VIDEO GAMES AGAINST THE MALE GAZE

EMA LAVRADOR
Universidade Católica Portuguesa,
School of Arts
Research Center for Science and Technology
of the Arts,
emavitoria@gmail.com

ABSTRACT

Video games are a medium that creates content often based on male gaze, allowing heteronormative and patriarchal portrayals that limit the representation of social minorities. In this article, we will study how video games counter the male gaze through realistic, diverse, and in-depth portrayals of their main characters. The case studies will be the characters Chloe Price from *Life is Strange: Before the Storm* (2017) by Deck Nine, Ellie and Abby from *The Last of Us Part II* (2020) by Naughty Dog, and Billie Lurk from *Dishonored: Death of the Outsider* (2017) by Arkane Studios. These video games feature strong female main characters who go against social norms and represent a diversity of sexuality, bodies, and cultures. Through this article, we intend to understand how these video games, which belong to series for a mass audience, are a step towards a commonplace of acceptance, accessibility, and awareness.

Keywords: Gaze; Representation; Stereotypes; Video Games; Violence.

1. INTRODUCTION

This article aims to study the opposition of recent and mass-production video games to male gaze stereotypes. To accomplish this, we will conduct the study using qualitative methods (Creswell & Creswell, 2017) of literary review and its application to case studies through the observation of patterns.

Gaze portraits, which have different contexts and forms, have long been studied by feminist studies and applied to different arts. Our goal is to understand, through selected case studies, how video games nowadays portray different perspectives and create their content for players of different genders, identities and cultures. In this study, we propose to analyze case studies that give a voice to marginalized groups and that are changing the gaming experience via their protagonists and narratives. The gazes that we will highlight in this study, apart from the male gaze, are the female gaze, the queer gaze, the oppositional gaze, the matrixial gaze, and the portrayal of non-normative bodies and behaviors in female main characters.

After contextualizing these viewpoints and their contrary relationship to the ideals arising from the male gaze, we will introduce postfeminist thinking. This current of feminism is essential for this analysis because, in the spare of having repercussions on the video games that we will study, it also reflects the consumerist thinking present in the video game industry. The case studies that we will analyze are the role played by the characters Chloe Price from *Life is Strange: Before the Storm (*2017) by Deck Nine, Ellie and Abby from *The Last of Us Part II* (2020) by Naughty Dog and Billie Lurk from *Dishonored: Death of the Outsider* (2017) by Arkane Studios in the fight for visibility.

These games highlight black, queer, disabled female characters with bodies and behaviors outside what is considered "typical" and binary. Through these representations, new narratives and possibilities are being created, not only as content for players but also to impact diversity portraits in mass media.

Through these case studies, which correspond to video games from renowned series in the action-adventure category, we will analyze how the aspects of violence prevalent in these video games shape the attitudes of the characters. This interest is due to the dominant association of violence with masculinity and the standard characterization of female characters in video games as passive or damsels in distress.

2. PERSPECTIVES ON GAZE AND POSTFEMINISM

The male gaze consists of portraying women as an object of desire, especially from the perspective of the cis straight white man. The problem is that gaze dehumanizes women from hypersexualization to limiting the backstory given to the character, confining women to their bodies, and oppressing any type of intersectionality, such as people of color, queer, trans and disabled groups. According to Mulvey (1975), what defines the

male gaze is the difference between the active/male and passive/female, as well as the projection of fantasies onto female figures, with visual, erotic codes and with the intention of to-be-looked-at-ness. Following this idea, Berger states that "men act and women appear" (1972, p. 47), defining the presence of man as the embodiment of power, with the woman being the object to be looked at by both men and women spectators.

Laurentis (1984) addresses this issue by first establishing that masculinity and femininity are matters of identification, and that a person may have variations of these during their lifetime and are not directly implicated in their desire. In this way, we can describe that the sensation provoked in spectators is not one of diminution, as the bias towards female characters may be due to a narcissistic identification (Hollinger, 1998) or a homoerotic desire (Stacey, 2013).

While approaching a theory of queer gaze, Wray (2003) emphasizes that gaze is never something innocent, defining it as a regime of looking and being looked at and that it relates to our understanding of our own body, desire, and reality. The author notes that, while the male gaze is based on the alienation of women, the queer gaze is based on the reflection of the same desires, turning the queer person into a role of simultaneous subject and object.

Although these are the principal forms of gaze that we will analyze in the case studies, other forms of gaze are relevant to identify, such as "oppositional gaze", a term coined by bell hooks (1992). This term refers to how marginalized people, in the specific case of black female spectators, resist images and criticize gaze for implying a power relationship (Jacobs, 2016). In contrast to this gaze, there is the "matrixial gaze", which argues that it is not necessary to create a polarized perspective (Geard, 2019), arguing that desire is not dependent on the phallus and that desire should be separated from it (Lichtenberg-Ettinger, 2005).

In contrast to the male gaze, the female gaze is based on feminist theory to expose women's experiences and emotions. Accordingly, instead of being a way of looking, the female gaze is an affirmation of the female spectator, character, or creator (Banerjee & John, 2023). Within feminist studies, we are also interested in the representation of disability, given that the patriarchal normalization of video games also provided the space for a "compulsory ablebodiedness" (Hall, 2002).

In the video games that we will explore subsequently, the different forms of gaze will be addressed, as well as the postfeminist movement ideology. In addition to this movement illustrating the concerns of mass culture, its characteristics will be useful to characterize issues present in the video game series *Tomb Raider* and *The Last of Us*.

When it comes to recent media culture, postfeminism is a recurring issue. This is due to the relationship of this wave of feminism with the culture of consumerism and the overlap of individualism in relation to the collective, which often makes this discourse "anti-feminist" (Montiel & Puyal, 2020). Postfeminism, in this sense, differs from feminism in that it has a positive view of patriarchy, popular culture, and postmodernism.

However, this movement discards essentialism, macro-narratives, and binarism (Schubart & Gjelsvik, 2004).

3. VIDEO GAMES AND THE CONSTRUCTION OF WAYS OF LOOKING

Video games are a medium that, due to their interactivity, require the player's constant attention. In the case of role-playing games, the player is involved in a narrative that creates a "real" environment in which the player embodies an avatar.

Because of the interaction with the game via an avatar, the protagonist is an essential part of the experience. On this basis, the characterization and representativeness of the protagonist influences the player and the audience. However, in video games, there is a constant lack of representation of social minorities, or their poor characterization (Grimes, 2003). Since the 2000s (Talbert, 2016), the representation of characters of marginalized sexual and gender orientations in video games has increased, regardless, these characters tend to be one-dimensional and have little impact. Even though this increase may have occurred due to capitalist expectations, representation is of great importance, and many marginalized characters began to take their place in the market from 2010 onwards. This means that not only can video games be reimagined to foster new forms of politics and symbolism, but the industry can also become more inclusive, consequently teaching and helping the players to become more empathetic (Phillips & Ruberg, 2018).

In a study by Glaubke (Glaubke et al., 2001) it is notorious how the video game industry has grown as a business and how technology has evolved. Nonetheless, the industry trivializes negative messages about violence and perpetuates gender and racial stereotypes. In this context, violence is glorified and rarely has consequences for the character. Similarly, female characters are often presented as victims and, as well as being under-represented (Burgess et al., 2007) and often hyper-sexualized, even though the number of female players has increased (Kondrat, 2015).

Video games tend to be both explicitly and implicitly heteronormative, with narratives that rarely feature LGBTQIA+ characters. The lack of representation of these minorities is no coincidence, as sexuality plays a key role in most of the action-adventure video games. Heteronormativity is the established norm, and apart from being visible in the content, such as the narrative and the rules of the game, it also shapes de character's behaviors and performance (Phillips & Ruberg, 2018). In this article, we will focus on the performance and its implications and interpretations, especially through the avatar, which we consider to be an extension of the interaction that becomes the player's identity (Krobová et al., 2015). In this way, the avatar is also a form of player empowerment, allowing them to take on alternative identities (Vitali, 2010).

However, an avatar is not a singular nature, as is visible in the interpretations of the famous character Lara Croft (*Tomb Raider*, action-

adventure game from 1996 developed by Edios Interactive). Lara Croft is a notoriously sexualized avatar and not a choice for the player, so when playing the game, the player can see Lara as a body/object or a protagonist. There is always a distance between the player and the character, that is what provides a satisfying gaming experience, and Lara is a pioneer for her protagonism at a time when video games had a solely male perspective. Whereas, despite *Tomb Raider* being one of the first video games with a strong female main character, Lara is one of the clearest examples of a tool for male gaze (MacCallum-Stewart, 2014).

Figure 1. Lara Croft in *Tomb Raider* (1996) © Edios Interactive.

As demonstrated in Figure 1, Lara has an exaggerated figure, big breasts, a tiny waist, large eyes, and a large mouth, corresponding to the male fantasy. Regardless, she also has the spirit of adventure and independence, is athletic, and knows how to use weapons, which are masculine stereotypes. Just as she can be an object for the male gaze, she can also open the way for other forms of desire, since the character does not reveal one-dimensional characteristics of gender (Kennedy, 2002).

This character, particularly in her early portraits, is a reflection of postfeminism, as she embodies both passive and active forms of sexuality and femininity and reveals patriarchal ideologies. However, the most important thing to recognize in this movement is that it doesn't matter what a woman does that is considered "anti-feminist", as long as she does it by choice (Engelbrecht, 2020).

Recently (Anupama & Chithra, 2022), there has been an increase in the number of female game developers, which enhances the production of video games from a feminist perspective and improves the realistic characterizing of female characters. For this reason, the problems created by the male gaze can finally be addressed.

Starting from this insight into the female gaze, the queer gaze, and the lack of representation of these minorities, as well as racial and disabled minorities, we will explore video games that use these forms of desire and representation as a statement against the heteronormative patriarchal system. In each example of the following large-production

series video games, we will understand their contribution to deconstructing social norms through the female main characters and how their behaviors and representations influence the player's experience.

4. CASE STUDIES

4.1. *LIFE IS STRANGE: BEFORE THE STORM*

The game *Life Is Strange: Before the Storm* (2017), by Deck Nine, is a prequel to *Life is Strange* (2015), by Dontnod Entertainment. In the original game in the series, Chloe Price is a major character saved by her childhood friend Max Caulfield, the game's main character, and her special power to go back in time. After their reunion, Chloe and Max join forces to search for Rachel Amber, who has disappeared. In the prequel, we follow Chloe as the main character as she meets Rachel and falls in love with her, long before Max returns to town.

Chloe is a character with a relevant narrative arc in both games and while carrying an important role in the adventure narrative, she is also dealing with complex feelings, such as grief and overcoming abandonment. Chloe feels abandoned first by her father due to his accidental death, then by Max, as she moves to another city, and, when Max returns, by Rachel, who has disappeared. Due to her backstory, Chloe is portrayed in the past as a shy girl who grows into a loud, violent personality with dry humor.

Our interest in depicting Chloe's personality is because of the way she embraces her anger. Although this behavior is commonly associated with men, Chloe uses masculine stereotypes to make fun of themselves, such as making fun of boys for their insecurities and, in *Life is Strange*, saying that she believes in gun control when she controls the gun, and men should be the ones who should be careful (Maja, 2019).

In the game *Life is Strange* great care is taken to present the queer gaze in a constantly present and non-predatory way. For example, as the game gives the possibility for Max to have a romantic relationship with Chloe, it is the player's choice to pursue the romance, and if that storyline is not followed, Max still romantically thinks about Chloe. We also have to emphasize that the physical representation of the characters avoids their sexualization, since Max and Chloe even feature in a scene wearing swimsuits in a swimming pool [Figure 2] but their bodies and the cinematography are shown in a non-voyeuristic tone (Pötzsch & Waszkiewicz, 2019).

Figure 2. Chloe [left] and Max [right] in *Life Is Strange* (2015) © Dontnod Entertainment.

Another strategy to avoid the male gaze that this game presents subtly is to place the characters off-center in the frame, as can be seen in Figure 3 from *Life Is Strange: Before the Storm*. Through this technique, the player intuitively focuses on the environment more than the character on the screen (Oktavanya & Panjaitan, 2019).

Figure 3. Chloe [right] and Rachel [left] in *Life Is Strange* (2015) © Deck Nine.

Looking at the queer representation in this video game, this does not only happen due to the choice or presence of characters from the LGBTQIA+ community. It also happens in the form of an archive. During *Life is Strange*, Max has a diary that serves to guide the player in the character's thoughts, and even when the player does not choose for Max to have a romantic relationship with Chloe, the diary reveals that the character is interested in kissing her. In this same game, we also witness how Chloe, a lesbian, uses the missing person posters to approach her mission to find Rachel, a bisexual, with whom she has a romantic relationship in the prequel. The archive is recognized as one of the ways to preserve queer

identity, and the way it is relevant in this game allows us to reach a high level of understanding of the feelings of these romantic relationships (Drouin, 2019).
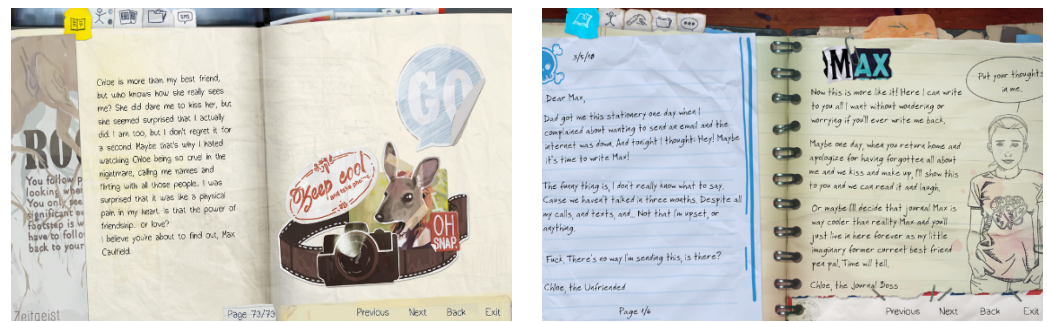

Figure 4-5. Max's Diary entry in *Life Is Strange* (2015) © Dontnod Entertainment (left)
Chloe's Diary entry in *Life Is Strange: Before the Storm* (2017) © Deck Nine (right)

In Figure 4, we can see an entry in Max's diary in which she questions the nature of her love for Chloe. In Figure 5, we can see how Chloe writes to Max in her diary and shows a romantic interest in her, revealing a queer romance even before Chloe meets Rachel in the game. Her diary is a clear portrait of Chloe's strong and rebellious personality, who calls herself "Chloe, the Journal Boss" and expresses her feelings of abandonment.

Another aspect we want to underline, as we reference the subversion of the sexualization of the characters and the archive of queer identity, is the way Chloe performs her role as the main character in *Life Is Strange: Before the Storm*. While in *Life is Strange* Max has special powers to go back in time, in the prequel that features Chloe, she does not have supernatural powers. Her "power" employed by the player is based on offending and being rude to other characters. And, although the narrative is linear, it is constantly interrupted by lucid dreams with Chloe's father, who has passed away. In this narrative, Chloe suffers from her father's death, Max's departure, and her financial debt situation, which gives her the self-destructive behavior present in both video games of the series. In this way, Chloe is a teenage punk rocker, a gender nonconforming character, with bully traits, and queer, a rare personality to represent in a main character (Vestå, 2021).

During the series, Chloe and Max actively overcome challenges that correspond to their courageous and rebellious personalities, and the same happens with Chloe and Rachel in the prequel, revealing a constant feminist and queer counter-cultural position.

4.2. *THE LAST OF US PART II*

Before writing about *The Last of Us Part II*, we have to we have to put into context the story of the first game in the series, *The Last of Us Part I* (2013) by Naughty Dog. In the first game, we follow the main character Joel, and his protégé, Ellie, as Joel has to take Ellie to the Fireflies base. In this apocalyptic narrative, Ellie is immune to the fungus that is destroying humanity, and the Fireflies intend to examine her to discover a cure. However, when Joel, who takes care of Ellie as if she were family, realizes

that Ellie has to die to be studied, he kills the surgeon and saves Ellie, depriving humanity of a cure (Favaro, 2022). Interestingly, according to Stang (2018), the growing protagonism of fatherhood is a trope that arises with postfeminism, which perpetuates the idea of the man saving the damsel but, positively, creates a new model of paternalized masculinity.

In the next game of the series, years later, we play as Ellie and Abby. *The Last of Us Part II* starts with Ellie as she makes it her mission to take revenge on Abby, who killed Joel. To fulfill her mission, Ellie has to act violently and dubiously, making her more of an antihero than a hero, questioning her behavior as happens to Joel in the first game when he chooses to save Ellie. Eventually, the game takes a turn. Just as we play with Ellie, we also play with her enemy, Abby, and we discover that her reason for killing Joel is also motivated by revenge, as Joel killed Abby's father, the surgeon, in the first game. At that moment, the distinction between hero and villain disappears, realistically portraying characters' decisions in a post-apocalyptic environment of chaos and conflict, far from human. This shows us that, in a world driven by survival and revenge, Ellie and Abby cannot be heroes, they can only act within what they consider good for their communities (Favaro, 2022).

In addition to the player having the moral weight of having to fight characters with whom they have become fond, looking for Abby while playing as Ellie and Ellie while playing with Abby, the player also sees Ellie losing her mentor (Joel) at the beginning of the narrative and her girlfriend (Dina) when she chooses to continue searching for Abby (Erb & Doh, 2021).

This is one of the first video games to feature a dominant, active woman who is prone to violence, sometimes engaging in inhuman behaviour (Parkin, 2020). However, in the post-apocalyptic universe of the gameplay, this violence can be interpreted as a form of emancipation. The two characters, Ellie [Figure 6] and Abby [Figure 7], also represent rare portraits in video games. Ellie is a lesbian woman and Abby has a muscular and non-normatively feminine body (according to the binary and cis-normative conception of body and gender (Galupo et al., 2021), with violence being the aspect that most stands out in their expression of gender identity, both as victims and aggressors. This goes against the stereotype that femininity should be non-violent as opposed to the violence associated with masculinity (Schubert, 2021).
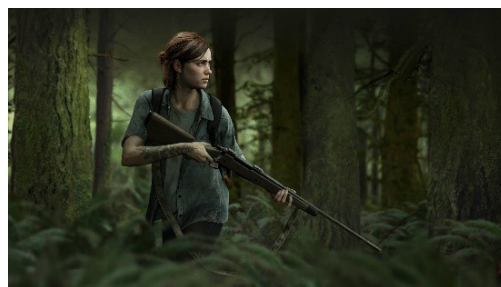

Figure 6-7. Ellie in *The Last of Us Part II* (2020) © Naughty Dog (left). Abby in *The Last of Us Part II* (2020) © Naughty Dog (right).

With the growing number of female characters in video games and the concern with a new photorealistic reality, which seeks to be less superficial and avoid depictions such as the original Lara Croft, Abby's build caught the attention of players (Tomkinson, 2023). Unlike what happens with Lara Croft, this was due to Abby's culturally deviant profile of the female body. Culturally, the norm for what is a woman's body is still one-dimensional, and Abby's body, despite being photorealistic, is seen as abnormal. Abby is a soldier in a military organization, and her muscular body and performance is motion captured by CrossFit athlete Jocelyn Mattler. Even before the game was released, comments were made saying that Abby was possibly transgender, which supports the patriarchal idea that, if her body deviates from the norm, she must not be a cisgender woman. During the game, Abby has a sex scene with a male character, to which many players reacted with disgust. This scene serves as a direct opposition to the convention of the gender binary and shows what heterosexual desire can be (Tomkinson, 2023).

Now focusing on Ellie, a young woman who grew up as a child soldier in the apocalyptic context, and a catalyst character in the first game of the series, she was always presented as a non-sexualized, homosexual character with a gender identity introduced in a complex non-binary way, and with a raging personality (MacCallum-Stewart, 2019).

In the second game in the series, Ellie is capable of committing great acts of violence, such as killing characters, something almost banal in video games, but also torture. During the gameplay, violence is mostly a player's choice, and the aesthetics and environment created explore these actions in a shocking (through the reactions of the surrounding characters) or unsettling way (through the desexualization of violence and gore).

Figure 8. Ellie tortures Nora in *The Last of Us Part II* (2020) © Naughty Dog

During the game, there are also moments when enemies beg for mercy before the player decides to kill or spare them. Torture, on the other hand, is the lowest level that Ellie reaches within her violence. Although the game is surrounded by various forms of violence, the universe and even Ellie herself consider torture to be a degeneration of humanity. When Ellie tortures Nora, the interactivity that makes violence a problem, as it is an

active role, prevents this scene from becoming light or even pornographic through cinematography, as we do not see Nora's body [Figure 8]. After torturing her, Ellie suffers the psychological consequences of her actions. Another context where we see the consequences of violence is at the end of the game when Ellie loses two fingers bitten off by Abby. Even so, Ellie decides to spare Abby's life, when she returns home, Dina has left her and she can no longer play Joel's guitar. In this way, Ellie spares a life, but it is the life of another torturer (Rotiroti, 2022).

4.3. *DISHONORED: DEATH OF THE OUTSIDER*

This is the third game in the *Dishonored* series, and develops as a sequel to *Dishonored 2*, continuing the narrative through the character Billie Lurke, who goes from secondary character to main character in this game, and expands the story of the Outsider, the antagonist and a god. In this game, Billie's objective is to fulfill Daud's last wish and kill the Outsider. Something unique about this narrative is that, while the other playable characters have supernatural powers gifted by the Outsider, Billie does not. The powers that Billie has during gameplay come from supernatural artifacts that she finds. To defeat the Outsider, Billie must discover his origin and, in an unexpected twist in a game of violence and murder, the player must choose whether to kill him or deal with him in a non-lethal way (Rautalahti, 2018).

The world of this game is set in Victorian times, with a strong emphasis on the aristocracy, cults, and experimental science, enabling contact between different classes and questioning social roles of gender, sex, and domestic life (Gallagher, 2014). The perception of social inequality happens both through interaction with characters, but also through interaction with rats. Billie's amulet gives her the ability to hear and perceive rats, which can help the player discover alternative ways to get to places, but the animals extensively describe the cruelties they face (Green, 2018).

In addition to this ability, Billie also holds the power to teleport, steal the faces of unconscious people, and freeze time. Since her introduction, Billie has been one of the characters with further narrative evolution and an experienced assassin (White, 2017).
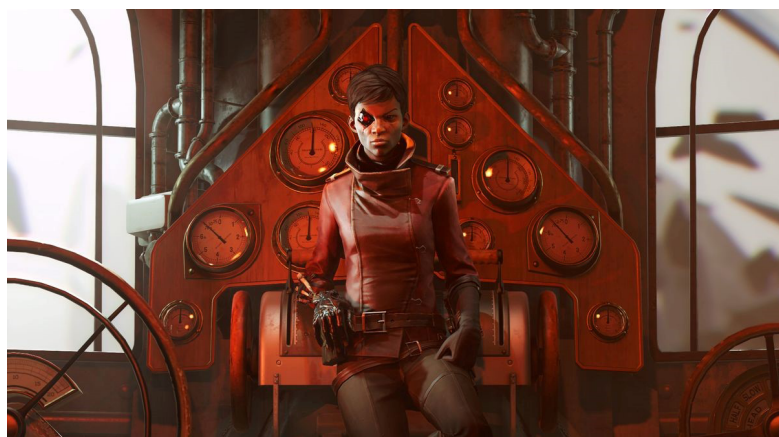

Figure 9. Billie in *Dishonored: Death of the Outsider* (2017) © Arkane Studios.

One aspect that we have to emphasize is the number of different representations that Billie embodies. She is a black, queer, and disabled woman, strong, and skilled and none of her supernatural powers are related to her disability. This portrayal in *Death of the Outsider* has enormous importance, as in the previous game in the series, *Dishonored 2,* Billie loses her eye and arm, corresponding to her portrayal as the main character [Figure 9], but the player is given the possibility of going back in time and "save" Billie. This choice caused players to establish a fanbase of ableist beliefs that entitled to the idea that disabled people do not have the chance to turn back time and be "fixed". Billie's disability goes against the commonplace of the able-bodied audience that argues that disabilities ideally should be cured or repaired. For this reason, Billie's portrayal is a positive step for the series towards progress (Crawford, 2020).

When it comes to sexuality, with Billie as the main character, we have a privileged standpoint of her romantic feelings through Deirdre, who passes away, yet is part of the story through Billie's dreams and thoughts. The amulet that Billie wears and gives her the ability to talk to rats is a gift from Deirdre, but the amulet is just a lucky charm with Deirdre's hair. Only after her death did the rats begin to whisper to Billie.

In this game, as in *Life is Strange*, queer romance happens intimately through an archive. Such can be seen in the mission One Last Fight, in which Billie writes "we used to lie together and the feeling of her fingers across my skin would be the only thing in the world to me" [Figure 10]. Here, the romance is shown in an affectionate, non-sexualized way, which lets us know Billie's emotional side.
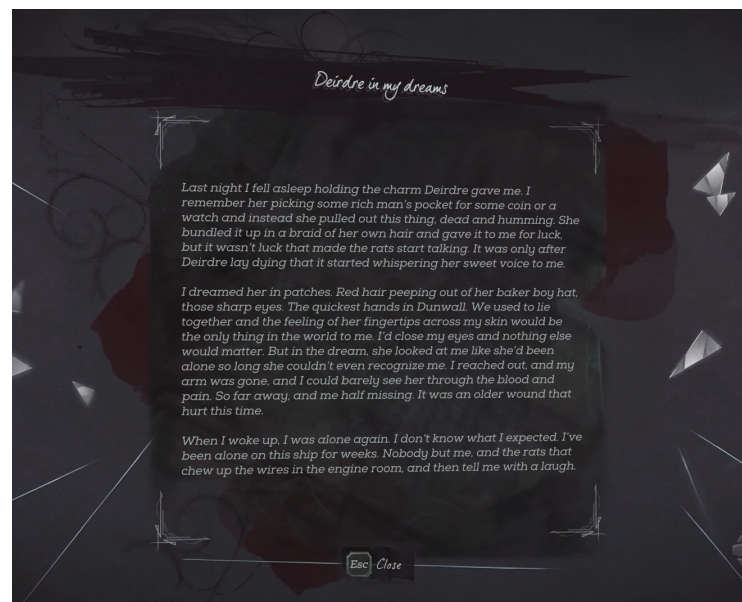

Figure 10. Billie's note about dreaming with Deirdre in *Dishonored: Death of the Outsider* (2017) © Arkane Studios.

As for violence, Billie resembles the characters we have been analyzing throughout this article. She is a killer with strong convictions that range between revenge and justice. Nevertheless, as in *The Last of Us Part II*, she also suffers the consequences of her actions.

For Billie to fulfill her mission and kill the Outsider, a dead person must speak his name. At this stage of the game, Daud is dead and his spirit inhabits the Void (where the world's magic comes from). At the end of the game, the player has the option to spare or kill the Outsider, and if he kills him, Billie regrets being a murderer and never being able to change it, and Daud's spirit is condemned to wander in the afterlife in the Void. If the player spares the Outsider and refuses the mission, Billie states that they are even for having saved her in the past and that Daud should spare him, then saying goodbye to Daud's spirit, who finds peace.

5. CONCLUSION

In this article, we can notice patterns that show how the video games *Life is Strange: Before the Storm*, *The Last of Us Part II* and *Dishonored: Death of the Outsider* fight the male gaze and at the same time increase the visibility and representation of social minorities, through the female main characters Chloe Price, Ellie, Abby, and Billie Lurk. These characters, belonging to minorities of race, class, gender, sexuality, and with non-normative bodies and personalities, are exploring new aesthetic and narrative ways of storytelling within the action-adventure genre.

One aspect that all these characters have in common is the way they use violence in a world that is violent towards them. In the case of Chloe Price, Chloe lives a life of anguish, grief, and inequality, and uses violence to scare and speak badly to other people, which in the gameplay is presented as her "superpower". Chloe is a rebellious young lesbian, with financial debts and a non-conforming gender identity. In her narrative context, Chloe responds to the world in a way that affirms her experience, so her expression of anger ends up being an affirmation of her existence.

The series *Life is Strange* is relevant to this study due to its care to avoid sexualizing the characters. In addition to the protagonists not being portrayed with sexualized bodies, during the game, these characters are positioned discreetly on the side of the frame so that the player can focus more on the environment around them through non-voyeuristic cinematography.

The use of diaries as queer archives is likewise relevant. In this series, diaries are preservation of the character's queer romantic interest, which, even if the player does not choose to pursue, is described in writing in the main character's diary. This way, whatever romantic choice the player makes, this exploration of sexual identity is available throughout the game.

In *The Last of Us Part II*, Ellie and Abby are surrounded by violence that goes beyond their personal sphere. The characters only know violence, and it is the catalyst for their meeting as they seek revenge on each other. Abby is a new character in the series and she is presented as an antagonist that, halfway through the gameplay, becomes the second protagonist. In this way, in addition to acknowledging both sides of the conflict and showing the moral weight of killing, we also begin to feel affection for Abby. This character is an excellent example of anti-male gaze

heterosexual visibility because Abby is not an object of the male gaze. Abby is proactive, has an unconventional body, and challenges prejudices about masculinity. Due to her muscular body, which is a result of her military training, the sex scene that the character has during the game was not well received by fans, as they were unable to perceive sex in a way that does not conform to gender roles. This is a direct affront to preconceived concepts of desire and sexuality, directly under female gaze ideals.

Ellie, as a recurring character, began to raise awareness in the first video game due to her sexuality, which in the sequel is undoubtedly portrayed as homosexual. Ellie, like Abby, grew up in a post-apocalyptic world surrounded by violence, but in this narrative, Ellie's morals are downward. Although at the beginning of the game, she is surrounded by Joel and Dina, who love her, after Abby kills Joel and she goes on an endless quest for revenge, she ends up being abandoned by Dina. Ellie even has to torture a woman during the gameplay, an action that the developers framed within a subjective aesthetic that does not eroticize violence, and on the contrary, shows Ellie's suffering during and after the torture. At the end of the game, after the last fight with Abby, Ellie is attacked and loses fingers on one hand, which prevents her from playing Joel's guitar when she returns to the empty house.

The way Ellie and Chloe use violence as an extension of their rebellion, and perhaps freedom, is a subversion of the sexist ideal, which is generally associated with men who do not suffer moral consequences for their actions. Following this thought and minding the characters' gender performance and sexual orientation, we can conclude that they are clear examples of queer gaze.

Finally, Billie Lurk, the protagonist of *Dishonored: Death of the Outsider*, is in many ways an objection to video game stereotypes. First, like Ellie and Chloe, Billie has a same-sex relationship with Deirdre, a woman she writes to and sees in her dreams. These interactions end up being the moments in the game where Billie is affectionate, as she was raised as a callous killer.

Billie is a black, queer, and disabled woman, who was present in the previous games in the series as a capable and ruthless killer. As the main character, Billie has supernatural powers that come from artifacts, and not from the Outsider's magic. It is important to underline that the powers that Billie possesses are not intended to fix or compensate for her disability.

During the previous game in the series, *Dishonored 2*, Billie suffers an accident that causes her to lose her arm and eye, which corresponds to the look presented in *Dishonored: Death of the Outsider*. However, after the accident, the player has the option to go back in time and avoid it, thus "curing" Billie from her disability. Due to fanbases having condemned the hypothesis of not going back in time to prevent the accident and "save" Billie, the intention to present the character without an eye and an arm, and to be the protagonist, is progress in a long path to break the abliest social constructions. In this way, Billie is a character who opposes the male gaze in many ways. It can be framed in different forms of desire, which we

can identify as queer gaze and oppositional gaze, as it is a black queer woman and feminist gaze, namely through the representation of disability.

The representation of female characters in video games is scarce, and variations in these identities and intersectionalities are still rare, so video games that openly and intentionally choose to portray characters outside the norms of desire are essential for a more inclusive future in the video game industry.

In this way, it will also be possible to achieve new aesthetics, such as the position of characters on the screen, the framing to de-eroticize violence, or the design of characters to show other forms of sexuality. And narratives, such as the view of the world through a character from a social minority, the subversion of stories commonly associated with normative male characters, and the exploration of our relationship with the avatar through discrete elements, such as diaries or moments of decision-making.

This study was created to be a beneficial tool for research into video game stereotypes and their subversion, and we hope that it will raise awareness of social issues and, therefore, assist in building awareness for inclusivity and diversity in mass media.

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