achieving the same power as her masculine counterparts, involves the player ignoring the warnings of many other characters to not back Anora for the throne, suggesting that choosing this option is not necessarily the best decision. Instead, the NPCs suggest that you choose your masculine friend, Alistar, to become King or to ask the two characters to marry and rule together. These sexist tones are present with the writing suggesting that a woman should not rule alone and that that is somehow problematic even though she is entirely capable and has already been in this position of power since the death of her husband early on in the game.

It is in *Dragon Age II* that there is representation of women in positions of power. In the beginning of the game, the smuggler for whom you can work is a woman. The captain of the city guard, Aveline, is similarly a woman with a position of power, though it is important to note that Aveline achieves this title and power throughout the story. These are individuals of varying moral and ethical alignment and skills and abilities. It is a welcome change from the previous game where there was little placement of women in positions of power outside of religious affiliations.

Women in *Dragon Age: Inquisition* can also be found in many positions of power (Figure 3). For example, the leader of an organization known as the Grey Wardens—whose goal is to periodically fight and destroy demons—is a woman. The Empress of

the Orlesian Empire—one of the two states in which the player spends a lot of time—is a woman in a position of power as well. These are two examples, however, there are the plethora of women in power and prestige throughout the world of *Dragon Age: Inquisition.* The representation of a variety of women is notable in this installment of the series.

Figure 3: A screenshot from *Dragon Age: Inquisition*, the "Jaws of Hakkon" DLC, showing one of the many women in positions of power throughout this game.

Transgender and Gender Non-Binary Characters

Presentations of gender are not strictly within the gender binary in the *Dragon Age* games. Over time, the inclusion of transgender and gender non-conforming characters has change specifically in the portrayal. Most inclusions of non-binary and transgender individuals in games are negative and transphobic (Shaw and Friesem 2016).

Dragon Age: Origins (2009) includes DLC character named Shale who states they have no gender. It is important to also recognize that the characters refer to Shale with he/him pronouns until they find out that Shale was a female dwarf in life when the other characters switch to she/her pronouns. The frustrating disregard for desired pronouns or respect in gender identity is clear. In the past decade, a significant change in the views surrounding gender and identity can be seen when looking at the presentation in this game, and other contemporaneous games, to presentations of gender in more recent games and the inclusion of pronoun choice by the player in the character creation process.

There is the inclusion of a transgender character in *Dragon Age: Inquisition* (2014), something relatively absent in the previous two games. Named Krem, this character's personality and presence is more than simply attempting to include a more diverse population into the game, as Krem is, for the most part, a thought-out character. The player meets this character near the beginning of the game and, depending on specific decisions the player makes, they will be able to speak further with Krem throughout

the game, building trust with the character and getting to know him better. Through interactions with this character, the player is allowed to ask questions about being transgender to Krem who provides answers that are not trivial or outlandish. A survey of LGBTQ+ characters in games states that Krem is a rare example of a transgender man in games and that, unlike other games, the game does not treat him through a transphobic lens, but in a positive way (Shaw and Friesem 2016). While in the four years since the game's release the questions regarding being transgender that the player can ask this character may be problematic, the ability to ask questions which a player may not want to ask in real life, provides a safe learning environment to facilitate a more understanding gaming community.

OTHER SERIES AS COMPARIONS

The *Mass Effect* Trilogy (2007-2012)

As a comparison, one can look at the *Mass Effect* Trilogy. Specifically, this comparison is useful in that the three games were released in similar years and were developed by the same companies: EA and BioWare. The first *Mass Effect* (BioWare 2007) game was released in 2007 for XBOX 360, *Mass Effect 2* (BioWare 2010) was released in 2010 for XBOX 360, PC, and PlayStation 3, and *Mass Effect 3* (BioWare 2012) was released in 2012 for XBOX 360, PC, and PlayStation 3. The three games received similar reviews, with *Mass Effect 3* receiving the highest reviews from critics (Metacritic 2007a, 2010, 2012). This follows a similar trend for the games as compared to the *Dragon Age* series. It is important to note that the low user review score (as compared to the critic's score) for *Mass Effect 3* was related to the negative feelings about the trilogy's ending, with no express relation to inclusivity.

The *Mass Effect* Trilogy is a science fiction series set in the near future where the player travels through the galaxy. The game consists of various alien races and technologies which provide space travel. The trilogy follows the same protagonist, named Shepard, on their journey to prevent the destruction of the galaxy by various sources of chaos which are present throughout all three games. These games are known for the consequences of each decision that the player must make throughout the game, where selecting the wrong dialogue option could mean the death of one of your squad mates— the individuals who follow the player around on their journey.

There are default world states for individuals who have not played previous games— like in *Dragon Age*—but the *Mass Effect* games allow you to decide which world state the player would like to use during the launch of the game with basic information about what decisions the previous game made for the player. A simple amount of knowledge about how the world state changes based on each decision in the previous game is available to the player at the start of a *Mass Effect* sequel.

Mass Effect shows similarities to *Dragon Age* in terms of how it treats women in the games. *Mass Effect* and *Mass Effect 2* presents predominantly sexualized female characters, excluding the main character. There are strip clubs full of exclusively female strippers and women wearing little clothing. These aspects can be justified as to show the seedy underbelly of *Mass Effect*. However, these scenes are entirely unnecessary as the crime world or darker sides of the galaxy do not need to be built on female objectification. If the developers did feel it vital to show the darker sides of the lore in this way, the simple inclusion of male strippers would remedy the sexism. In *Mass Effect 2*, the player is also subjected to random, unnecessary close-ups of the buttocks of a squad member named Miranda, more objectification of women. By *Mass Effect 3*, the strip clubs and the random objectification of the player's companions are no longer prevalent.

It is important to note that in the second and third installment in the *Mass Effect* series there are a few women in positions of power, though they are mostly criminals, like the head of a crime syndicate on Omega, one of the game's two space stations. Many of the female squad members are thought out, complex, and strong—like the development of the companions in *Dragon Age*. Women in *Mass Effect: Andromeda*, however, are in various positions of power with different skills and abilities, not exclusive to criminal activity.

It is important to note that the *Mass Effect* Trilogy does not have the inclusion of explicitly transgender characters as *Dragon Age* does. Though one characteristic of the Asari, a prominent alien race in the *Mass Effect* series, is that they are considered genderless, according to game information, but are only referred to with she/her pronouns and are considered a race only comprised of women by much of the community of player surrounding the game. This is to be noted as the game lore explicitly states the Asari are genderless. In an overheard interaction in *Mass Effect 3,* a human character finds out that the Asari are genderless and asks the pronouns of the Asari with whom she had been speaking. Perhaps this inclusion and difference in content is due to a changing cultural attitude toward transgender individuals in the two-year difference between *Mass Effect 3* (2012) and *Dragon Age: Inquisition* (2014).

The *Uncharted* Series (2007-2017)

The *Uncharted* series can also serve as a comparison, though they were developed by a different game company, NaughtyDog. The installments of this series came out at relatively similar times to both *Mass Effect* and *Dragon Age* and have grown similarly. The first game, *Uncharted: Drake's Fortune* (NaughtyDog 2007) was released in 2007, *Uncharted 2: Among Thieves* (NaughtyDog 2009) was released in 2009, *Uncharted 3: Drake's Deception* (NaughtyDog 2011) was released in 2011, and *Uncharted 4: A Thief's End* (NaughtyDog 2016) was released in 2016. These games all had relatively similar ratings to each other with Uncharted 4 receiving the highest critic rating out of the four games (Metacritic, 2007b, 2009b, 2011b, 2016). This trend again follows that of the *Dragon Age* and *Mass Effect*. A fifth game was recently released in 2017 called *Uncharted: The Lost Legacy* (NaughtyDog 2017) which does not follow Nathan Drake and is about half the length of the previous four installments, receiving a lower review score than its predecessor, but one that is still relatively high (Metacritic 2017).

Uncharted is a third person action-adventure series that follows a modern-day treasure hunter and self-proclaimed thief, along their adventures to obtain fortune around the globe. The series involves various global myths and legends, both fabricated and including elements of actual legends to serve the purposes of the story. The first four *Uncharted* games follow Nathan Drake on his treasure-hunting journeys while, in the most recent game, *The Lost Legacy*, the player assumes the role of Chloe, a half-Indian woman. Chloe appears in previous games installments as a side character to Nathan Drake. Aside from *The Lost Legacy* and a small sequence in *Uncharted 4*, these games are linear in both story and maps. There are almost no decisions that the player gets to make for the character, including the basic dialogue response decisions that are made in the *Mass Effect* and *Dragon Age* games. This means that the world changes occur based on predetermined story, rather than making the player choose how to handle a situation. Since there are no decisions, the characters interact with each other based on the writing of the game. Characters look and behave similarly with each other in each game with no deviance based on decisions, like the player character's gender, though the characters do grow as people throughout their adventures. The player must play as Nathan Drake, excluding *The Lost Legacy*.

Looking at the other characters in the first *Uncharted* game, the only woman is Elena who plays the love interest to Nathan. Other than a few sequences where she helps in a

shoot-out or drives a vehicle, she plays the part of romantice and sounding board for the audience with little backstory of her own and she seems to follow Nathan regardless of his implosive and dangerous decisions. This changes in the next installments of the series as the game builds out Elena as a character and begins to include other women in the game, like Chloe who plays the love interest to Nathan in *Uncharted 2*. Chloe in the second game is different from Elena's character in the first game in that she has her own selfish goals and does not simply stay with Nathan regardless of the situation. By the time we see Chloe in *the Lost Lega*cy, she is a fully developed complex character and the game developers changed her body model to reflect a more realistic woman, rather than the oversexualized, and largely unhealthy and unattainable body image that was common in previous video games, like Lara Croft before the 2013 series reboot.

From the first game, a player can see a change in the inclusivity of women in games as well as how the game treats these characters. By the fourth *Uncharted* game, there is a woman in a position of power—Nadine, the owner of a private army which Nathan is fighting during the game. Nadine is also a complex and strong female character, and she is a woman of color. While the inclusion of a racial minority as an antagonist is somewhat problematic, Nadine becomes much more in *The Lost Legacy* where she plays alongside Chloe as one of the heroines of the story (Figure 4).

Figure 4: A screenshot from *Uncharted: The Lost Legacy* showing Nadine and Chloe, the main characters in this game.

Like *Mass Effect*, the *Uncharted* series does not include any transgender characters. Most of the characters in *Uncharted* both as companions and as enemies are masculine, even in the most recent game. While this is likely due to a lack of desire to make new enemy models, the inclusion of diverse genders in the game world, especially as enemies would be welcome. Much like *Mass Effect* and *Dragon Age*, the trend for sexualization and objectification of women in the game's changes over time, providing a snapshot of the sociocultural norms of the periods during which the games were developed and released.

CONCLUSION
Looking at the treatment of gender between the three game franchises from the late 2000s to the late 2010s, there is a noticeable difference in how the women of the games are portrayed. Women are presented increasingly in the varying positions of power,

with less objectification and sexism, and generally more included within the game worlds. There are notable changes in the presentation of gender. Newer installments of the same franchises show increasing inclusion and positive portrayals of women and gender, suggesting that the change is not solely due to a change in the development team or one company.

Through the years, game have, in terms of inclusivity and development, created more of meaningful characters in their spaces. The increase in women video gamers might be the cause for the change in video game content, but it is also likely related to a cultural shift. Since games, like other types of storytelling, are embedded with the culture and norms of the times in which they were created, the evidence presented here shows a change at the cultural level of the treatment of sex and gender in the past decade and a half. With the change in aspects of the *Dragon Age* series to become more inclusive, the games can act as a place in the history of gaming culture and societal norms and values in which the game was developed.

Cultural views on sex and gender have changed in North America during the games ongoing installments. During the years between releases of the games (*Dragon Age*: 2009-2014; *Mass Effect*: 2007-2012; *Uncharted*: 2007-2017), there seems to be a lack of paradigm-shifting movements in locations outside of the gaming industry and culture that might have been the cause of the shift that is shown in these games. The cultural change seen in these video games may be due to the influx of a newer generation of individuals entering the workforce around this period as well as current events and movements spurring sociocultural change like the #MeToo and Black Lives Matter movements. Future research regarding sociocultural shifts may benefit from looking games published by European developers as compared to developers from North America, especially with regard to cross-cultural differences in understandings of gender. Similarly, it would be interesting to see in future works a study if cultural shifts can be seen in independent games from the same period. This text does not seek to determine the origin of the social change, though future research may wish to examine this question.

BioWare announced that they are working on another *Dragon Age* game to be released in the near future. The possibility of a new *Mass Effect* game is increasingly more realistic. The evaluation of any new *Mass Effect* installment as well as the evaluation of gender in *Mass Effect: Andromeda* and any new releases into the *Uncharted* games would benefit future research. It will be interesting to see if there is a shift in the content of the games and to what degree, if any, they change in terms of diversity and sexism. Future research on the new *Dragon Age* game, in comparison to other releases and to the older games as described in this article, will be necessary to determine the impact of recent cultural and political events. Similarly, future research should revisit these franchises, as well as others, to discuss and evaluate sociocultural changes surrounding sex and gender in as new games are released.

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