



HELSINGFORS UNIVERSITET

The Aggrieved of Us

A thematic analysis on cultural resistance toward
non-normative gender representation in video games

Magisteravhandling i journalistik och kommunikation

Författare:
Ella Kaverma

Handledare:
Professor Mats Bergman

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Handledare: Mats Bergman

Sammandrag:

The aim of this study is to uncover how non-normative gender representation in the Last of Us part II is resisted by hardcore gamers and what this resistance tells about cultural attitudes towards gender. The video game industry has traditionally been highly male dominated, both in terms of developers and characters that are featured in games. Going against the hegemony of play has often been aggressively resisted by gamers. This was illustrated by #GamerGate, a harassment campaign where female game critics and video game developers were targets of online harassment, doxing, as well as rape- and death threats. The purpose of this thesis is to contribute to the larger body of research studying misogyny and transphobia online, as well as create an understanding of how the concept of hegemony of play in combination with entitlement to the gaming medium has created such hostile spaces to minorities in gaming communities. This thesis utilised reflexive Thematic Analysis to analyse 96 reviews scraped from Metacritic on the day of the release of TLOU2. The analysis found three main themes which explained that, instead of viewing representation as natural progression, critics argued that non-normative gender representation is a symptom of problems in the video game industry. The second theme revealed that hardcore gamers thought that representation contribute to issues in society at large, as they challenge stereotypical gender norms. In addition, non-normative gender representation was argued to be unrealistic in an apocalyptic setting.

Syftet med denna studie är att undersöka hur icke-normativ könsrepresentation i The Last of Us Part II möter motstånd från så kallade "hardcore gamers", samt vad detta motstånd säger om kulturella attityder kring genus. Spelindustrin har traditionellt varit dominerad av män, både vad gäller spelutvecklare och karaktärer som porträtteras i spel. Att ifrågasätta "spelets hegemoni" (eng. hegemony of play) har ofta mötts av aggressivt motstånd från spelare. Detta illustrerades tydligt under #GamerGate, en trakasserikampanj, där kvinnliga spelkritiker och spelutvecklare utsattes för nättrakasserier, "doxing" samt våldtäkts- och dödshot. Syftet med denna avhandling är att bidra till den växande forskningen om kvinnohat och transfobi på nätet. Därtill skapas en förståelse om hur spelets hegemoni i samband med en känsla av ensamrätt till spelmediet har skapat fientliga miljöer för minoriteter i spelmiljöer. Magisteravhandlingen använder reflexiv tematisk analys för att utforska 96 recensioner insamlade från Metacritic på utgivningsdatumet för The Last of Us Part II. Analysen identifierade tre huvudteman, vilka visade att i stället för att godkänna representation som ett naturligt val, uppfattade kritikerna icke-normativ könsrepresentation som ett symptom av problem inom spelindustrin, så som korruption. Det andra temat visade att "hardcore gamers" också tänkte att spelet bidrar till större samhälleliga problem eftersom det utmanade stereotypiska könsnormer. Dessutom hävdades det att sådan representation var orealistisk i ett apokalyptiskt sammanhang.

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1. Introduction

Video games have been a part of my life for as long as I can remember. I used to bring my pastel pink Nintendo DS with me everywhere, we loved playing the Sims and racing games with my best friend, and I used to beg my stepsiblings to play Lego Pirates of the Caribbean with me. I was over the moon when my mother's partner bought us a Playstation 3 for Christmas, which eventually became mostly used by me. When I turned eighteen and made some actual money from my summer job, the first thing I bought was a Playstation 4.

Despite my longstanding connection to games and gaming, I have been reluctant to call myself a gamer or talk about my interest in games with anyone, especially men. If my friends would mention that I like gaming in a setting with strangers or casual acquaintances, I would downplay my interest, even deny my status as a gamer. "But I don't like shooters", "I really only enjoy story driven games" or "I'm not any good at playing" would be frequent phrases I used to discredit myself. In my head, there were certain types of games that could be called "real games", and the gamer status was only ascribed to players who liked those games. Mostly I thought about first person military shooter games, as well as the undeniably toxic environments those are for women and others who fall outside the "gamer" stereotype. I was afraid that if I admitted to loving story driven, emotional games, I would be told to go back to the kitchen and that I am not a real gamer, therefore denying the status myself before anyone else could. Because of my attraction towards good, and sometimes even emotionally devastating, stories, my interest was piqued when I first heard of a new game called *the Last of Us* (TLOU) in 2013.

I knew my parents would never buy the game for me since it was rated for 18-year-olds and older, so instead I decided to watch someone else play it on YouTube. And I loved it. The story follows Joel, a devoted father who at the dawn of the destruction of humanity due to a fungal outbreak, loses his young daughter. Twenty years later, traumatised and hardened by the difficult life in a post-apocalyptic world, Joel is tasked with smuggling an immune, teenage girl, Ellie, to a rebel militia with the intention of making a vaccine. The story obviously resonated with me, but it was also the very first time I have seen myself represented in a video game. When the sequel *the Last of Us part II* (TLOU2), which this thesis focuses on, was announced in 2016, I was beyond excited, and happy to see that this time the player would get to play the game as a now 19-year-old Ellie. What I am highlighting here is that representation matters.

Representation has been a hot topic in media research and discussion for a long time. While women and people with diverse gender identities have traditionally been less visible in media, as well as treated as secondary to the male characters, media has attempted to start taking the issue of inclusion more seriously. Especially film and TV have taken large leaps forward when it comes to gender inclusion. Yet video games seem to be lacking behind. Games have been traditionally regarded as a “masculine” hobby and as I previously mentioned, this affects who is seen as a ‘gamer’, who games are made for and who is represented. TLOU2 made a conscious effort to change who is represented, with the inclusion of several female protagonists and a transgender character. While I cannot call it a surprise, I was disappointed to find out that the game was met with an incredible amount of misogyny and transphobia when it came out in 2020. The pattern is familiar, changes in the gaming industry have been traditionally strongly resisted by the core audience of early games, a contributor to the slow progression of representation in games (Fron et al., p. 310). One example is the infamous #GamerGate (GG) harassment campaign, where female and other minority game developers, -critics and -journalists were targeted due to “corruption” and “infiltration of politics” into gaming. GG took place ten years ago and set a dangerous precedent for the rise of alt-right actors both in video game industries, and in broader society in general.

Similar patterns can be observed in how representation of gender is resisted in video game characters. Recent games like Alan Wake 2, Grand Theft Auto VI and of course the Last of Us part II, have received criticism for their supposed “woke” ideology and the involvement of politics into games. Characters with marginalised identities are attacked, with their existence and identities conflated in such a way that the whole game is perceived to be a narrative about gender or race. This thesis will therefore look at reviews on TLOU2, determine why players are resisting diverse gender representation in the game and explain how cultural attitudes on gender inform the critics’ negative views on non-normative gender representation.

1.1. Significance and justification

I believe visual entertainment, such as television, film and video games, just like news media, play an integral role in explaining our environment and society. They have the capacity to influence public opinion and attitudes, previous research has concluded that misogyny and transphobia in media contribute towards the perseverance of larger societal issues (Hall 1982, p. 70-71). The exclusion of gender-diverse characters and the presence of hate speech targeting them when they are included perpetuate systemic structures that maintain the marginalization of women and transgender people (Madžarević & Soto-Sanfiel, 2018; Johnson, 2015). Madžarević and Soto-Sanfiel present in their

research done on the representation of homosexuality in film the persuasive power of narrative fiction that exposure and identification with gay characters influences viewers' opinion on homosexuality. Moreover, I argue that hatred towards minorities is a reflection of how minorities, or in the case of this thesis, transgender people and women, are perceived by gamers and, by extension, broader society.

Therefore, it is crucial to examine how the gaming industry and its audience perceive gender minorities and women, as well as how 'hardcore gamers' react to increased representation. Video games are an artform that has excluded minorities for far longer than other media, which is why this aims to contribute to an understanding of how to make video game communities more open to a diverse demographic of players and characters. Studying the hostile language prevalent in gamer communities provides a lens into spaces where non-normative gender expressions and identities remain unwelcome, shedding light on the complex issues of transphobia and misogyny, of which particularly the latter often remains obscured in broader society. As demonstrated by #Gamergate, video game communities play a significant role in shaping political discourse and redefining the boundaries of acceptable behaviour both online and offline. As a contribution to the broader discussion of transphobia and misogyny in video game communities, this thesis will answer the following research questions:

RQ1. How and why do hardcore gamers resist non-normative gender representation in the Last of Us part II?

RQ2. What does the resistance reveal about cultural attitudes toward gender in gaming communities?

To find answers to RQ1 and RQ2, I will be looking at user reviews on Metacritic, specifically reviews written by so called "review bombers", as well as analyse the critiques using thematic analysis as described by Braun and Clarke (2021). The goal is to understand why and how critics resist diverse representations of gender, which arguments are commonly used and how the reviewers motivate their stance. I also wish to shed light on cultural attitudes that drive players to negatively review a game like TLOU2 purely on the representation it gives to marginalised identities in games, which review bombers are more likely to do.

Here it is also important to define what I mean by non-normative gender representation is this thesis. Non-normative gender representation refers to transgender representation, as well as the representation of cisgender women and men whose gender expression goes against the normative

gender expectations set by the hegemony of play. To adequately define transgender, I refer to GLAAD's Media Reference Guide, which specifies transgender as "*an adjective to describe people whose gender identity differs from the sex they were assigned at birth. People who are transgender may also use other terms, in addition to transgender, to describe their gender more specifically. [...] It is important to note that being transgender is not dependent upon physical appearance or medical procedures. A person can call themselves transgender the moment they realize that their gender identity is different than the sex they were assigned at birth*". In its analysis, this thesis also considers cisgender characters who do not meet the gendered expectations of the hegemony of play. This means that characters who, for instance, do not display traditionally gendered markers of their assigned sex or behave in ways that the hegemony of play judge as inappropriate for their assigned sex, are also included in the analysis.

In including cisgender characters in my analysis on non-normative representation, I am not implying that cis- and transgender people are going through similar struggles. Transgender people in our society go through unique hardships and bigotry, which cannot and should not be equated to misogyny or strict gendered expectations placed on cisgender men. The focus of this thesis in addressing both trans- and cisgender characters was chosen because of a few key reasons. Backed by Rodríguez-Ruiz (2022), I argue that the fixation on sex and gender as two opposite categories, male/female or man/woman, upholds a male-centred system. There is a need for questioning the gender binary, since only then can we adequately address gender inequality and include anyone whose gender expression, identity or sexuality does not fit into the neat boxes of male/female or man/woman (Rodríguez-Ruiz 2022, p. 40). Transgender people highlight the performativity of gender, and feminism, as argued by Rodríguez-Ruiz and me, cannot exclude transgender people, as their lived experience in itself exposes artificial sex-gender structures.

Furthermore, in the context of reviews of TLOU2, transphobia and misogyny are sometimes indistinguishable. I argue that the hegemony of play portrays gender almost as a caricature, where the sex-gender structures are, or at least have traditionally been, even stricter than what would be displayed "in real life". Therefore, divergence from the gaming norm is, at least in the case of TLOU2, viewed as an attack on femininity or masculinity, even if the character is cisgender. By viewing gender as a performance, it also allows me to touch on the limited understandings of masculinity in games.

1.2. Structure of the thesis

This thesis will continue by presenting a glossary with important terms in regard to the gaming industry and gender diversity. This section will also address the efforts this thesis makes to ensure that it addresses everyone respectfully. Afterwards the background for this thesis is explained, in which I will dig deeper into the #GamerGate harassment campaign and explain the discussions around the Last of Us part II. Previous research into the representation of women and transgender people in video games will be discussed in chapter 2, as well as the prevalence of right-wing extremism in video game communities and the cultural positioning of gaming communities. In chapter 3 the theoretical frameworks for this study will be presented. The concept of the ‘hegemony of play’ and aggrieved entitlement are to be explained. The material and methods will be presented in chapter 4, followed by the analysis itself. The thesis will end on a discussion.

1.3. Glossary

Term	Definition
<i>AAA game</i>	High-budget, high-profile games distributed by well-known publishers, equivalent to blockbusters in the movie industry
<i>Cisgender</i>	Describes people who identify with the gender assigned to them at birth.
<i>Gender expression</i>	External manifestations of gender, expressed through a person’s name, pronouns, clothing, haircut, voice, and/or behaviour (GLAAD, 2024)
<i>Gender identity</i>	A person’s internal, deeply held knowledge of their own gender (GLAAD 2024)
<i>Non-normative</i>	Not relating to what is considered the usual or normal way for people to look, act, or behave (Cambridge Dictionary 2025). In the context of this thesis, non-normative refers to gender expressions and identities that do not fit the normative expectations of men or women.
<i>Transgender</i>	Umbrella term to describe people who do not identify with the gender assigned to them at birth. Includes binary transgender people and people elsewhere on the gender binary.

This thesis will also be using the GLAAD Media Reference Guide to follow best practice in addressing transgender people and issues of gender diversity.

1.4. Background

1.4.1. #GamerGate

In their article, *Media in the Post #GamerGate Era: Coverage of Reactionary Fan Anger and the Terrorism of the Privileged* (2020), Blodgett explains that the 2010's saw an increase of aggressive hate campaigns online targeting women, racial minorities, but especially women of colour. These attacks by anti-fandoms forced their targets out of the internet, even their homes. The most famous one of these campaigns is #GamerGate.

While brewing behind scenes since 2007, the hashtag and harassment movement begun officially circling various platforms in the early autumn of 2014 (Mortensen 2018, p. 791 & 788). It started with a vendetta against independent game developer Zoë Quinn, whose ex-partner Eron Gjoni released revenge porn of her, as well as claimed that she had bribed game journalists with sexual favours to give her game *Depression Quest* better reviews than it deserved (Bezio 2018, p. 561; and Mortensen 2018, p. 789 & 791; and Blodgett 2020, p. 186). The post was, according to Blodgett, carefully crafted to spark hostility within certain websites, such as 4chan and Reddit, with already established violent and misogynist cultures. Mortensen in turn details that Gjoni was in comment sections telling more stories about Quinn to garner sympathy for himself. The Boston Magazine, who interviewed him on the subject, described his process of distributing the post “*as if he were gathering the pieces of a horrible machine, with each component designed to be as damaging to Quinn as possible*” (Jason 2015 in Blodgett 2020, p. 186). By leveraging a resentful internet subculture with the carefully crafted post, Gjoni reached his goal of applying public pressure on Quinn, but beyond that, the post triggered harassment, including death and rape threats, against Quinn and anyone who publicly defended her (Blodgett 2020, p. 186). The harassment movement soon began bombarding gaming companies under the hashtag #GamerGate on Twitter, demanding game developers supportive of Quinn to be fired. Blodgett explains that gamergaters, for instance, threatened with massive boycotts, leading to many game developers losing their jobs.

With the growing movement, gamergaters moved on to target other prominent female presence in gaming media, with the original goal broadening to a much larger scale (Blodgett 2020, p. 187). Quinn and the positive reception of her game was just an initial representation of a perceived threat against the integrity of games, as all women and especially feminism were now quickly to be ousted from games and gaming spaces entirely since they were seen as an imposition (Blodgett 2020, p. 187). Prominent female researchers in the field using feminist analysis, such as Anita Sarkeesian (Mortensen 2018, p. 790), Shira Chess and Adrienne Shaw (Chess & Shaw 2015), and female media personalities, like actress Felicia Day (Blodgett 2020), were added into the GG “discourse”. Branded as Social Justice Warriors, SJWs, they were seen as illegitimate and unethical actors on a mission to ruin games in disguise of inclusivity (Blodgett & Salter 2018, p. 137). Sarkeesian’s inclusion and the

attacks directed at her are especially relevant still today, as she became one of the biggest targets of GG and she is still often mentioned in discussions resisting feminism in games.

As previously mentioned, the central claim of gamergaters was that feminism and the inclusion of both minorities and women were threatening games, meaning that GG was framed as a movement fighting for ethics in gaming journalism (Mortensen 2018, p. 791). According to Mortensen, claims of Quinn's involvement with five gaming journalists in order to secure positive reviews were repeated in support of this framing of the harassment campaign, even after the reviews were proven to never exist. By positioning themselves and games as politically independent, gamergaters defended their attack against women, minorities, and feminism in gaming as a neutral countermovement towards the ideologically motivated changes in the industry (Chess & Shaw 2015, p. 216). Chess and Shaw also note a sense of perceived persecution, leading to conspiracies like the GamerGate claims of a feminist attack on gaming. The cultural position of games and gamers has traditionally been largely negative, with gamers often having to defend their interests against popular media and academics' framing it with violence, sexism and racism (Chess & Shaw 2015, p. 217).

Not only did GG set a cultural precedent on how racial- and gender minorities, as well as women, are allowed to be treated in gaming spaces, but researchers such as Bezio argue that GG has functioned as a blueprint for the current neo-conservative uprising. First, prominent conservative microcelebrities, like Milo Yiannopoulos, have encouraged GamerGate's "cause" and vice versa (Bezio 2018, p. 562). His and countless other's articles on GG, reiterating claims of feminists taking over video gaming, lambasting Zoë Quinn, Anita Sarkeesian, and others daring to criticize the hegemony of play (discussed in section 4.1.), were featured in Breitbart, controlled by Donald Trump's former adviser Steve Bannon (Bezio 2018, p. 562). Bezio further explains that the lexicon developed by gamergaters is now universally accepted discourse in the United States by those silencing progressive voices in politics. Mockingly using words like "snowflake", "unicorns" and "social justice warrior" (SJW) all had their origins in the GamerGate harassment campaigns, and the call to eliminate corruption in gaming journalism reappeared in Trump's 2016 slogan "drain the swamp" (Bezio 2018, p. 563). Like Bezio says, GG has "everything" to do with the rise of the alt-right.

When examining the reactionary reviews to TLOU2, it is important to understand the cultural impact of GamerGate on the critics' perspectives but also the effect negative narratives on gender representation even in smaller subcultures have on how larger society accepts and perceives non-normative gender expressions and identities. GamerGate "*was the canary in the coalmine, and we*

ignored it” (Lees 2016 in Bezio 2018, p. 562), which is why I argue that the continued GamerGate-era rhetoric against individual actors and game characters sets a dangerous precedent for the continued rise of the alt-right, which should not be ignored.

1.4.2. The Last of Us part II

The Last of Us franchise has in recent years become a huge phenomenon around the world, even outside of gaming communities. The series by HBO adapting the game has created a huge buzz, raking in millions of viewers for each episode. The first game, released in 2013, and series, released in 2023 and 2025, were adored especially because of the relationship between Joel Miller and Ellie Williams.

The second game was released in June 2020, seven years after the first one. Due to a choice made in the first game, where Joel decides to save an immune Ellie instead of letting her die to make a vaccine, the past comes back to haunt him, who is killed just a few hours into the game. The main playable character is now a 19-year-old Ellie on a mission to avenge him. On the journey she descends further into hatred and bloodlust, which causes a lot of pain in those around her.

Half of the game is also played as the main “antagonist” Abby Anderson. The player learns her motivation for killing Joel, which was to avenge her father who Joel kills to save Ellie in the first game. In the beginning of her section of the game, the player learns also that



Ellie Williams (Rare Gallery wallpaper n.d.)



Joel Miller (Tzeng 2020)



Abby Anderson (Tzeng 2020)



Lev (Contributors to the Last of Us Wiki n.d.)

she still suffers and, for instance, still sees nightmares even though going through with her revenge. Her story is about healing, which she finds in caring for a 13-year-old Lev, who has been persecuted by his community, the Seraphites, due to him being transgender. Their journey closely mirrors the experience players had with Joel and Ellie in the first game. Neil Druckmann, the creator of the game, has said that the first game is about finding love even in the darkest of places, while the second one is about hate and how much loss the need for violent retribution causes (Favis 2020). The second game is also about forgiveness and about finding peace, especially prevalent in Abby's section of the game (Favis 2020).

As one can imagine, the death of a main character, especially one as loved as Joel, was met with a huge wave of criticism, even before its release. This was due to a leak of the plot, prompting many fans to not even wanting to give the second game a chance. This dislike of the plot manifested as a huge wave of negative reviews on Metacritic, in a phenomenon called review-bombing, during the day of the release, even though it takes over 20 hours to complete the game. Review-bombing happens as a deliberate effort by a large group of people to sabotage a game by "*organising a scheme of mass submission of reviews. Such 'bombing' swiftly alters the ratings of the item, or its rank*" (Tomaselli & Cantone 2021; in Tomkinson 2022, p. 6). Evidently, a piece of media is not necessarily being review-bombed if it receives a lot of negative reviews but is rather identified by peaks in submissions of usually negative reviews, which often feature rude or outright hateful language (Tomkinson 2022, p. 6).

While review-bombing can happen due to many reasons, like dislike of the creator or distribution methods, TLOU2 reviewers focused on the plot and characters. The game was criticised for its "LGBTQ+ agenda", due to Lev being transgender and Ellie being lesbian (Tomkinson 2022, p. 6). In a previous quantitative analysis done by Cantone, Tomaselli and Mazzeo (2021), it was concluded that nearly 15 000 reviews revolved around politics and the LGBTQ+ community, with most of these reviews having a low score. Reviewers were also upset about the leaks, either expressing disappointment that the experience was spoiled by the leaks, or what these spoilers revealed about the game (Tomkinson 2022, p. 6). Joel's death was deemed especially upsetting, with many directing their anger towards the character of Abby, his killer. Abby's character, as well as her actress, received a lot of misogynist hate, even with transphobic undertones (though being cisgender) due to her muscular frame.

TLOU2 is widely considered a landmark in diversity and developers have openly spoken about wanting to include people from different ethnic backgrounds, sexualities, gender identities and

abilities to the forefront (Dennin & Burton 2023). The reception of this diversity, mainly the inclusion of Lev, as well as Ellie's and another female character, Dina's, relationship, among queer communities was mixed (Muncy 2020). Muncy, as a transgender person, argues that Lev is an enjoyable and well-rounded character, with a distinct personality outside his gender identity. He feels real and his story, while grim and full of violence, is about hope, as it mirrors Ellie's and Joel's journey in the first game (Muncy 2020). However, Muncy also notes the issues in his story, alongside for instance Dennin and Burton. They argue through their own queer experience, that TLOU2 falls in the trap of misery porn and ultimately functions to fulfil the desires of straight, cisgender players. TLOU2 serves as an empathy machine and designed for Abby, by extension the cisgender players, to feel good about themselves (Dennin & Burton 2023; and Muncy 2020).

It is important to disclaim that I will not take a stance on the quality of representation in TLOU2, I do not believe I am the correct person to make that judgement. In this thesis I adopt, as Tomkinson describes it, a Deleuzoguattarian approach to representation of characters in media. This approach argues for understanding the world through its differences, to see humans as unique and complicated beings (Jun 2009 in Tomkinson 2022, p. 12). Through this lens women and especially gender minorities as discussed in this thesis are not the same, but it should be recognised that the only bodies that exist are in opposition to the male body, which the developers of TLOU2 have considered in design and characters. Deleuze's and Guattari's approach also argues that it is problematic to focus too much on perfect representation of diverse characters and warns us of falling into representational thinking, as it sustains the status quo through positioning it as the "original" way of how things are. Rather, repetition of diversity is opportunity for novelty and difference (Deleuze & Guattari 2005, p. 310-312), which in turn, according to Tomkinson, opens avenues for being transformative and subversive. The key to create "better" representation is focusing on what it does, characters like Abby, Ellie, Lev and to some degree Joel serve the purpose of reminding players of real-world social movements that challenge the stereotyping of women, advocate for trans rights and encourage male accountability and vulnerability. That is to say, approaching representation through Deleuze's and Guattari's philosophical lens allows me to focus on the question "what does this representation do?" instead of falling into the trap of asking "is this good representation?" (Tomkinson 2022, p. 14-15).

2. Previous research

The following section will explain the previous research on topics relevant for this thesis. First, I will outline the research done on female and transgender characters in video games. The goal is to establish the normative position of non-male characters in the medium.

Next, the connection between the alt-right and gaming communities is explained, with the intention of explaining why such negative cultural attitudes towards non-normative gender representation are persisting in gaming spaces. Finally, the cultural position of gamers is established, as well as the toxic masculinity pervasive in gaming communities. This informs the thesis of both why gamers are positioning themselves as victims of feminism and inclusivity, as well as lays the groundwork for understanding the rigid gender norms that exist in gaming communities.

2.1. Female characters in video games

It is difficult to find definitive quantitative data on the number of female characters in video games, but the consensus is clear. They are very few, some studies have even suggested that only 6% of characters are women (Cooper 2022), their roles are less important, they speak less and so on. The precedent for the hegemonic position of male characters was set in the very beginning of the history of video games, as the first playable female character, Samus Aran, was introduced in 1986 (Bristot et al. 2019). Bristot et al. explain that the game she appears in, *Metroid*, presents her full body armour, never showing her face until the end. It is heavily implied that Samus Aran is a male character, but as a prize for completing the game quickly, her true sex is revealed to the player by displaying her in a pink bikini (Bristot et al. 2019). Women have often been treated as prizes for players to try to win, as illustrated by the introduction of Samus Aran, but examples are plentiful in some of the most popular video game franchises. You play as Mario to save Princess Peach in order to gain a kiss (Trépanier-Jobin & Bonenfant 2017, p. 30), and you play as Link to save Zelda. All the while female characters are robbed of agency; they are to be passive objects in the story. They are not as significant even in their own stories, as illustrated by Zelda, who in the games named after herself is not even a playable character.

Furthermore, female characters have historically been treated as eye candy in video games, as illustrated in the example of Samus Aran. Broader patriarchal structures in society, as well as in film, TV, video game and general media production, heavily influence how women are viewed and “displayed” on screen. Visual media is a tool for reinforcing pre-existing desires within the audience and the social norms that govern them (Mulvey 1975, p. 14). Laura Mulvey explains how film often show and sometimes manipulate the common understanding of sexual differences that shapes how we see images, experience desire and enjoy watching. She also introduced the now iconic term “male gaze”, which describes the treatment of women’s bodies, where they are objected to a curious and oppressive look (Mulvey 1975, p. 19). In a patriarchal society, the role of the viewer is distributed

unequally, where men are often in the active role of looking, while women are displayed as objects in a passive role.

The concept of the male gaze is easy to be applied to video games, furthermore Trépanier-Jobin and Bonenfant argue that the male gaze can be enhanced by the interactive medium of video games, as the player is no longer a passive viewer, but can actively participate in the objectification and sexualisation of the female characters. The players assume an active role even when they are forced by game mechanics to control the camera, but players are sometimes encouraged to participate in the sexualisation more directly, for instance through prizes. In *Grand Theft Auto V*, players can enter strip clubs where they can flirt or touch the dancers without consent if the bouncer is not looking, leading to more dances or even the ability to take the dancer home with you (GTA wiki, n.d.). Therefore, objectification in video games does not only operate on a level of representation but moves on further to a level of gameplay (Trépanier-Jobin & Bonenfant 2017, p. 38).

However, even when players are not directly involved in objectifying the female characters in games by touching them or when playing as a female character, they rarely escape the oppressive male gaze. Trépanier-Jobin and Bonenfant explain that some male players choose female avatars in MMORPG's (massively multiplayer online role-playing game, players design their own characters that are highly customisable) because they are nicer to look at. In games with non-customisable female characters, they are often displayed in skimpy or form-fitting clothing, even in situations that do not make sense, such as combat, and where their male counterparts are allowed to stay covered (Trépanier-Jobin & Bonenfant 2017, p. 38-39). One of the most famous female video game characters, Lara Croft, is a perfect example of a sexualised, hyperfeminine protagonist. While some would even go as far to argue her to be a feminist icon in the world of games, due to displayed strength and intelligence, there is no denying her body is objectified in almost every single game she appears in. Yet while women in games are highly sexualized and objectified, female characters are also expected to be soft and dainty, traditionally feminine. This includes having a natural inclination towards homesteading and childrearing, perpetuating the idea that women are only fulfilled when taking on their biological role as wives and mothers (Trépanier-Jobin & Bonenfant 2017, p. 33)

Furthermore, women in video games often suffer from the "Serial Girl" syndrome, where characters share similar figures to one another (Trépanier-Jobin & Bonenfant 2017, p. 44). Trépanier-Jobin and Bonenfant explain that this figure is determined by, as well as enforce, societal standards of beauty, as women are often depicted with slender yet curvy bodies and delicate facial features, while creating the illusion of variety and choice by giving the characters different skin, eye or hair colour.

While I have been able to observe a slow change in how women are represented in games, it is still of utmost importance to gain an understanding how the hegemony of play (which will be discussed later in the theoretical framework section) has influenced female characters historically. Passive, sexy, fitting the cultural beauty standards, there to please the often-male player. TLOU2 diverges from these expectations. In the game, women clearly take centre stage, with two female protagonists, dressed in jeans and baggy shirts, surviving in an unforgiving environment and looking the part. Based on previous research, like Tomkinson as well as Cantone, Tomaselli and Mazzeo, it is safe to assume many players were displeased with this depiction of non-normative femininity, calling them too muscular, masculine or simply ugly. The disappointment in the way the women of TLOU2 look could be also seen in the ways fans interacted with material, such as photos or clips from the game. Editing female video game characters to meet the expectations of the male gaze has become, according to my own observations, a fairly common practice. This includes adding, for instance, longer flowy hair and makeup to the characters.

Based on previous observations and discussions surrounding TLOU2 there is an expectation that the presence of women who are designed more realistically, instead of trying to cater to the male gaze and trying to fit them into mainstream ideals of beauty, will have an effect on how reviewers discuss the game.

2.2. Transgender characters in video games

While transgender characters have been present in video games since the 1980s, quantitative research, such as Utsch et al. (2017), has shown that representation is difficult to find especially compared other identities under the LGBTQ+ umbrella (especially gay men). Though there is not a lot of research done, especially qualitatively, on the issue of transgender representation, the existing consensus seems to be that the already lacking representation is further soured by the fact that the existing characters often invalidate the trans identity or otherwise play into problematic, even dangerous, stereotypes.

Where women are presented as objects to be gazed at, transgender characters are often made into cautionary tales or horrific monsters (Thach 2021, p. 20). Again, I think it is useful to look at the first transgender character to appear in a video game, Poison from *Final Fight* (1989), to illustrate the trends and stereotypes that have followed transgender characters throughout their history. For those unfamiliar with *Final Fight*, it is a Japanese video game series in the genre of “beat ‘em up”, where players are faced by a large number of enemies on hand-to-hand combat. Poison was first introduced

as an opponent and her character did not become playable until later in the series (Henley 2021). According to Henley, there was originally no intent to make her a transgender character but was instead designed as a cisgender woman. This raised concerns amongst the developers about the implications of the commercial success of the game in the U.S. since hitting women was “considered rude” in America (Henley 2021). Henley explains that the developers “solved” the problem by making Poison transgender, calling her by a mocking and fetishizing Japanese slang “newhalf”. This is a common trope used in media, where transgender women are essentially portrayed as crossdressers, which in turn is rooted in real life misconceptions about transness. The change made to Poison’s character upholds these false beliefs, while essentially telling the player that hitting transgender women is acceptable, as opposed to hitting cisgender women (Henley 2021). Portraying transgender women as crossdressing men and telling players it is okay to hit them by the changes made to the character of Poison, the game directly contributes towards the normalisation of violence that transgender people face in real life.

Thach explains that the confusion and ambiguity surrounding Poison’s gender is not uncommon nor unique in the world of gaming, since this is one of the overarching tropes used for transgender characters. The depicted violence against and done by transgender people is likewise common video games, which according to Thach often paired with the character having a mental illness. This vilification of transgender people has a long history in video games and other forms of popular culture (Henley 2021). It is again not difficult to see how life imitates art, or perhaps in this case how art imitates life, as this type of fearmongering and gender panic can be seen in our daily lives, where particularly transgender women are depicted as dangerous individuals who use their identity to gain something or use others (Westbrook & Schilt 2014).

As previously discussed, Muncy wrote in a perspective for the Washington Post about the trans representation in TLOU2, where they explain that as the only transgender character in AAA games, Lev’s presence was a complex issue. This thesis’ aim is not to evaluate the quality of representation. However, it is important to understand the historical representation of transgender characters in games to address the reactions towards Lev in TLOU2, which considering all accounts, is a step into the right direction when it comes to trans representation in games.

2.3. The alt-right and video game communities

Looking at the history of games, especially video games, they seem to be followed by moral panic. In the early 2000s for example, talks about the corrupting nature of video games were common in

both the public sphere, as well as the U.S. congress. In 2005, Hillary Clinton and other senators proposed a bill that would restrict the selling of M-Rated (equivalent to R-Rated movies) games (Markey & Ferguson 2017, p. 99). According to Markey and Ferguson, she detailed in a press conference the violent nature of video games and how the most popular titles tend to feature violence and general moral degeneracy, as well as proceeded to quote since discredited researchers. They claimed that like lead exposure as a child leads to decreases in intelligence, video games increase aggressive behaviour (Markey & Ferguson 2017, p. 99).

While a direct impact between violent video games and increased long-term violent behaviour has since been refuted by several studies (Hern 2020), there are multiple studies suggesting a strong link between video game communities, the alt-right and what Hermansson et al. describe in their book *The International Alt-Right: Fascism for the 21st Century?* (2020), as the manosphere. A broad, decentralised collection of websites, forums, blogs and vlogs, with a staunch opposition towards feminism, based on the false claim that feminism promotes misandry rather than gender equality (Hermansson et al. 2020, p. 163). While many of the manosphere interests and ideas are sexist, anti-feminist and misogynistic, other concerns are not. For instance, issues surrounding male suicide or loneliness are not themselves expressions of prejudice, rather their argument which places blame on women, feminism and progressive politics is what makes the movement sexist (Hermansson et al. 2020, p. 163). Therefore, according to Hermansson et al., it is important to remember the most central claim of the manosphere; feminism is an inherently prejudiced movement that threatens men. There exist numerous subdivisions within the manosphere interacting with the alt-right due to their similar views on feminism, gender and overall progressive politics (Hermansson et al. 2020, p. 163).

The GamerGate harassment campaign discussed earlier in this thesis is described by Hermansson et al. as a demonstration of the broader manosphere uniting in the mid-2010s under an anti-feminist ideology, where other ideological disagreements mattered less than before. Bridging gaming communities with the broader manosphere GG functioned as the initial push towards increasingly damaging conspiracies and radicalization, as they awakened to the perceived threat of feminism and progressivism towards male only “safe spaces”, which gamergaters call taking the “red pill” (Hermansson et al. 2020, p. 171). Furthermore, it is important to understand the intimate connection with GamerGate, the broader Manosphere and the alt-right, since it is possible that reviews of TLOU2 were also manufactured by the broader alt-right as a part of the “culture war”.

The continued rise of the alt-right in video games is partly due to demographics, Bezio explains. The alt-right mostly consists of white men aged 18-35, which means that the men most likely to participate

in online discussions and demonstrations surrounding the alt-right are also the assumed core audience of modern video games (Bezio 2018, p. 560). This image of the gaming market persists despite shifting demographics, women making up 44 % (Bezio 2018, p. 560) of players today and 17 % of active players being queer (GLAAD 2024a). The persisting stereotype contributes to a skewed image of who games are made and marketed for. Furthermore, men are still dominating the gaming industry, as only 22 % of industry professionals are women, most likely causing a monopoly of male-targeted games like Call of Duty and games with male only protagonists (Bezio 2018, p. 560). As a product of the domination of white men in the gaming mainstream, right-wing themes are easily read into the medium due to an inflation of white protagonists, as well as often violent themes and stereotyped images of minority characters (Hermansson et al., p. 115). It does not end there, as gaming journalist Alfie Brown notes that games are often biased towards conservative, patriarchal and imperialist values even when they are meant to be impartial, attracting right-wing players (Hermansson et al. 2020, p. 115-116). Brown even more worryingly describes the themes of many games to prime “apolitical” gamers to accept right-wing values further down the line.

By establishing the connection of the alt-right and gaming communities, my aim is not to create moral panic surrounding video games. My goal is to demonstrate how pervasive prejudice is in the medium, which in turn informs many gamers’ conceptions on gender. While not perfect, I hope that gaming companies that intentionally work on increasing quality representation, like Naughty Dog, are not discouraged by the prevailing culture in video game communities.

2.4. Geek masculinity and the cultural positioning of the “hardcore gamer”

Finally, I believe it is important to understand how the alt-right influences in gaming, as well as the hegemony of play which will be discussed soon, have shaped both the geek masculinity and cultural positioning of the *hardcore gamer*.

In their article, Blodgett describes gamers as a subgroup of “geeks”. Portrayed in media often as a young, straight, white man who lacks social graces and are considered unattractive as romantic partners due to their nerdy interests, poor hygiene and bad clothes (Blodgett 2019, p. 188). Bound to lose to their more socially adept peers, the jock archetype, who “*exude sexually desirable traits*” (Blodgett 2019, p. 188), the geek is a disgraced man with no access to what he is entitled to based on his sex, race and sexual identity (Hills 2018; in Blodgett 2018, p. 188). Blodgett explains how the narrative of geeks in popular media also allows for a redemptive arc, in which salvation and

acceptance is found through normative sexual interactions to restore the geeks social privileges. The particular model of masculinity proposed by geek media fosters resentment towards women and minorities, who are viewed both as an intrusion into geek spaces and as denying access to benefits that white men are in their own view privileged to, such as access to women, sex, wealth and power (Blodgett 2019, p. 189).

However, it is important to understand that the stereotypical image of gamers explained above, as angry white teenage boys playing violent first-person shooters has such a prevalent cultural position partly due to fearmongering. Just as discussions surrounding games increasing violent and aggressive behaviour, Ian Bogost explains in Bezio's article that the medium is often associated with such topics because of the mostly negative news coverage on games. It is also problematic to continue the pervasive assumption of a universal "gamer" experience, as there exists a clear divide within the gaming communities themselves (Salter & Blodgett 2017, p. 89). Salter and Blodgett suggest that gaming is its own social microcosm, where the "gamer" identity, and the cultural role that is connected to it, takes precedence over any other identities. They further explain that the foundation of this microsystem is based on a continued idea of gaming as a "man's world", as a study surveying gamers observed that embracing masculine norms (as explained above) were more likely to report sexist attitudes towards women participating in video games. In combination with the consistent need to defend their interests from frequent claims of sexism, racism and violence made by popular media and academics, gamers have assumed a marginalized identity, which Chess and Shaw suggest engaging with from a perspective of perceived persecution (Salter & Blodgett 2017, p. 89 and Chess & Shaw 2015, p. 217). Regardless of whether the gamers are the oppressors, they feel that their culture is misunderstood, with the increased visibility of women and gender minorities, who are viewed as only casual players (Bezio 2018, p. 560), threatening their "male only" microsystem.

Because of the variety of lived experiences and the prevalence of a gamer stereotype within gaming spaces, dividing players into real and casual players based on gender, I will be referring to the subsection of the manosphere that includes gamergaters and gamers who manufacture outrage against games like TLOU2 as *hardcore gamers*. The hardcore gamer is a self-prescribed term for those who see themselves as "real" gamers, engaging only in serious games which often excludes women and minorities. The development of the hardcore gamer identity is also a key factor in developing such an antagonistic attitude towards those that are perceived to threaten their medium, whether it is by encroaching on their spaces by playing what are labelled as "real" games, or by criticising the still prevailing sexist and racist attitudes in gaming communities (Bezio 2018, p. 560; and Salter & Blodgett 2017, p. 92).

3. Conceptual Framework

In this chapter I will present the broader conceptual framework relevant to this thesis. These frameworks are used to analyse the reviews and inform how the underlying cultural beliefs on gender representation have formed in gaming communities.

3.1. Hegemony of Play

In their article, *The Hegemony of Play* (2007), Fron et al. outline the concept of how today's digital games culture has influenced global culture. The term "hegemony of play" was not coined by Fron et al., but by renowned gaming expert Bernie DeCoven during a lecture for USC's School of Cinematic Art, which led to a heated debate. Those defending the status quo based their arguments on unquestioned assumptions, much like power structures in society on a broader spectrum are seen as natural, especially by those with privilege. These assumptions are related:

1. to the production process and creational environment of games,
2. to the evolution of technologies related to games
3. and to the cultural positioning of games and gamers.

Today's games industry, consisting of a predominantly white, cisgender and heterosexual male-dominated corporate and creative elite, determines which games get made, who they are made for and how they are marketed (Fron et al. 2007, p. 309). Operating on both a monetary and cultural level, Fron et al. argue that the hegemony of play has created a symbiosis between developers and self-prescribed hardcore gamers, who systematically deploy rhetoric which alienate players not fitting the image of stereotypical gamers. These attitudes and stereotypes have prevailed throughout the years, even though inclusiveness has been a growing trend in the gaming industry and despite some of the best-selling games in history moving away from the rigid binary existing in "traditional" video games.

Despite attempts to diversify, the industry is still highly homogenous. This affects the production processes and environments within video game companies. Qualitative data collected by the International Game Developers Association (IGDA) suggests that developers recognise the issue, and some are growing frustrated with the limiting effects it has on their creative freedom, while others rationalise or even defend the dominion of white cisgender males in the industry (Fron et al. 2007, p. 311). According to Fron et al., many held strong beliefs supporting the idea of a system based on

meritocracy, where the most qualified individuals are most likely to enter the field and find success, no matter the gender, race, sexuality etc. Others parroted the problematically incomplete stereotype that some people, especially women, show less interest in computer science, one participant in the study sweeping the issue under the rug by saying “*It’s just the way it is*” (Fron et al. 2007, p. 311). The focus on qualifications in the context of the gaming industry is encoded to exclude other relevant experience, such as experience within the broader entertainment industry. The cultural issues and problems within workplaces in the gaming industry also discourage women from entering the field (Fron et al. 2007, p. 311). Furthermore, the women who do break into the industry have to struggle against the prevailing culture. Fron et al. provide an example where Nour Polloni, a successful female developer, had to negotiate with an all-male creative team to dress a lead female character in baggy clothing when the team wanted her in a string bikini. Virtually every woman in the IGDA study referred to the toxic “boys only” ethos, an issue that has been left unresolved to this day. Recent illustrating cases would be the lawsuit against Activision Blizzard, where female employees in the company had to withstand sexual harassment, discrimination and locker room talk at the workplace (Silberling, 2022).

The second assumption Fron et al. discuss is the technology of gaming, where the hegemony of play controls both the software of games and the hardware of devices they are played on. The issue of hardware is probably evident to many who played as a child, as for instance, the original Xbox controller was simply too big for the hands of many, but especially women and children (Fron et al. 2007, p. 312). A quick search on Google shows that the problem persists, as many have complained about the size of the Playstation 5 controller, saying it makes gaming an uncomfortable experience.

Finally, we move on to the cultural positioning of games and gamers. Fron et al. argue that the very success of the gaming industry and their dedication to their core audiences has led to the development of the current situation. The success of AAA games has been followed by a reluctance to take risks and focuses on pandering to their core market, “hardcore gamers”. Most of us are probably familiar with the hardcore gamer stereotype “*characterized by an adolescent male sensibility that transcends physical age and embraces highly stylized graphical violence, male fantasies of power and domination, hyper-sexualized, objectified depictions of women, and rampant racial stereotyping and discrimination.*” (Fron et al. 2007, p. 315). Fron et al. explain how this leads to cynical and manipulative practices, where the core audience is viewed through a lens of what can be exploited, while female and transgender gamers are further alienated, female characters highly sexualized and transgender characters pushed to the margin.

Most importantly, what is viewed as hegemonic, in this case a male-dominated industry, centring men and their perspectives in games and the lack of or poor representation of women and transgender people is presented as “*natural, as anti-ideological, as devoid of bias*” (Cammaerts 2022, p. 2). In their article, Fron et al. discuss the negative implications the hegemony of play has for both the game industry’s core audience and everyone else marginalised from that group. It stunts innovation, creativity and even growth, all the while excluding large parts of the population from the social practice of play, which Fron et al. and I argue belongs to everyone.

The hegemony of play strongly influences the way female and transgender characters are portrayed in video games, as well as viewed by the gamers. The current hegemony has naturalized the dominion of certain character archetypes in the western gaming industry, what they are supposed to look like, behave like or even how players interact with them. When this the naturalized order is “broken”, like TLOU2 did, it results in massive backlash by a privileged group of consumers.

3.2. Aggrieved entitlement and male victimization

In their book “*Angry white men: American masculinity at the end of an era*” (2013), Kimmel explains how corporate America, through the encouragement in the American Dream, has encouraged a rigid understanding of what a man is supposed to be. It heavily relies on traditional gender roles, where the value of a man is decided by their ability to provide for their family, as well as work their way up the economic ladder by applying themselves and work hard (Kimmel 2013). The American men are raised on the belief of a true meritocracy and a “God-given right” to success, as Kimmel explains. If and when these expectations go unmet, it is regarded as a failure to meet the expectations of traditional masculinity. As economic struggles have reached every social class in America, Kimmel explains that a shared understanding of masculinity contributes to feelings of humiliation. In an attempt to negate these feelings, many white men, “us”, have found fault in undeserving “others”, rather than recognizing the structural inequalities that only benefit the rich and powerful (Kimmel 2013). The accusing finger often points at a government who does the bidding of these “others”, whether it is immigrants, racial minorities, women or gender- and sexual minorities. The entitlement also reaches to female bodies. Kimmel describes that the prevalence of domestic violence and violent attacks on often stem from an unfounded entitlement to sex or an intimate partner’s body. Male loneliness is described by these men as the fault of feminism, since it encourages women to decline what the men are entitled to (Kimmel 2013). Robbed of what is “rightfully” theirs, whether it be a respectable position in society or access to women, humiliation has turned into anger towards already disadvantaged groups in society.

As Hermansson et al. explain, gaming spaces exist in a culturally unique position, opposed to e.g. film or music, where the alt-right can focus their emphasis on protecting the mainstream culture based on a white-male hegemony, instead of taking it back. Amongst the erosion of the domination of white men, games and geek culture has been regarded as a kind of final safe space for the aggrieved white men (Hermansson et al., p. 171). The perceived encroachment of feminism, liberal-leftist politics and identity politics in games is often argued to be perpetrated by SJW's. While dissecting the SJW stereotype is outside the scope of this thesis, it is important to understand the implications of the term. While social justice has positive connotations, deployed in the context of alt-right spaces it implies a monstrous feminine, a woman with often androgynous features who is out of control and unwieldy (Massanari & Chess 2018, p. 526). Instead of engaging with criticism against their preferred medium, a stereotype of an irrational woman is constructed, to legitimise the normative position which favours the hegemony of play as the only rational option.

Furthermore, as women and gender minorities have started taking more space in gaming communities, as well as gaming narratives, hardcore gamers take it as a sign that masculinity is under attack (Kimmel 2013). Feminism has, according to white men, gone too far. It is to a degree where men have become the second sex. Kimmel explains that, for instance, a female only club night is perceived as a sign of feminism going too far. Or that a game featuring female protagonists symbolizes the death of a medium and men being ousted from gaming. The phenomenon of *aggrieved entitlement* and *male victimization* was present during GG (Blodgett 2020, p. 187), and I argue that it continues influencing gaming communities to this day.

4. Methodology and material

This thesis uses reflexive Thematic Analysis (TA) in its analysis. Its aim is to discover how gamers perceive transgender and female video game characters, as well as explore how some alt right gamers reviewing the Last of Us part 2 use these characters uphold the hegemony of play. In the highly male dominated field of video games, women and gender minorities have traditionally been forgotten about, or even treated with hostility, both as developers, gamers and characters. Therefore, reflexive, latent, TA is a fruitful method for analysing the themes that are often used against female and transgender characters in games, as well as discover power structures present in these conversations and how language is used to legitimise the hegemony of play. This section of the thesis will begin with describing the material used in this thesis. This will be followed by an explanation of the research tradition of Thematic Analysis and how it is used in this thesis, as well as the ontological and

epistemological assumptions in this thesis. Finally, I will explain the ethical considerations important for TA, studying the internet, toxic communities and the vulnerable communities they are attacking.

4.1. Material

To answer RQ1. (How and why do hardcore gamers resist non-normative gender representation in the Last of Us part II?) and RQ2. (What does the resistance reveal about cultural attitudes toward gender in gaming communities?), this thesis will look at data scraped from Metacritic. Metacritic is a large platform for aggregating reviews on different types of media, including music, films, television shows and video games. While the site gathers reviews for many types of media, it is often especially regarded as the foremost aggregation website for the video game industry. The site features both professional and user reviews, which are scored on a weighted average from 0-100. While Metacritic's influence over sales has decreased, it has traditionally had an important role in the video game industry, both in driving sales and determining performance bonuses tied to Metascore averages at some studios (Tassi 2022).

The massive review bombing of TLOU2 was a significant wake up call for Metacritic to change their reviewing system. Within the first 48 hours of the release TLOU2, the game had accumulated 38 000 reviews, over four times the reviews of TLOU during its entire existence, with a score of only 3.6/10 (Tomkinson 2022, p. 6). Due to the review bombing of TLOU2, combined with the often hateful or even racist, misogynist, trans- and homophobic language in the reviews, the site received criticism for their user policies. For instance, Glennon for Inverse condemned Metacritic for not having a rigorous moderation system in place. Instead of reviews, especially for games like TLOU2 that were known to cause outrage, going through a human moderator, they are published to the site immediately (Glennon 2020). To combat the issue of review bombing and bigoted language, Metacritic regularly follows the discussions happening in the user review section. According to Glennon, they also rely on other users flagging abusive content for offensive reviews to be removed. Furthermore, as a response to the attack against TLOU2, Metacritic added a 36-hour waiting period before users can critique new games in an effort to combat review bombing (Lyles 2020). The idea is to ensure that players have had adequate time to play the game before adding a review on the site. Yet there is still much prejudiced content that slips through the cracks (Glennon 2020).

Finding the original reviews on Metacritic is difficult and collecting them into the easiest format to analyse is not my area of expertise. Luckily there is a dataset by lazaro97 on Kaggle, who the creator has marked as open access. Lazaro97 has data on reviews from TLOU, TLOU2 and the TLOU DLC

Left Behind. File user_reviews_g2 contains reviews of TLOU2, with 30 658 total reviews, dated from the day of the release of the game (19th June 2020) to March in 2021. The data was filtered down to make a qualitative analysis feasible. I began by deciding to only use reviews from the day of the release of TLOU2 (19th June 2020) with a score of zero, written in English. The reviews were then filtered by these key words: “LGBT”, “gender” and “_trans”. Reviews from the day of the release, with a score of zero, were used since they would be most likely posted with the intention of review bombing the game and therefore be more likely to include manufactured outrage at inclusion in the game. The final sample used for this thesis’ qualitative analysis consisted of 96 reviews.

4.2. Data analysis

The method selected for this thesis is a *thematic analysis*, which involves identifying and analysing patterns of meaning, or themes, found in a set of data (Braun & Clarke 2021, p. 114). TA has many different approaches, but the method as outlined by Braun and Clarke is called *reflexive thematic analysis*. The themes in reflexive TA share a central organising concept, which can be more or less evident at first glance and are reliant on the subjectivity of the research. Subjectivity is in fact to be treated as the primary tool of the researcher, instead of something that they should forcibly get rid of, which requires the researcher to acknowledge their position and critically reflect on their role as a researcher (Braun & Clarke 2021, p. 46 & 42). Braun and Clarke explain that knowledge is inevitably shaped by the practices of the researcher and meaning is only created by interaction with the data, it is not something that inherently exists within it. To reach their goal of creating these themes, the researcher should follow the six phases of reflexive thematic analysis; 1. *familiarisation with the data*, 2. *coding*, 3. *generating initial themes*, 4. *developing and reviewing themes*, 5. *refining, defining and naming themes*, and finally 6. *writing up* (Braun & Clarke 2021, p. 74). The progression of the analysis is not strictly linear, as Braun and Clarke emphasize that there is no shame in going between the “stages”, on the contrary, it is a part of the process.

After gathering my data, I began familiarizing myself with it by carefully reading through all the reviews, while making notes in a notebook that I dedicated for this process. Afterwards I immediately began creating codes for the data by using Atlas.ti, highlighting interesting and recurring issues that were brought up in the critiques. In creating the codes, I aimed to take a *deductive* approach to the data, with the goal to analyse the data to test an established theory, in this case using the hegemony of play and aggrieved entitlement as frameworks to guide my analysis (Braun & Clarke 2021, p. 90). The approach to data does not need to be strictly deductive or *inductive*, however the approach chosen for this thesis allows the analysis to exist in an already defined social context.

The process continued by jumping between phases 1. and 2. for quite some time. I read and re-read the data several times, each time refining my codes. I began by coding at the more *semantic* level, which captures the explicitly expressed meaning (Braun & Clarke 2021, p. 92). However, in the process of finding the deeper meaning behind the reviews, I used a mix of semantic and *latent* coding, which Braun and Clarke describe as focus on the more implicit and conceptual levels of meaning. Fairly common in TA, the researcher often starts coding the “obvious” meanings, while moving on to the hidden meanings after familiarising themselves with the data. The final codes that I felt represented the data best were also in the end divided into coding categories.

Some reviews were quite clear on their position, while others I had to look deeper to find the implicit meaning of the critic. For instance, it was sometimes difficult to code the reviews as anything other than transphobia or misogyny, but classifying the reviews as “only” hateful vitriol would not have been particularly interesting or contributed to any kind of academic knowledge. Finding the deeper meaning of *why* the reviewers are so angry at the representation of women and gender minorities is what interested me in this thesis. My final codes and coding categories are seen in the table below:

Coding category	Codes
<i>Representation as a problem in the video game industry</i>	Inserting politics
	Pandering non-gamers
	Corruption
	Artistic quality, loss of enjoyment
<i>Representation as a threat outside games</i>	Threat towards masculinity
	Threat towards societal institutions
<i>Unrealistic</i>	Unrealistic in TLOU2

Following the first two phases, I moved on to generating initial themes based on the coding categories and subthemes based on the codes. I noticed that the reviews essentially resisted non-normative gender representation at three different levels. First, because it showed that the video game industry has issues. Second, because representation in TLOU represents a larger threat towards society and finally, that it is an issue for the game itself, since non-normative gender identities and expressions is perceived as unrealistic in the game’s context.

I continued working on the themes, defining them more clearly and naming them. Braun and Clarke emphasise the importance of clearly specifying your themes, and not to simply summarise a topic. The codes have to share an idea, which sometimes can be hidden. When looking further at my themes, I for instance struggled with placing the artistic quality and loss of enjoyment code into a theme. I

ended up switching it a few times between the “non-normative gender representation indicates a problem in the gaming industry” theme and “non-normative gender representation is a threat” theme. The final theme, named “non-normative gender representation is unrealistic in TLOU2” was also named as “weaponised realism” for a long time, but I ended up changing it since weaponised realism was more of a technique reviewers used to resist the perceived unrealistic identities in TLOU2. The final themes and subthemes were named as follows:

- Non-normative gender representation indicates a problem in the gaming industry
 - Non-normative gender representations indicate that games are made political
 - Non-normative gender representation in games indicate they are made to appease “non-gamers”
 - Non-normative gender representations indicate corruption in the gaming industry
 - Non-normative gender representation kills the artistic qualities of games and other visual media
- Non-normative gender representation is a threat
 - Non-normative gender representation is a threat towards masculinity
 - Non-normative gender representation is a threat towards society
- Non-normative gender representation is unrealistic in TLOU2.

Throughout the analysis, I utilised a critical and constructionist approach to find the deeper meanings behind what critics wrote. My goal was to connect everything to the background of TLOU2, as well as previous research and the frameworks chosen for the thesis.

4.3. Ontology and epistemology

At this point I wish to expand on the ontological and epistemological assumptions in this thesis. Ontology is defined as “*a particular theory about the nature of being or the kinds of things that have existence*” (Merriam-Webster, n.d.). Leavy argues for the acknowledgement and valuation of subjectivity, as objectivity can only be reached by paradoxically owning and disclosing one’s value systems.

Epistemology in turn refers to the “knower”, Leavy describing it as “*a philosophical belief system about how research proceeds as an embodied activity, how one embodies the role of researcher, and the relationship between the researcher and research participants*” (Leavy 2020, p. 4). Since I will be working from a social constructionist standpoint, the philosophical assumption I take as a

researcher is that objectivity is something that does not exist, instead in line with qualitative research traditions, researchers are seen as an instrument for the study, disclosing their personal, professional and political commitments influencing the study. The hierarchical structure between scholar and participant ought to be rejected, participants instead viewed as co-creators of knowledge (Leavy 2020, p. 4).

4.4. Ethical considerations

The internet and social media have given researchers rich resources of data and is a useful tool in studying everything from consumer behaviour to political opinion (Townsend & Wallace, 2018, p. 190). Yet the many benefits are followed by new ethical considerations, the main ones within my thesis being informed consent and privacy. According to Townsend and Wallace, some might consider everything online as public data, a free-for-all arena researchers may use however they please. But this view is problematic, as there are areas of the internet that are considered personal, such as private profiles and password protected groups (Townsend & Wallace, 2018, p. 193). By following this logic, Metacritic should be considered public domain and using data collected on their site should not have major ethical considerations.

4.4.1. Disclosing use of artificial intelligence

I affirm that this thesis was composed and written by myself and that the work is my own. However, I have used ChatGPT-4o (specifically during March, April and May 2025) in some instances during the writing process to improve language, flow and readability. I also used the tool in two situations where I had a severe writer's block, asking the tool to assist me on how to continue writing a specific section (section 6. Conclusion and section 5.3. Non-normative gender representation is unrealistic in TLOU2). This prompt gave ideas on how to continue in the form of a list, which helped me move forward in the writing process. I have reviewed and edited the AI-improved text and take full responsibility for the content of this thesis in accordance with the University of Helsinki's guidelines on the use of generative AI in research.

By disclosing the use of AI I wish to contribute to the transparency of research and take steps to ensure that my thesis follows best practice. AI-tools can be helpful in giving ideas and help through writing blocks, as well as improve language, but should never replace the work of a human researcher. Furthermore, I wish to acknowledge the social and environmental impact of AI, which is why advocating for responsible use of AI-tools is important. This, in my case, means avoiding unnecessary use of AI.

4.5. Reflexivity

I have pondered over my epistemological position as a researcher and my right as a privileged cisgender, white woman to speak on the behalf of the queer community. Even studying and reiterating hate speech feels like an act of symbolic violence. Such thoughts are important and a key to feminist and constructionist research. A researcher is obligated to question and review their epistemological standpoints, as well as consider their relationships to the people and/or communities they study (Gruwell, 2020, p. 92). The scholar ought to reflect on their position and thoughts throughout the project, as it contributes towards the credibility of the study. I hope my privilege can in this case act as a shield and provide distance against the exhausting task of studying the toxic web. I also strongly believe studying marginalised communities or their oppressors should not be left to the members of said community, but others, more privileged researchers can be helpful in this task. However, I need to be aware that my view on the issue might not be as nuanced as someone directly affected transphobia or homophobia and has to endure its powerful existence in their daily lives. Gruwell discusses the importance of studying online harassment to illustrate the extent of the problem, even the most vulgar and violent. This is also the purpose of my master's thesis. In my opinion, attacking minority characters uphold discourses of hatred and othering, while indirectly attacking players with shared marginalised identities of the characters. Games and gaming communities are still largely hostile towards women and marginalised people, excluding them from forms of entertainment that should be enjoyed by everyone.

5. Analysis

In this section of the thesis, I will be presenting the findings of the analysis. There were three main themes found from the analysed material, with themes one and two broken down into subthemes, furthermore highlighting the cultural attitudes surrounding gender that informed the critic's opinions on gender diversity in TLOU2. Before getting into the analysis, it feels important to remind that the critics were sometimes violent in their language, but there will not be any themes named simply "transphobia" or "misogyny". Instead, it is helpful to think of the themes as an analysis of what in this case drives transphobia and misogyny. I found that there were three levels to the resistance of non-normative gender representation; resisting representation in the video game industry, resistance towards a more open society and finally, resistance towards representation in TLOU2 itself.

The first theme essentially highlights how reviewers resist diverse gender representations since it shows that there is an issue in the gaming industry itself. The underlying fear that drives this

perspective is losing a beloved medium to content they are not comfortable with or cannot relate to. The second theme explains how critics perceive non-normative gender identities as a threat towards larger society. In their mind, TLOU2 is just a representation of this threat. The final theme shows how reviewers view non-normative gender representation as a detriment to the game itself, arguing that diverse identities are unrealistic in the world of TLOU2.

It should be noted that the identified themes do not exist in vacuums independent of each other but are often overlapping and reviews could often be coded into several themes. This thesis does its best to address these reviews and give a holistic understanding of the reviewer's positions and the gaming communities as a whole.

5.1. Non-normative gender representation indicates a problem in the gaming industry

The first theme that was constructed from the material was that critics believe non-normative gender representation to indicate that there are problems in the video game industry. Critics' underlying anxieties over being decentred in their preferred medium and losing cultural dominance in their cultural spaces informs much of the arguments that are used against non-normative gender representation in games. Similarly to GG, the theme shows how resistance towards female and transgender characters is argued to be about ethics and keeping games "pure", often instead of directly implying further societal chaos. The subthemes found that reviewers:

1. perceive **non-normative gender representation as political**. While politics in games are opposed to in general, the liberal left-leaning "agenda" many critics refer to is viewed as especially problematic. The first subtheme will dive deeper into how gender is politicised in the reviews, as well as how the hegemony of play influences the cultural attitudes towards gender.
2. identify an ideological opponent who benefits from politics in games. Critics argue that **non-normative gender representation is added into games to appease "non-gamers"**, instead of focusing on the core market, hardcore gamers. The subtheme will describe how critics, "us" have constructed a political "other", the liberal non-gamer, who encroaches onto their preferred medium.
3. believe the representation of non-normative gender expressions coupled with the positive reception by game journalists **indicates that there is corruption in the video game industry**. This section illustrated how reviewers build their claims on a basis of ethics, where resistance

towards inclusivity is not political, since critics are just defending the moral norm of apolitical gaming.

4. believe that representation is distracting and **ruins the artistic quality of games**. Critics argue that inclusivity comes at the expense of storytelling and gameplay. They argue that games with non-normative gender representation do not have universally relatable themes, since they shift their focus on issues that are only relevant for minorities.

5.1.1. Non-normative gender representations indicate games are made political

A central theme repeated in negative reviews of TLOU2 is the claim that non-normative gender representation makes the game political. The presence of LGBTQ+ character and themes, as well as female characters that defy heteronormative expectations of beauty, are viewed as disruptive because of the perceived ideological agenda they represent. According to 41 critics this undermines the norm in games, where the medium is seen as something that should remain apolitical. Characters like Abby, Ellie and Lev are seen as conflicting to the gaming ideal of neutrality.

“Please keep politics and games separated. Thanks.”

Review 85

“The worst game to ever come out of Naughty Dog... They threw the whole groundwork that was established in the first game in favor of a narrative that is littered with identity, gender politics and a petty revenge plot.”

Review 26

The backlash and the reviewers’ arguments reveal how deeply dominant ideological structures, particularly those of masculinity, heteronormativity and cisnormativity, are entrenched in gaming culture. These structures have become invisible through decades of design that prioritize male protagonists and experiences, often excluding women and transgender characters. Combined with a male-dominated industry, such norms have thrived in conservative gaming spaces (Hermansson et al. 2020, p. 115).

As seen above, reviewers are not merely opposed to the story or game mechanics of TLOU2, instead they position its non-normative gender representation as proof that gaming has been compromised by liberal politics. The core assumption that underlies this argument is that games have previously been free of ideological influence, as reflected by the first reviewer’s plea to “*keep politics and games separate*”. The non-normative gender expressions and identities are viewed as an imposition on the

medium. Rather than a natural evolution of storytelling, critics of TLOU2 perceive the representation in TLOU2 as an *agenda* or as *propaganda*, as the following reviewer compares the LGBTQ+ representation to explicitly political movements:

“And making this game a LGBTQ movement is a no-no... I also wouldn't like to have anti-Trump or Bernie propaganda in my games. Already had enough that I need to see BLM movements on all websites if all I want to do is watch a movie. Please keep politics out of my games.”

Review 85

The hegemony of play has placed gaming spaces into a culturally unique position, as Hermansson et al. write, since it allows hardcore gamers to defend their position instead of taking it back. The claim that games exist in politically neutral spaces of course ignores a long history of political messaging in games, as exemplified by Hermansson et al., where, for instance, military shooters like *Call of Duty* glorify American imperialism and nationalism, while games like *The Sims* reinforce neoliberal ideals. However, despite the implicit political ideologies present in gaming, these games are not met with similar backlash because they align with dominant political ideologies, rather than challenging them (Hermansson et al., p. 116).

Much like the #GamerGate controversy, which framed itself as a defence of ethics and neutrality, these critics claim their stance is objective. By presenting opposition to diversity as “common sense” they reinforce the status quo while denying their own ideological grounding. Therefore, critics like the one above can claim that the backlash against TLOU2 is not counter-political, but instead a reaction to the game's propaganda. Maintaining this status quo becomes, in their view, the ethical and moral imperative.

“Finally you pushed a political agenda in your game for every inch of an hour. People just want to play their game. They do not want to relate to poorly written characters who just happens to not be cis gender.”

Review 39

The reviewer writing “*people just want to play their game*” suggests that being more gender inclusive, or in other words deviating from the expectations the hegemony of play has created, disrupts the gaming experience. Non-normative gender representation is not seen as natural progression, but rather as an unwanted imposition. Words like *push* and *agenda* were common in these reviews and I

argue that when positioning representation as an agenda that needs to be pushed, the reviewers imply that the current norm reflects what the hardcore gamers naturally want.

Furthermore, by equating non-normative gender expressions and identities with partisan political movements, the critics of TLOU2 reinforce the belief that the existence of queer and transgender identities is inherently political. From this viewpoint, any form of gender diversity challenges the perceived neutrality of gaming and is therefore unwelcome. I argue that resistance to such representation reflects an effort to preserve the current cultural hierarchy in gaming. This pushback stems from fear of losing a historically privileged position. As gaming narratives diversify, hardcore gamers feel displaced, interpreting this shift as a personal attack. In framing TLOU2 as a political project, these reviewers assert that gaming belongs to cisgender male players, and any disruption of this structure is seen not just as change, but as an attack on gaming itself.

The backlash against TLOU2 presents a few key cultural attitudes that gaming communities hold about gender and non-normative gender representation. The reviews analysed in this section demonstrate that critics:

- **Believe that gender representation is inherently political.** The presence of non-normative gender identities in TLOU2 is perceived as an ideological decision rather than a reflection of real-life diversity.
- **Believe that some arenas of social and cultural life, such as gaming, should remain apolitical.** The hegemony of play has naturalized the dominance of white, heterosexual and cisgender protagonists, where any deviation from this norm is viewed as a political imposition. Gaming as a “safe space” for men is viewed to be under attack by political agendas.

Ultimately what the reactions illustrate is the resistance towards change in a previously stagnant, hegemonic medium, which is not unique to gaming. It is a reflection of broader cultural struggles over gender, power and identity in contemporary society (Cammaerts 2022).

5.1.2. Gender representation in games indicate they are made to appease “non-gamers”

While the previous subtheme explained how non-normative gender expressions have been politicised in games, as well as how the hegemony of play has been naturalized to a degree where any deviation is viewed as an imposition, this subtheme answers why the critics think representation has been added

to TLOU2. As many as 48 of the reviewed critiques imply that non-normative gender identities were represented not due to a natural progression into more inclusivity, but rather as a marketing strategy to appeal to a new, non-gamer audience.

Instead of progressing alongside other industries into more representation, the critics argue that politics, which non-normative gender representation is equated to, was forced into the game to boost sales and attract minority audiences. The following quote exemplifies this perception:

“Let me break this down for you quickly: PANDERING has negatively infected gaming culture and the Last of Us 2 is the quintessential example of it [...] In modern culture, however, we have reached a point where pandering has become an issue, particularly when a medium appeals to a certain demographic without making any effort to understand the people they're supposedly representing.,,It often feels like an afterthought, something thrown in to reap the benefits of including that group (typically a minority) without doing any actual work.”

Review 36

The critic views the gender representation in TLOU2 as inauthentic. They argue that the game features characters like Abby, Lev and Ellie as an attempt to court an audience traditionally outside the gamer demographic. The term *pandering* suggests that the representation is artificial and performative, while reinforcing the deeply engrained idea that if the hegemony of play is broken, it is done to spite the hardcore gamers in favour of a politically and economically driven agenda.

Although some critics express, which I perceive as at least somewhat genuine, concern for the quality of representation, like the one above, others are more hostile towards the shifting of gaming demographics and the characters who represent it. There were several critics who reject TLOU2 completely, reducing its story to a kind of “social justice fantasy” rather than a legitimate narrative:

“I can't believe how awful the writing is in this game. It's complete SJW non-sense with awful writing that completely killed this game. If you want to play an LGBT fantasy game then guess what Last of us 2 is just that!”

Review 54

“The only people who legitimately enjoyed playing The Last of Us 2, for it's story, are people whose ONLY personality trait is either their gender, sexual orientation, or skin colour.”

Review 40

The critics above establish a clear “us versus them” narrative, creating a boundary between what they perceive as the legitimate gaming community, the hardcore gamers, predominantly consisting of cisgender men, and those who are viewed as outsiders. These outsiders include women, gender- or sexual minorities, or those who advocate for issues of diversity, equality, LGBTQ+ rights or social justice. The reviewers express how the “others” are ruining games with non-normative gender representations, while positioning themselves as the rightful owners of the gaming medium. Just as GamerGate positioned SJW’s as a threat towards “real gaming” in 2014, these reviews frame inclusivity as an infiltration and a corrupting force that undermine the traditional values of political neutrality in games.

By invoking the SJW archetype, the reviewers frame themselves as rational, merit-based critics and defenders of real games. Meanwhile the SJWs are positioned as a threat to true gaming, as their concerns are rendered frivolous and ideologically motivated. Those who support diversity are seen as overly emotional, politically motivated and misguided, who base their perspective on TLOU2 on inconsequential things such as “*gender, sexual orientation, or skin colour*”. This archetype often carries gendered and transphobic connotations, depicting social justice advocates as irrational, militant, and disruptive, coded as female or non-binary figures who do not conform to traditional ideals of femininity (or masculinity) (Massanari & Chess 2018, p. 532).

The argument that TLOU2 was designed to appease “non-gamers” further reinforces the belief that women and transgender people do not belong in gaming spaces. By suggesting that women, transgender people, and queer individuals are outsiders, critics uphold a narrow and exclusionary definition of who counts as a legitimate gamer. In doing so, they reaffirm a cultural hierarchy that marginalises diverse identities and portray them as incompatible with fun and meaningful games.

“You know it's gonna be a flop when you show a big "SCREW YOU" to your old fans and try searching new ones in the face of LGBT minorities”

Review 87

“The Last Of Us Part II is a "game" for people who don't play games and sadly, if this games becomes sucessful, we'll probably be in a very negative place for creativity as developers or players.”

Review 62

The reviewers above operate under the assumption that transgender people, even more broadly, all LGBTQ+ players, and women exist outside gaming spaces. The perspective disregards that queer-, trans- and female players have long been part of gaming culture, however in more invisible positions. By framing the inclusion of non-normative identities in TLOU2 as a deviation from player expectations, critics ignore the diverse audience that engaged and appreciated TLOU.

The exclusionary stance that many critics take is based on a flawed market-driven logic, which assumes that narrative decisions in games should be governed by the preference of a narrowly defined core audience, the hardcore gamers. Within this framework, content that highlights marginalised identities or diverse women is considered pandering or “*a big "SCREW YOU" to your old fans*”, as it does not align with the taste of the core market. However, this logic fails to acknowledge the increasingly diverse player base, including women, transgender people and other minorities, who have all been historically and currently underrepresented in games, while being actively involved in the medium.

The perspective that TLOU2 was made for non-gamers reveals a form of gamekeeping designed to protect the boundaries of a hardcore gamer community, one that defines itself by the exclusion of women and transgender people. I argue that critics’ reviews reveal deeply engrained cultural attitudes about gender representation informed by the longstanding hegemony of play:

- **Women and transgender people are not a significant consumer base of games.** Hence diverse representation of different kinds of women and non-normative gender identities are unnecessary.
- **Gaming belongs to men and attempts to change this are an imposition.** Representation is therefore perceived as a desperate attempt to court “non-gamers” to buy a product they otherwise would not.
- **The market does not naturally support gender inclusivity.** Which according to critics means that representation is added simply as a political statement.

The backlash against non-normative gender representation reflects broader anxieties about who games are for. Fears around losing the cultural identity of games is directed towards the people who are perceived to benefit from more diverse games, “outsiders”, who are catered to at the expense of “hardcore” gamers.

However, some reviewers go even further in their analysis, seeing non-normative gender representation not just as misguided, but as a sign of deep-rooted corruption in the gaming industry.

5.1.3. Non-normative gender representations indicate corruption in the gaming industry

Sub-themes one and two in this section have explored why critics of TLOU2 reject gender representation in the game, first by identifying what is perceived as a core issue, the politicization of games, and second, by questioning who, outsiders rather than hardcore gamers, the representation is for. If, according to the reviewers, representation is unnecessary and intrusive, it poses the question of who is responsible for the increased visibility of women and gender minorities in games, specifically TLOU2. The answer provided by 17 critics is that they identified corruption in the gaming industry.

Several critics argued that the industry nowadays prioritizes diversity and identity politics over narrative quality. Rather than allowing the free market and the preferences of the core market of hardcore gamers determine which games succeed, the critics imply that that game developers, -journalists and -publishers are colluding to force gender politics onto video games. The following review shows how TLOU2 is perceived as a characteristic example of the kind of product that results from the corrupted industry:

“The way you instructed gaming outlets to only review the first third or so of the game is an utter disgrace that only shows the incestuous nepotism inherent in this godforsaken industry.”

Review 21

The critic appears to be addressing nepotism in the gaming industry, a concern that, like other entertainment industries, has been scrutinised for favouring established figures, supporting insider networks and the lack of diversity especially in leadership (Smith & Decker 2016, p. 1). However, within the context of this thesis and the backlash against TLOU2, every critic who mentioned nepotism framed it not as a structural issue that keeps newcomers, women, gender-, sexual- and racial

minorities from attaining industry success. Rather, nepotism is presented as a tool for game developers to artificially impose gender politics onto games. The critic above refers to the nepotism in the gaming industry as *incestuous*, expressing visceral disgust. While this might initially appear to be hyperbolic language, when situated within a broader historical context, such as discourse surrounding GG, it may be interpreted as an insinuation to conspiratorial claims that suggest unethical or exploitative exchanges, like the exchange of sexual favours, to promote games like TLOU2. This interpretation is further supported by the reviewer's subsequent focus on one of GG's most prominent and frequently targeted figures:

"You [Neil Druckmann] should never be given creative control of any video game ever again, and I hope that other AAA devs will think twice before hiring someone as tone-deaf to their audiences as Sarkeesian to consult."

Review 21

The push towards diversity and the inclusion of non-normative gender identities is, according to the critics, driven by different corrupt entities within the gaming industry. However, Anita Sarkeesian who faced relentless harassment in 2014 during GamerGate, is still commonly discussed in video game communities in general. TLOU2 reviews are no exception. Another critic extended the claim made by the previous reviewer, tying TLOU2's gender diversity directly to Sarkeesian's supposed influence:

"Sarkeesian being involved along with the questionable new director (Druckmann) were a big red flag, all but confirmed by various leaks and studio employees apparently being removed for questioning the bizarre story direction."

Review 72

The rhetoric used to discuss Sarkeesian, TLOU2 and non-normative gender representation in the reviews closely mirrors the central ideological claims of GG, particularly its position that feminist critiques of gaming are illegitimate. According to both gamergaters and critics of TLOU2, the increasing presence of feminist discourse and critique on gaming to address issues of representation is a part of deliberate and coordinated effort to infiltrate the medium from within (Mortensen 2018, p. 792). Sarkeesian, in this context, was accused of being a manipulative outsider whose critique on gendered tropes in video games was perceived as unsolicited and damaging impositions of gender politics onto games. Her work elicited an extraordinary volume of online harassment, including doxxing and threats of rape and death, as it became a symbol of a larger conspiracy among

gamergaters, who interpreted feminist critiques of the gaming industry as an orchestrated campaign to destroy the cultural foundations of gaming (Chess & Shaw 2015, p. 212).

Now, a decade later, remarkably similar accusations are directed at TLOU2 and Sarkeesian, demonstrating the enduring cultural impact of GG and its continued influence in shaping current resistance towards gender inclusivity within gaming. This time, Sarkeesian is accused of influencing TLOU2, not through her work as a feminist media critic and researcher, but rather as a secret consultant to Neil Druckmann, despite the absence of any credible evidence supporting the claim. While there is no denying that Sarkeesian's work has contributed to a heightened awareness of gender dynamics and has started essential conversations around misogyny in gaming spaces, there is no evidence that she had any formal or informal role in the development of TLOU2. I argue that the two reviews above are indicative of a larger cultural anxiety among critics, rooted in the perceived loss of medium and their hegemonic position in it. The responses reflect the continued ideological and cultural influence of GG, and the persistence of its narratives in contemporary gaming culture.

Furthermore, the intense criticism directed at Sarkeesian positions her as the personification of the broader social shifts that the critics oppose. As a high-profile figure associated with feminist gaming critique and as a primary target of GG, she is constructed as a symbol for the increasing diversity and representation in games. The growing presence of women and gender minorities is perceived by the reviewers as a threat towards the "natural order" and their "rightful" supremacy as established by the hegemony of play (Kimmel 2013). Instead of expressing disappointment in the "*bizarre story direction*" TLOU2 takes, the reviewers redirect their grievances and anger towards an imagined external influence and framing the subjective failures of the game a symptom of the ideological interference of the "other".

In addition to targeting developers, the analysed critiques of TLOU2 extend corruption claims to gaming journalists, by arguing that the overwhelmingly positive reviews by professional critics are an indication of industry-wide collusion. According to reviewers, the game was undeserving of the praise it receives and the positive reviews by major publications were the result of coercion or bribery. This scepticism is reflected in several reviews, revealing deep mistrust towards industry figures and reinforcing the idea that an ideological agenda is being coordinated between throughout the gaming industry:

“And with this one game, big name journalists (IGN, Polygon, VG24/7, Eurogamer etc) if their reputations in recent years weren't already badly damaged and reduced to the court jesters of gaming journalism, their fate is sealed by a once loved franchise”

Review 72

“Well we all know that Sony paid well to the reviewers (tlou2 has 95 on metacritic yhh ofc lmao),,”

Review 15

The accusations suggest that gaming journalism has lost its integrity, a claim that echoes the central allegations during GG a decade earlier. As reflected in the first review, journalists and prominent gaming publications such as IGN, Polygon and Metacritic, are alleged to take bribes from publishers, in this case Sony, to promote TLOU2 uncritically. Within this narrative, similarly to GG, representation is not viewed as a genuine creative choice, but instead as a sign of corruption. In doing so, critics are able to reframe their opposition to non-normative gender representation not as a bias, but as an ethical campaign for journalistic and artistic integrity. This strategy enables the reviewers to disguise bigoted sentiments as principled critiques grounded in concerns over ethics in gaming journalism.

Even the more overtly hateful rhetoric, containing misogynistic, transphobic and homophobic overtones, was framed by some reviewers as either an overreaction born from justified outrage or dismissed altogether. In some cases, critics argued that claims of bigotry are not reflective of the overall discourse surrounding TLOU2, but a strategically manufactured by developers and publishers to garner sympathy and silence legitimate concerns:

“We live in a world where if a film releases starring a female lead and it is panned by audiences, there are marketing crews to spin the criticism as sexism to undermine their validity. If a video game releases and consumers flock to berate it, it's classified as 'review bombing' or 'trolling' or sometimes also 'sexism,' 'racism,' or 'LGBTphobia'. In The Last of Us Part II's case it's all of the above. This practice isn't just becoming normalized either. It IS the norm. And that's unacceptable. Entertainment media should thrive because of its audience, not in spite of them.”

Review 33

Reviewers argued that characters like Ellie, Abby and Lev are added into games like TLOU2 as a corporate strategy to deflect from genuine criticism audiences have towards their product. The

implication here is that any legitimate criticism against the game is rendered illegitimate by the gaming industry by weaponizing marginalised identities. The argument that there is no backlash against TLOU2 that is rooted in misogyny, transphobia or homophobia, despite evidence to the contrary, invalidates the experiences of marginalised players while portraying the developers' attempts to increase diversity as deceitful.

This line of argumentation reflects broader discourses within right-wing media, where issues of “free speech” and “censorship” are frequently used to resist progressive shifts in popular visual media (Cammaerts 2022, p. 9). The sentiment “*Entertainment media should thrive because of its audience, not in spite of them*” once again reinforces the idea that hardcore gamers are directly opposed to increased diversity and suggests that deviations from the norms established by the hegemony of play is an act of betrayal to the loyal and assumed homogenous fanbase. Furthermore, this framing ignores or intentionally denies the explicitly bigoted reviews that are found even in the data for this thesis. Moving into the next themes, these discriminatory discourses become more evident, undermining the argument that the backlash against TLOU2 is purely about quality or narrative.

Ultimately, claims of corruption within the gaming industry and how it reflects upon TLOU2 serve a larger ideological function, as critics argue that gender ideology and politics are deliberate and dishonest manipulation of the gaming industry. Critics argue that non-normative gender representation is not an organic outcome of changing demographics or inclusive design practices, but rather a disingenuous strategy to pander to perceived “outsiders”, marginalized groups who are presumed not to be part of the core gaming audience. When developers make efforts to increase diversity in their games and this results industry wide praise, reviewers use this as proof of manipulation. These narratives offer valuable insight into the cultural attitudes that underpins the backlash, revealing a deep resistance to demographic and ideological diversification within gaming spaces:

- **Non-normative gender representation is forced political messaging orchestrated by industry elites.** Because the perceived core market for games, hardcore gamers, are not centred in the narrative of TLOU2, representation must be an artificial tool used to influence the audience.
- **Gender is weaponised by industry elites to either evade criticism or market the game.** The transphobic and misogynist backlash is argued to not exist, and genuine criticism of the game is only framed by Sony as an attack on diversity.

- **Only hardcore gamers should review games, since it removes bias to favour games with diversity.** Non-male, non-cisgender journalists are argued to not belong in gaming spaces, therefore their perspectives should not influence how games are made, reviewed and discussed.

5.1.4. Non-normative gender representation kills the artistic qualities of games and other visual media

A prominent criticism of TLOU2 that the reviews allude to is a claim that gender inclusivity has diminished the artistic quality of games and consequently made them less enjoyable. Twenty-six critics argue that the incorporation of gender non-normative characters and themes surrounding gender identity distracts from the storytelling and prioritizes ideological messaging over narrative depth. This perspective suggests a broader cultural belief in which diversity in games and other visual media is inherently at odds with artistic excellence and creative authenticity.

Many of the critics view gender diversity in TLOU2 as a distraction and argue that the game ignores core themes that were present in TLOU, such as love and healing. According to this perspective, TLOU2 prioritizes politics and gender ideology over meaningful storytelling, as the following review exemplifies:

“Ruined franchise by an almost unbelievable bad story. So much stuff to discuss in a post apocalyptic world and Naughty Dog chooses to focus on an empty and stupid vengeance, sexuality and gender. For the sake of this agenda, it even killed a very loved character in a very hateful way”

Review 38

The critic implies that non-normative gender identities and expressions overshadow what should be the primary thematic focus of the story. However, I argue that this interpretation of the game fails to acknowledge the central narrative themes of TLOU2, such as loss, grief, trauma and forgiveness. Furthermore, the dismissal of gender and sexuality as *empty* and *stupid* not only misrepresents the narrative depth of the game, but trivialises the lived experiences of marginalized communities, framing their representation as irrelevant.

Critics tend to frequently conflate diverse gender representation with a complete shift in storytelling priorities, the following review is another typical way to argue against diversity in characters and narrative focus:

“TLOU” had themes and depth. It was about mankind discovering his humanity in the ruins of civilization. It was about bonding, communication, relationships, and hope., “TLOU Part II” is about little more than peddling brutal, transgressive content, and on top of that, advertising it in a misleading manner to the millions of fans of the original groundbreaking title”

Review 21

The reviewer above draws a comparison between the first game and its sequel, implying that only TLOU had meaningful and universal themes that are relatable to a large audience, such as love and finding meaning in a post-apocalyptic world. Meanwhile TLOU2 is framed as a story concerned only about gender and sexuality. I argue that it is not the narrative complexity that has changed, but rather who the narrative is about, which critics seem to find disruptive. Some express disgust, as the reviewer above seems to do by calling the game *transgressive*. While this term could be attributed to the violent content of TLOU2, its usage in this context, especially by a critic who also references Anita Sarkeesian’s alleged (though unfounded) influence on the game, suggests a moral objection to gender diversity rather than narrative content. Therefore, I interpret the reference to “transgression” as disapproval of the increased representation of women and non-normative gender expressions and identities.

Furthermore, many critics express strong ideological resistance towards Ellie’s sexuality and Lev’s gender identity. Once again, diversity is seen as an imposition by liberal game makers or activists, rather than an organic choice. The next review illustrates explicit anxiety concerning the perceived cultural consequences of inclusivity, associating gender diversity with a broader liberal-leftist political agenda that threatens the integrity of gaming and, by extension, visual media as a whole:

“Liberals, SJWs, and LGBT degeneracy ruined a once good story. Everything I once loved has been destroyed by these heathens.”

Review 4

The critique reveals that the disapproval directed at TLOU2 extends beyond narrative preference. Instead, the presence of non-normative gender identities and representations is perceived as a symbolic attack towards gaming culture itself. Diverse representation of both gender and sexuality here is described as inherently destructive, as the reviewer uses charged language such as *degeneracy* and *ruined*. Advocates for more inclusive storytelling are dehumanised and delegitimised, described as *heathens*, illustrating the extent to which gender diversity is positioned as a cultural threat.

As previously mentioned, the reviewers often overstate the role of gender and sexuality. One reviewer offers a hyperbolic comparison between TLOU2 and *Star Wars*, reinforcing the sentiment that non-normative gender representation alters the essence of a story:

“Imagine Star Wars, but you play as a trans person who beats Obi-wan over the head with a blunt weapon, to death. That's what this game is. And then instead of staging the rebellion and blowing up the Death Star, Luke spends 80% of the story dealing with his new gay lover.,,There is a time and a place for those things, this aint it.”

Review 92

The review above reveals several entrenched cultural attitudes toward gender diversity in gaming. First, non-normative gender identities and characters who represent diverse expressions of gender dominate the narrative, it is distracting. Second, the statement that *“There is a time and place for those things, this ain't it”* reinforces the hegemony of play, implying that certain genres, such as sci-fi or action-adventure, should remain both cis- and heteronormative. Drawing from Kimmel's concept of aggrieved entitlement, this view parallels broader anxieties about perceived loss of privilege: just as some white American men feel resentful towards women and immigrants taking the jobs they are “entitled” to, critics express similar sense of loss regarding the inclusion of women and transgender people in gaming. The argument is that certain stories and genres are seen as “rightfully” belonging to the hardcore gamer demographic. To challenge the perspective, one might ask to consider whether the story would be better if Abby was a man, or whether Ellie being straight would make the story stronger, or finally, if a gay Luke Skywalker would have made the *Star Wars* trilogy weaker?

“You have a HUGE problem when you let activists take over the writing of a beloved franchise, and forcefully shoehorn in their agenda like a square peg in a round hole.”

Review 92

Critics believe that introducing non-normative gender identities and expressions to gaming is first and foremost an ideological intrusion, rather than a reflection of the changing demographic of players and developers. As previously mentioned in section 6.1.1., ideology is framed as negative for several different reasons, one of them being the diminishing artistic integrity. By constructing inclusivity as a political agenda and positioning game developers as activists rather than artists, critics both reflect and reinforce the hegemonic norms of gaming culture. The conversation surrounding gender representation in TLOU2 reflects a broader cultural struggle over the power to tell stories and anxiety over losing artistic control. This subtheme also highlights the following cultural beliefs:

- **Non-normative gender identities and expressions do not reflect universal values.** The positioning of TLOU and TLOU2 against each other, with the first game representing themes of love and hope, the reviewers argue TLOU2 to be unrelatable to the core audience.

5.2. Non-normative gender representation is a threat

Beyond viewing gender inclusivity TLOU2 as a sign of issues in the gaming industry, many critics also frame it as a broader societal threat. The second theme of this thesis reveals how resistance to non-normative gender identities extends beyond gaming, as critics perceive the representation in TLOU2 to represent a larger cultural shift that disrupts traditional values and gender roles. The shift is often perceived as a threat towards several societal institutions, sometimes even the foundations of society.

On a foundational level, this perception is tied to anxieties about power and losing cultural hegemony, as the inclusion of LGBTQ+ and female protagonists who challenge traditional femininity break the longstanding norms in gaming spaces. Therefore, the second theme constructed from the material has identified a fear of losing not only male-dominated cultural spaces, but hegemonic positions in society at large. The overarching fear manifests itself by viewing non-normative gender representation as a threat:

1. **towards masculinity.** The portrayal of non-normative gender identities and expressions is seen as an attack towards masculinity, particularly through the depiction of female strength and male vulnerability.
2. **and towards society and traditional values.** LGBTQ+ inclusion, particularly transgender representation, is perceived as a part of a larger cultural shift. Traditional gender roles are viewed to be under attack, and by extension, broader societal norms.

In the following sections, I will break down how each of these anxieties is articulated in the user reviews and how they connect to broader societal discourse.

5.2.1. Non-normative gender representation is a threat towards masculinity

Many negative reviews of TLOU2 interpret non-normative gender representation as a direct attack against masculinity. Joel's death in the game is framed not just as a narrative choice, but as a symbolic execution of traditional masculinity in gaming. The hardcore gamers' backlash against Joel's fate, Abby's physicality and broader themes of the game reflect anxieties about the once-secure dominance

in gaming spaces. As the hegemony of play is challenged, the accompanied loss of status, power or privilege is perceived as oppression, causing resentment, in this case towards non-normative gender representation. As Kimmel describes aggrieved entitlement, the loss of cultural dominance in a final “safe space” for men reflects broader societal anxieties over the gender roles.

11 critics viewed TLOU2 to be an attack towards men and masculinity. For instance, Joel’s death was not perceived simply as an emotional loss, but an intentionally ideological decision to remove strong male characters in the game. The following review makes this clear connection:

“They just killed him because he’s a strong male. YES, JOEL WAS A STRONG STRAIGHT MALE, so what?? He was a good example of a father figure, a strong man who protects his loved ones, who WENT THROUGH SO MANY AWFUL EVENTS BUT STAYED STRONG. What you did is totally destroy all the potential of a wonderful sequel.”

Review 44

Here, the critic suggests that the defining traits of Joel’s character, such as his strength and resilience, traits often associated with traditional masculinity, were the reason he was removed from TLOU2. The critic reasons that these attributes are no longer tolerated in modern storytelling, with the exclamation “*Joel was a strong straight male, so what??*” implying his removal to be an attack towards masculinity in games. The review reinforces a victimhood narrative and expresses anger towards the perceived betrayal of TLOU2, as the male protagonist archetype is feared to be endangered in gaming. This backlash against the game due to Joel’s death is an indication of the rage felt by a dominant group, in this case the hardcore gamers, given their historical hegemony slipping away (Kimmel 2013). There is a sense of entitlement, where the hardcore gamers tend to argue for their continued dominance based on historical entitlements and privileges. The Last of Us without Joel is, according to the critic above, simply not good and his death “*destroyed all the potential of a wonderful sequel*”.

Furthermore, Joel’s death is not only viewed as a detriment to TLOU2, but the perceived *humiliation* of it further fuels the belief that his masculinity, and therefore masculinity in games and society, is under attack. Another critic expresses frustration at how he was portrayed in his final moments:

“You killed Joel in the most humiliating way possible, a great character died in the stupidest way possible. Joel, the guy that never trusted strangers, and barely trusted anyone, the guy that survived 25 years in that world, is killed by strangers with a golf

bat. Do you think The Joel Miller would be so casual with armed strangers in the apocalypse?”

Review 86

The ideal male character created by the hegemony of play plays into male fantasies of dominion, strength and power (Fron et al. 2007, p. 315). Joel in TLOU2 and his decision to help Abby, as well as his brother’s mistake to disclose their names causing Abby to recognise who he is, is framed by the critic as a weakness. His death is *stupid* and *humiliating*, even unrealistic in some way, reinforcing the belief that his masculine strength was deliberately undermined.

Neil Druckmann has disclosed that his decision to kill of Joel was purely to uphold the artistic integrity of the TLOU franchise (Trumbore 2020). While Joel was written out of the game early on, there were plans to keep him in the narrative in the beginning. However, Druckmann felt that his arch was done and a game involving him would undermine the emotional core of the game. While some amount of anger and disappointment was expected, the developers of TLOU2 never expected, certainly never intended, for his death to be so controversial. I argue that the reason for such a strong reaction from the critics is mostly because of who killed him. When the traditionally masculine traits of strength and dominance, both physically and mentally, are challenged, especially through defeat at the hands of a woman, the critics turn to criticise the game due to a perceived attack and forced ideology.

The frustration over Joel’s death and especially who he is killed by becomes even clearer when comparing reactions to other male character deaths in gaming. The next reviewer makes a direct comparison:

“Imagine that in Walking Dead 2, Lee Everett is alive and the LGBT community will kill him. Imagine that in RDR3, Arthur Morgan is alive and the LGBT community will kill him. Imagine that in the next Nemo cartoon, the LGBT community will kill Nemo’s father. Such feelings you will get in TLOU2.”

Review 93

Before analysing this review, it is first important to clarify what the critic is discussing. Despite Abby, Joel’s killer, being a cisgender, straight woman, the critic falsely identifies her with the LGBT community. Her mischaracterisation is due to her muscular physique, which some reviewers falsely interpret as her being transgender (Tomkinson 2022, p. 8). This “failure” to meet gendered expectations of female video game characters will further be discussed in the next session, but it is

an important point to disclose here to create understanding of what is analysed. However, the deeper implication of this review is that Joel's death represents a systematic attack against male characters in media.

The critic attributes Joel's death to a vague LGBTQ+ entity, representing a fear of losing narrative dominance and cultural significance, in favour of perceived ideologically charged content. Many critics seem to interpret TLOU2 as replacing powerful cisgender men with female and transgender characters, mirroring the anxieties surrounding a larger loss of cultural dominance (Kimmel 2013). The critic above is very transparent in their belief and perspective, as they draw a comparison to other video game deaths. Both Lee Everett (in *The Walking Dead* video game) and Arthur Morgan (in *Red Dead Redemption II*) are similarly masculine figures who died in their respective narratives, Lee from a "zombie" bite and Arthur from tuberculosis. However, these deaths were never met with any outrage. Therefore, it is not as much the issue that Joel dies in the game, instead who killed him, how he died and who reviewers perceive to fill his role that is the problem.

The hate Abby receives both in the analysed reviews and the cultural zeitgeist as a whole (Tomkinson 2022, p. 2), indicates a broader anxiety surrounding the loss of masculinity. Abby is viewed as a symbol of this replacement and her embodying traditionally masculine traits of strength, physicality and will to protect those at a disadvantage is perceived as an unnatural disruption of gender norms set up by the hegemony of play. One critic describes the experience of having to play as Abby throughout half the game as unbearable:

"I knew that Joel wasn't going to make it in this game but God Dam!!! They did him dirty in this one. Just seeing a beloved character whom many of us thought was untouchable get treated like that is flat-out disrespectful to the fans. [...] But no, they quickly took all that away with a swing of a golf club by probably the worst video game character to date."

Review 7

The critic frames Abby as a wholly illegitimate protagonist, calling her the "*worst video game character to date*". The perceived imposition of her character, along with the player being put into her perspective by forcing them to play as her, is viewed as an insult to Joel, which the phrase "*they did him dirty*" seems to imply. Furthermore, Joel's death in this way is stated to be disrespectful to the fans.

While this critic could once again truly display an emotional reaction to losing a beloved video game character in an undeniably brutal manner, the continuation of the review suggests otherwise:

*“Then to play with Abby for 10 hours was horrendous and sitting through these meaningless side story between the different factions and how one character is a tranny, but wants him/her Mom to accept it was too much because at this point, WHO THE **** CARES!!!”*

Review 7

The perceived injustice of his death is amplified by the fact that he is, according to the critics, replaced by characters who do not conform to the hegemonic expectations of play, Abby and Lev. Kimmel argues that aggravated entitlement does not inspire self-reflection but rather a reactionary attempt to reclaim lost status, as displayed by the critic above by calling Lev a transphobic slur. It furthermore explains why so many critics refuse to engage in the game’s narrative on its own terms, instead framing their anger as resistance to political agendas:

“It’s clear the reason certain things happen is because of the game’s LGBTQ agenda. If you play the game, you can clearly see the hate towards males and male protagonists.”

Review 95

Rather than viewing the representation in TLOU2 as an expansion of gaming narratives, this critique embodies the fear that masculinity in itself is under attack by gender minorities. They argue that Joel’s death in the game is not only a narrative issue but is indicative of a larger conspiracy against masculinity and men. As a reaction to the decentring male characters, and by extension hardcore gamers, the reviewer is framing men as an oppressed group. They argue that the *hate* towards men and male characters is apparent when playing the game, with claims of marginalization being common in far-right groups, appropriating language of oppression for their own benefit (Hermansson et al. 2020, p. 165; and Kimmel 2013). Hermansson et al. explain how men and traditionally masculine traits are claimed to be under systematic attack by feminists and LGBTQ+ activists, which in the context of games means replacing them with women, often with traditionally masculine characteristics, and queer characters. This claim is made despite male protagonists still vastly outnumbering female leads in AAA gaming (Bristot et al. 2019).

The hegemony of play has shaped video game communities into male-dominated spaces, reinforcing the societal ideals for men and masculinity. When the hegemony is resisted, in this case by portraying Joel as weak, subservient and vulnerable, ultimately even “removing” him from the story, hardcore

gamers react with hateful vitriol. The perceived loss of status is a common cause for outrage, as male players fear losing cultural dominance in gaming spaces. The backlash against TLOU2 is not only about games and storytelling preferences, but about a fear of an existential threat towards masculinity. The reviews analysed in this section reveal the following attitudes towards gender:

- **Traditionally masculine male heroes are being removed from games.** As the narrative focus of TLOU2 shifts to women and Lev, reviewers perceive Joel's death as a symbolic death of strong male characters in video games.
- **Traditionally masculine men are under attack.** Critics argue that decentring men in games is indicative of a broader cultural shift where masculinity and men are oppressed because of their identity.

These arguments align with broader reactionary narratives that claim that masculinity is under scrutiny in modern culture, reflecting fears about the erosion of power and privilege that comes with hegemonic masculinity (Kimmel 2013). Besides viewing TLOU2 as a reflection of the perceived erasure of masculinity, many continue to claim a broader threat towards society.

5.2.2. Non-normative gender representation is a threat towards society and the gender binary

Beyond viewing non-normative gender representation in TLOU2 as an attack on masculinity, many reviewers framed it as an indication of a broader societal threat. Genderqueer characters, as well as female characters who do not fit heteronormative expectations of appearance and behaviour, are feared to destabilize traditional values, gender roles and even societal institutions, such as the nuclear family. Thirty-one reviews were coded as resisting non-normative gender representation on the basis fears surrounding shifting gender roles and perceived moral and cultural decline.

The backlash against the game reveals a reactionary response to evolving gender norms, where critics perceive queer and non-normative gender representation not merely as poor storytelling, but as a deliberate ideological imposition that symbolizes unwanted cultural and social change. A recurring argument among critics is that TLOU2 is a deliberate attack towards the moral purity of the first game. It is common for reviewers to draw a comparison between TLOU and TLOU2, as the following critic does:

*"This game is **** sorry it pushes a gender without limits there spitting on the first game im out"*

Review 77

The reviewer above argues that TLOU2 *spits on* the first game while promoting “*gender without limits*”, revealing unease with the disruption of traditional gender norms. This discomfort is further highlighted by the critic’s use of common rhetoric in broader cultural opposition to non-normative gender identities. Another critic characterises the representation in TLOU2 as a degradation of universal values:

"[In TLOU] We got touched through universality related humanism and paternal love what Joel gives Ellie under desperate situation. --- Spoilers ---, but what about TLoU2? Joel became protector of LGBT. Joel became golf ball and died in vain. Ellie dig up his corpse and behead it in her memory."

Review 94

Here, love and human connection present in the first game is directly framed to be a contradiction to LGBTQ+ themes and representation introduced in the sequel. Instead of finding deeper meaning in a story told through diverse characters, the critic paints a picture of non-normative gender representation as inherently incompatible with universal themes. I argue that this perspective reduces gender minorities to deviant and dehumanised entities, as the reviewer claims an inability to relate to any other trait in these characters. Moreover, the idea that Joel has been reduced to a “*protector of LGBT*” reveals a zero-sum view of representation, where including non-normative gender identities is seen as reducing all other qualities of a character.

Ellie is also viewed as a detriment to the game. Her refusal to conform to conventional gendered expectations and unavailability to male desire are framed as an insult to Joel, as the reviewer above seems to indicate by arguing that “*Ellie dig up his corpse and behead it in her memory*”. The explicit disgust towards homosexual relationships becomes even more clear in the following review:

*"What a cringe story. Gross characters. **** game. Pass on this trash. It's so forced and gross. Girls kissing and trans chicks. Barf."*

Review 24

The exclamation “*barf*” used by the critic above illustrates how homosexuality is not just rejected but viewed as repulsive, reinforcing heteronormative ideals of acceptable relationships. I also argue that

the review above displays entitlement over the female bodies in TLOU2. The romantic relationship between Ellie and Dina, as well as Abby's physique, are depicted outside the lens of heterosexual male pleasure. This deviation from the normative framework of female representation provokes anger and disgust, as evidenced by the reviewer's response. Furthermore, traditional femininity, just like traditional masculinity, is viewed to be under attack. One review provides a particularly illustrative example:

"Take away the LGBT agenda and return the beautiful women to the games."

Review 28

This comment reflects exactly how deeply gaming culture has been shaped by the hegemony of play. As the critic states, *beautiful women*, that is women who are conventionally attractive in a way that appeals to heterosexual, male players, have been an industry standard since the beginning of video game history, and should be *returned* to games. According to Trépanier-Jobin and Bonenfant, this standard typically includes young, thin, white women with delicate features and mild curves, often dressed in sexually suggestive clothing (Bristot et al., 2019, p. 12). I argue that this also includes impractical beauty enhancements, such as makeup and stylized hair, even in contexts where such appearance is implausible, for instance in survival or combat scenarios. The female characters in TLOU2, by contrast, are dressed for survival. This deviation renders them "inadequate" in the eyes of some critics, who, conditioned by decades of hyper-feminized portrayals in games, deem anything outside the established norm as unattractive.

While the reviewer above never mentions what they find unappealing in the female characters in TLOU2, others explicitly target Abby, like the one below:

"no one wins in this story apart from that mutant that has taken over the plot of the game. I dont care for the fact she is transgender, to be honest that doesn't bother me"

Review 31

Several critics fixate on Abby, specifically her physique and as previously seen, some falsely interpret her character being transgender. While the critic above claims not to be offended by her gender expression, the description of her as a *mutant* clearly communicates discomfort with her physique and gender. I argue that the discussion surrounding Abby's gender and policing how she expresses her femininity indicates a strong discomfort with women who do not adhere to traditional beauty standards. Within the hegemony of play, women are often designed to appeal to the male gaze, not only by fitting the industry standard of female beauty, but also by being subordinate to male

characters. Abby challenges this dynamic by rejecting traditional markers of femininity and positioning her as both a physical and narrative equal to the male protagonist in TLOU, Joel. Her portrayal challenges the normative structures embedded in gaming narratives and provokes backlash from those who perceive her representation as a threat to the comfort zone of hardcore gaming audiences.

The manufactured confusion surrounding Abby's gender ultimately seems to suggest a fear surrounding changing gender norms, as well as promoting anti-feminist and anti-gender rhetoric commonly used in other contexts than gaming.

“The story is at Grade F by killing a lovable protagonist and replace with a douchebag regardless of his/her/its gender.”

Review 34

The reviewer's use of “*his/her/its*” suggests an intentional refusal to acknowledge gender fluidity and transgender identities. Referring to a human as “*it*” is profoundly dehumanising, reducing the person, in this case Abby, to an animal or object. This rhetoric further reinforces the beliefs among many critics that gender diversity is unnatural and dangerous. Furthermore, the explicit transphobia directed at Abby demonstrates how rigid conceptions gender also harms cisgender people. The mere suspicion of her being transgender is enough to provoke intense hostility, revealing how fragile the gender binary is. Her “imperfect” performance of femininity disrupts established norms, triggering significant resistance.

Beyond expressing disgust and anger at specific characters, some critics interpret the gender representation in games and TLOU2 as a larger ideological effort to dismantle social order. One critic states:

“Because the game developers want to accept their dirty agendas such as homosexuality and feminism and insert them into societies and transform the game story from a game that simulates parenting to a game of sex, violence, and killing.”

Review 78

While I argue that much of the hatred directed at individual characters stems from anxieties about the erosion of gender hierarchies and fear of losing cultural authority, the reviewer above explicitly links gender diversity to moral degradation. They reinforce conservative narratives that attribute feminism and queer identities to the destruction of traditional values of family and familial love, in favour of,

as the critic argues, “*sex, violence, and killing*”. The reviewer privileges normative gender expressions as morally pure, while also suggesting through the phrase “*insert them into societies*” that gender fluidity is argued to be fundamentally unnatural to the human.

Similarly, another critic frames LGBTQ+ representation as a larger progressive agenda aimed at dismantling various social institutions:

“After decades in a post-apocalyptic world all what humanity cares about is talking about a girl sleeping with another. These whiners (LGBT movement) after destroying every beautiful thing family, society, universities, values, even common sense, they are moving to mess with the gaming world.”

Review 5

The reviewer above portrays non-normative gender representation as a threat towards several factions of the human existence, reflecting broader cultural anxieties about the destabilization of traditional norms. Gender roles and -markers are so deeply engrained in western culture that any deviation is assessed as a threat towards society itself. By normalising marginalised non-normative gender identities, TLOU2 disrupts heteronormative ideals that underpins these societal institutions of *family, education* and *values*. According to the reviewer above, the game is not an isolated incident, but a symptom of cultural decline. Games are cast as the “final frontier” in a broader struggle against what is perceived as the *destructive* advancement of the LGBTQ+ movement.

The resistance to non-normative gender representation in TLOU2 ultimately reveals that, for many critics, diversity in gaming represents a profound existential crisis. Non-normative gender expressions and identities are viewed as morally corrupt and fundamentally opposed to universal human values of love, family and education. The arguments made by the reviewers’ rest on three cultural attitudes towards gender representation:

- **Non-normative gender representation is morally corrupt and opposes universal human values.** TLOU2 is viewed as a transgressive game and the comparison between the first game in the franchise suggests that reviewers view representation as always at odds with universally human stories.
- **Gender roles are natural, and gender diversity undermines natural femininity.** The framing of inclusivity as an imposition suggests that critics believe that gender roles are

natural and inherent. According to reviewers, femininity and beauty are values women should subscribe to.

- **The inclusion of non-normative gender representations in gaming reflects a cultural erosion and undermines societal stability.** The existence of transgender people exposes the artificial gender binaries that societal institutions like the nuclear family is built on, leading reviewers to resist representation out of fear of cultural decline.

While mirroring broader conservative beliefs on minorities, these reactions are also consistent with GG-era anxieties about the changing cultural sensibilities in the gaming industry. Despite a decade in between, hardcore gamers still view diversity as an attack orchestrated by LGBTQ+ activists, feminists and progressive ideologies, believing in maintaining gaming as a space where traditional gender norms should remain intact.

5.3. Non-normative gender representation is unrealistic in TLOU2

The third and final theme illustrates the reviewers' selective demands for realism to reinforce prevailing societal norms and prejudices. As with other forms of visual entertainment, video games require varying degrees of suspension of disbelief. For instance, the Last of Us part I features a scene where Joel falls from a balcony and is subsequently impaled by a steel rod, which he survives despite only being cared for by a fourteen-year-old Ellie. Video games, particularly those involving frequent combat, routinely distort the physical limitations of the human body to enhance gameplay and entertainment value (Tomkinson 2022, p. 3).

In the case of TLOU2, realism is strategically weaponised to critique the identities and physical attributes of the characters. Fourteen critics argue that some characters, mainly Lev and Abby, undermine the game's realism, either by possessing physical traits that challenge gendered expectations or by focusing on their own gender identity in a survival scenario. These critiques reveal how cisnormativity, heteronormativity and rigid gender binaries have been deeply entrenched within the gaming world through decades of male-dominated design, narratives and the broader hegemony of play.

A particularly prevalent critique is the belief that gender identity should be a trivial concern in an apocalyptic setting, as in TLOU2. The hegemonic structures of gaming culture have long shaped what is considered as natural within game worlds, influenced by the domination of male, cisgender and heterosexual protagonists in AAA titles. Gender identity in games, much like in broader society, is

assumed to align with traditional norms, and questions of gender are rarely explored. Within this framework, critics argue that Lev as a transgender boy is misplaced in the story of TLOU2, as seen in the following review:

“Do you really think a trans person would care about pronouns in a world like this? Really? Or that an extremist group would care about some trans person in an apocalyptic world?”

Review 86

The hegemony of play privileges traditional narratives of heroism, survival and conquest. Within this cultural context, non-normative gender identities are perceived as disruptive intrusions, introducing personal struggles unrelated to the narrowly defined stories of physical survival. Many hardcore gamers are not culturally conditioned to view personal experiences as valid storytelling elements and themes in games, as further evidenced by the backlash Zoe Quinn faced for the favourable critical reception of *Depression Quest* (Blodgett 2019, p. 186). More importantly, questioning whether Lev would be concerned with his *pronouns* under the conditions of TLOU2, the critic assumes that non-normative gender identities are a luxury of stable societies rather than an intrinsic part of human experience. This assumption demonstrates how deeply binary and essentialist understandings of gender have been normalised, positioning any deviation from this norm as imposition of contemporary society.

Another common rationale for rejecting transgender representation in a game like TLOU2 is a belief that being transgender is unfeasible without access to hormone therapy or gender affirming surgeries. This suggests that transgender identities are only valid when accompanied by a medical transition:

“The characters are too bad we lost their respect because of some new things they call character but it can't be. You can't put a transgender character in the apocalyptic world where there are no hospitals, no surgeons, and everyone isn't even sure they'll be alive tomorrow.”

Review 58

This argument reveals a medicalized view of transgender identity. Rather than acknowledging gender as an internal and social experience, it equates being transgender solely to medical transitioning. Given the absence of gender affirming healthcare in the apocalyptic setting of TLOU2, critics use this as a limitation to delegitimise Lev's identity. However, the authenticity of transgender identities is not conditional on a medical transition. The assumption that medical intervention is a requirement for

a valid transgender identity reveals cisnormative and essentialist views on gender, where dismissing Lev's identity due to a lack of medical resources reaffirms the problematic belief that transgender people must "pass". As GLAAD notes, "passing" implies performing an identity that is deemed socially acceptable, thereby marginalising those whose expressions do not conform. The critic above exemplifies how dominant ideologies shape perceptions of identity and acceptable expressions of identity, positioning being cisgender as the default human experience while transgender identity as conditional on modern medicine.

At the heart of these critiques lies a deeper ideological rejection of transgender identities as a whole, where they are viewed as artificial or forced. Many reviewers express the belief that transgender and other non-normative identities are a contemporary invention rather than longstanding elements of human diversity. By framing gender identity as a "*new thing*", like the critic above, reviewers align themselves with reactionary discourses that position LGBTQ+ identities as a manufactured trend. This rhetorical strategy serves to invalidate transgender identities while reinforcing hegemonic gender norms. For instance, some critics argue that gender is a new phenomenon artificially imposed by media, as seen in this review:

*"forcing LGBT stuff in an zombie apocalypse is ridiculous, shove all that SJW in your a** naughty dog, worst game of the year easily"*

Review 66

Beyond Lev, critics reject Abby and her physique on the basis of realism. As discussed previously, she is often misinterpreted as transgender, like the reviewer below states:

*"How would you even be trans in the apocalypse? There's not enough time to be thinking about all that, plus you can't even get hormone therapy or a sex change since it's the apocalypse and all. plus after watching this piece of **** murder a main character now you have to play as her"*

Review 57

The expectation that women in games should be small, delicate and conventionally attractive reinforce hegemonic gender norms, where physical strength is coded as inherently masculine. However, this critique is not merely a reaction to visual aesthetics, it represents the broader influence of traditional gender norms and their roots within video game culture, as explored in section 6.2.3. Abby's failure to conform to narrow standards of femininity leads some critics to question her womanhood altogether. Her muscular physique is construed as evidence that she is not a "real" woman

(which in itself embodies the deeply problematic and transphobic notion that transgender women are not “real” women), as suggested by the following reviewer:

“Men are men and women are women”

Review 85

The assertion that non-normative gender identities and expressions are unrealistic in an apocalyptic setting is not a neutral argument, it is a reflection of deeply ingrained gender norms in gaming culture. Selectively applied realism is used to reject characters who do not fit traditional gender roles, while accepting other unrealistic elements of TLOU2 and games in general. This suggests that, ultimately, the resistance to these characters is not about the worldbuilding in TLOU2, it is about maintaining the hegemonic structures that have long dictated whose stories are being told in games. The reviews reveal the following cultural attitudes about gender representation:

- **Gender identity is irrelevant for survival.** Critics assume that in a post-apocalyptic world, gender identity would become irrelevant.
- **Trans identity is a modern construct, not a historical or universal experience.** Critics argue that trans people only exist due to contemporary gender discourse, ignoring historical and cultural precedents.
- **Gender nonconforming bodies defy realism.** Critics frame Abby’s physique as unnatural or even impossible.

6. Conclusion

This thesis has been a qualitative study on why negative reviewers resist gender representation in TLOU2 and what these negative reviews show about the cultural attitudes towards non-normative gender representation. It examined 96 reviews, and the answers to RQ1. How and why do hardcore gamers resist non-normative gender representation in the Last of Us part II?, were found through the identification of three main themes. One opposed gender in gaming on the basis of resisting politics, the second theme opposed non-normative gender identities and representations in society altogether because of the perceived threat towards societal institutions and gender roles. Finally, non-normative gender representation was resisted in the apocalyptic world of TLOU2 due to it being perceived as unrealistic. The themes and a closer analysis of them in turn revealed answers to RQ2. What does the resistance reveal about cultural attitudes toward gender in gaming communities?. The thesis largely

concludes that hardcore gamers have rigid views on gender, mainly equating gender to sex. Non-normative gender identities are viewed as something imposed on games, and by extension broader humanity, by progressive-leftist politics, modern society and a cultural elite. Specifically, the representation of diverse identities in games is presented as an ingenuine attempt to lure women and transgender people, who are according to hardcore gamers not gamers, to play games, all to increase profits for the gaming industry. Non-normative gender identities and expressions are believed to be morally corrupt and a direct threat to traditional masculinity and societal institutions.

The theoretical frameworks used for the thesis proved to be helpful in coding, identifying themes and interpreting the reviews. The concept of hegemony of play, as described by Fron et al. (2007), refers to the dominant cultural and structural forces within the gaming industry that prioritize white, cisgender, heterosexual male perspectives. This hegemonic structure determines not only what types of games are made, but also who is considered a hardcore gamer, which narratives are told in games and what kind of characters are centred in stories. In this context, efforts to include female, specifically women who defy gender norms, and transgender characters challenge entrenched norms, which often results in backlash and review bombing. The review bombing directed at TLOU2 reflects the perception that representation of marginalised identities is a disruption to the perceived neutral and apolitical nature of gaming, ignoring the fact that the neutrality hardcore gamers assign to games is itself a political position that privileges existing power structures.

The resistance towards the representation of non-normative gender identities and expressions is further explained by Kimmel's (2013) concept of aggrieved entitlement. It describes the phenomenon where certain privileged groups, most notably straight, white men, feel in the changing society deprived of power and status they are rightfully entitled to. In gaming communities this entitlement manifests as a view of inclusivity and diversity threatening the sanctity of a male-dominated gamer culture. The vitriolic reaction to TLOU2's characters, in particular Ellie, Abby and Lev, can thus be seen as an attempt to reassert control over a space that is being increasingly opened to people outside the hardcore gamer demographic. These players interpret the game's deviation from the norms of the hegemony of play in character design and themes of identity, as a loss of cultural territory.

6.1. Discussion

Early in this thesis I asserted that Bezio writes that everything to do with the rise of the alt-right has to do with GamerGate. In the same vein I argue that the findings of this study extend beyond the scope of gaming and point to broader patterns in how society navigates gender, representation, and

identity politics. Review bombing TLOU2 does not merely reflect dissatisfaction with gameplay and the story but shows how games and other visual media have become proxy sites for the so called “anti-woke culture war”, where social justice, feminism and issues like LGBTQ+ rights are abnormalized (Cammaerts 2022, p. 5). The volume of backlash against TLOU2 suggests that gaming is not just entertainment, but a contested cultural space where ideas about gender and power are negotiated and enforced (Hermansson et al., p. 116).

The presence of Abby and Lev in TLOU2 elicited a significant wave of transphobia. The dehumanisation and abnormalization of transgender people align with broader societal issues outside video games, particularly in the context of the escalating global anti-gender movement (Kuhar 2023, p. 122). Societal backlash against progressive social movements that challenge hegemonic gender roles and dominant political ideologies, which by their very nature, are constructed and maintained as neutral, objective, and beyond reproach. Consequently, efforts to preserve these structures are rarely acknowledged as political acts, rather, they are framed as rational or as a defence of common sense (Cammaerts, 2022, p. 2). This strategy parallels the patterns observed in reactions against feminist, LGBTQ+, and racial justice movements, where critics portray their opposition as an apolitical stance, despite its function in reinforcing deep rooted systems of privilege and exclusion. These anxieties surrounding the erosion traditional gender roles and the perceived loss of political power are even reflected in reviews in this thesis, where many critics frame the game’s gender representation either as an indication of societal decline or as a final battleground against the encroachment of gender ideology.

The rhetoric used by reviewers of TLOU2 supports the idea that online communities play a critical role in shaping real-world ideologies and behaviours. The hostility directed at fictional characters is not harmless, it reflects and reproduces attitudes that contribute to the marginalisation of real people, and suggests, as Tomkinson argues, that players are not open to difference. As GG demonstrated, online backlash against diversity and feminist critiques in games often escalate into coordinated harassment campaigns, setting the tone for broader reactionary movements, including parts of the alt-right. Similarly, the hate towards characters in TLOU2 resulted in real-life threats towards the actors and creators. For instance, Neil Druckman revealed that he received antisemitic hate and death threats, while the actor for Abby, Laura Bailey, reported that “fans” of the game were threatening her newborn son (Hernandez 2020; and Shepard 2024).

Furthermore, I argue that the anxieties surrounding non-normative bodies in TLOU2 are indicative of how women and transgender people are viewed more broadly in society. Abby, who became a

lightning rod for criticism not only because of her role in the narrative, but also due to her muscular physique, defies gendered expectations of beauty and what female bodies should look like in games. A similar dynamic is being played out in public reactions to Bella Ramsey's portrayal of Ellie in the TLOU HBO series, which second season is being released this spring of 2025. Ramsey, who does not conform with any gender (McNamara 2023) and does not conform to hyperfeminine beauty standards, has faced a disproportionate amount of scrutiny and online harassment over their appearance (Winkie 2025). "Fans" have at the minimum claimed that the actor "doesn't look like Ellie", but at worst said that they were put on the show as a woke agenda because of their looks (Winkie 2025).

At the same time, I argue that the extreme resistance observed also points to the cultural power of representation. If the characters of TLO2 were insignificant, they would likely not provoke such a strong reaction. The presence of transgender characters and women in high-profile AAA games like TLOU2 signals a shift in the gaming industry that many hardcore gamers perceive as threatening precisely because it is meaningful (Tomkinson 2022, p. 14). Tomkinson suggest that games have become sites of struggle, where subjective notions of realism, escapism and immersion are negotiated between developers and players.

6.2. Limitations

It is important to acknowledge my positionality as a researcher in relation to video game communities. I am what many would consider a "gamer", I find enjoyment in playing video games and, to some extent, in engaging with online discussions. Primarily through reading perspectives on the story elements of the games or encountering at memes related to video games and gaming culture. As noted in the introduction, I have felt at times experienced a sense of alienation from this hobby due to the exclusionary and gatekeeping practices prevalent in gaming communities, mostly because of the prejudiced views on women and minorities. For an extended period, I have felt frustration with the representation and treatment of women and gender minorities, not only as players but also because of how they are portrayed as characters. The increased visibility of women and transgender people is, to me, such a welcomed one. Therefore, in the interest of transparency, I must acknowledge that the ways in which the characters in *The Last of Us Part II* are discussed often make me angry. Even more importantly I find the hostility and threats directed at actors and creators, particularly when belonging to a marginalised group, disgusting. However, I have made a concerted effort to critically reflect on any internalised assumptions I may hold about the reviewers and gaming communities in general, with the goal of ensuring that my analysis is not unfairly influenced by these preconceptions.

6.3. Suggestions for future studies

This thesis inevitably leaves many important issues unexplored, and several avenues I was interested in pursuing ultimately fell outside the scope of this study. While the analysis has centred on gender representation and the cultural backlash surrounding TLOU2, the complexity of the game's narrative and its reception warrants further research through additional theoretical lenses. Intersectionality would offer a valuable framework for examining how overlapping systems of oppression, such as race and sexuality, interact with gender in the game and in players' responses to it. Although characters like Lev introduce important dynamics related to religion and trans identity, these elements were not extensively addressed in this thesis due to limitations of space and focus. Moreover, a deeper engagement with issues of race, especially in terms of how racialized bodies are represented or erased in video games, would significantly enrich the current academic conversation around games in general. Incorporating these perspectives in future studies would provide a more nuanced understanding of how power operates through representation, both within game worlds and in the communities that form around them.

Furthermore, the portrayal of religion in visual media warrants more discussion, as religious themes and persecution occupy a complex role in TLOU2. The Seraphites, a deeply spiritual faction, serves as one of the primary antagonistic forces in the game's narrative. They are portrayed as a group bound by a doctrine that reinforces strict gender norms, obedience, and sacrifice. A critical engagement with this portrayal of religion must consider Neil Druckmann's own statements in an article for the Washington Post about being influenced by the Israeli-Palestinian conflict and growing up in Israel. He has cited his experience with the Israeli occupation and the treatment of Palestinians as a source of inspiration for the game's exploration of cycles of violence and tribalism (Favis 2020). While the game does not depict a direct connection to the Israeli apartheid and Druckmann went into creating TLOU2 with good intentions, the thematic is evident in the rigid factionalism and ideological indoctrination of both the Seraphites and their rivals, the WLF.

In this context, the Seraphites are not merely an abstract cult, but a symbol of Palestinians and religious extremism. Lev's journey mirrors the experiences of those marginalized within traditional religious communities, particularly queer and trans people, who face both spiritual and physical violence. While it is a valid story to tell, it might fall into problematic discourses of Western geopolitical narratives that often demonize resistance movements associated with faith, like the Palestinian Liberation Organization, especially those outside the western sphere of influence.

Scholars drawing from postcolonial theory could offer interesting insights into how games like TLOU2 replicate hegemonic structures and narratives about religion, identity and violence.

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8. Appendix: Reviews of the Last of Us part II

Number	Review
1.	Neil Druckman's new trannie-sim sexual fantasy! Please play through this game if you enjoy throwing up during grotesque sex scenes, enduring hours worth of tasteless and stiff dialogue, and questioning the motivation of characters that seem like they were whipped up by some preteen egirl with the self imposed last name "brat". This is quite possibly, the biggest cluster **** to ever grace gaming!,Incredible!
2.	The last of us part 2 has a user score of 3.3 and no this is not only because of the leaks thats ridiculous! Many many many games have being leaked before!!! For example Uncharted 4...Furthermore is not everybody who gives this game a 0 or 1 ultra conservative, i know im not. And yes i have played the game for many hours now its a sh... show and the biggest gaming disappointment of my life! Im almost 34... game of thrones season 8 aint sh.. ladys and gentelman. This is how ET fans must have fellt after the release of the legendary bad atari game. To be fair the only good thing that i can say is that the world and the gameplay are alright! I have no problems with LGBT ppl what so ever but in this game its force feed! A true abomination!S: playing as Abby can only be topped by playing Hitler, Stalin or Mao Zedong ... you get the point
3.	I will be forever saying this game ended with the first ones DLC.,Did a terrible job of representing LGBT community, and the outstanding graphics couldnâ€™t save this seemingly rushed and forcibly political storyline.,Itâ€™s a real shame to see one of your favorite developers ruin a great game, maybe if druckman put as much effort into the story line as he did overworking and abusing his employees we would have a great sequel.
4.	Liberals, SJWs, and LGBT degeneracy ruined a once good story. Everything I once loved has been destroyed by these heathens.
5.	After decades in a post-apocalyptic world all what humanity cares about is talking about a girl sleeping with another.,These whiners (LGBT movement) after destroying every beautiful thing family, society, universities, values even common sense they are moving to mess with gaming world.,I think we have to boycott this game and make it clear to everyone who's daring to drag us to such agendas, even when your name is naughty dog, that we don't buy such garbage (stories).
6.	This game is a prime example of pushing a narrative that no one but SJW's wanted. Absolute and utter trash story. The gameplay and graphics aren't bad at all, but that's all the game has going for it. I have to ask what are these paid critics smoking when reviewing this game. Like 10/10? WHAT??? How much did ND pay you for that review? Anyway I just can not get over how garbage these new characters are and the story as a whole. I don't get why games need to push this garbage narrative of equality down peoples throats. It is very obvious what they are trying to do. I'm not saying that anything is wrong with being gay or trans the problem is when you keep shoving this garbage SJW **** that no one cares about there is a clear message you are trying to convey. All I want to do is play the game kill some zombies and have a good or somewhat story that will make people who played the first game happy. But instead got nothing remotely close to that. Naughty Dog wake the f*ck up you should be ashamed of this disappointment of a story. To the paid critics that probably couldn't beat the intro of the game b4 writing a 10/10 review you guys are out of your minds.
7.	Sigh, aren't there focus groups to avoid disasters like this?,I'll be quick and straight to the point. I played and loved the first game because of Joel and Ellie. I knew that Joel wasn't going to make it in this game but God Dam!!! They did him dirty in this one. Just seeing a beloved character whom many of us taught was untouchable get treated like that is flat out disrespectful to the fans.,This game was supposed to be about their growing relationship and how Eliie was going to cope with the truth from the first game. But no, they quickly took all that away with a swing of a golf club by probably the worst video game character to date.,Then to play with Abby for 10 hours was horrendous and sitting through these meaningless

	side story between the different factions and how one character is a tranny, but wants him/her Mom to accept it was too much because at this point, WHO THE **** CARES!!! THE MAIN CHARACTER WAS KILLED FOR NO (D)UCKING REASON AND SEVEN YEARS OF CARING AND INVESTING EMOTIONS FOR ELLIE AND JOEL ARE FOR NOTHING.,...Honestly, I hate this game and NG from here on out.
8.	This isn't about LGBT characters or politics. I'm trans. This is about the game **** on Joel and Ellie and the plot making no sense. The game focuses on surprising audiences, and in doing so has the characters make terrible decisions. There is no respect for beloved characters or good storytelling
9.	Bad writing, bad story, bad lgbt, bad game, bad 60 dollars, bad ending,Just freaking buy ff7, p5r, ghost of tsunima or doom eternal. Worth of 60 dollar rather this pointless sequel.
10.	The game is just glorified LGBT misery porn. The game fails to establish meaningful relationships with other characters.
11.	Woke, SJW trash held up by a shill media. Don't buy this garbage They killed Joel and stick in what looks like a trans woman
12.	Metacritic will probably delete this by the time, considering it a "troll" score, but seriously, the game's story is BAD, it's "dark" and depressing just for the sake of it. They disrespected one of my favourite characters of last Gen, and literally spit on his corpse. Not only that, but the way that to his death was badly written, like everything conspired so that Abby would be attacked by clickers and Saved by Joel, and she had no idea that it was him who killed her father, and just like that, Joel and his brother end up on the camp of Abby's clan and trust them (even though they have years of experience and know that there bandits and merciless people out there) and are like hi my name is Joel Miller... That's just ridiculous, cartoon level of writing..Now the ending, my god the ending, Joel dies like 2hours in, so you spend all the journey with Ellie, killing everyone on your way to get to Abby and take revenge, and guess what, REVENGE BAD, she fights her, drwons her, then get a flash back of Joel playing guitar, and then let her go? Like what? What?! You're telling me that the guy who sacrificed the world for you, died because of this decision, and you killed everyone to get to the killer and avenge him, then decide nah, not worth it....I'm seriously speechless, if you've noticed I haven't talked about anything LGBT or Agenda pushing **** I have no problem with them, my problem with the game goes beyond that, I love old Bioware games, and they already had gay characters, so nothing new..And talking about nothing new, well, the gameplay hasn't evolved that much, jump button, sprint jump, dodge? I mean it's the same TLOU1 experience expanded in some open areas. I would rather recommend you buy Days Gone you can get it for cheap, has good gameplay and sandbox, and is also a zombie apocalypse game.
13.	We dont like to see SJW agenda pushed in our face! Everyone can be a hero, but its not heroism to be of specific sexual orientation or gender!
14.	Coming from a legitimate review standpoint this game has been atrocious to play. The story can barely progress itself and what were once fluid multifaceted characters are now cheesy 2d machines. I have never before been unable to complete a game, but now is one of those times. I made maybe 5 hours into this game before I decided I needed to take a long break from it indefinitely. One of the major issues I had with this game was the gratuitous sex scenes throughout, and what felt like Naughty Dog putting diversity into a game for sales. This game feels genuinely exploitative towards the LGBT community because it uses multiple LGBT characters as sales points and fan service. If they were to introduce an LGBT character who mas more than a flat character who's entire personality was not based on their sexuality/gender that would be great. I think diversity in games is something that needs to happen, but in this game the characters that are meant to be inclusive are more representative of a cardboard cutout than an actual inclusive character. I would highly dissuade anyone

	from buying this game if they were a fan of the original last of us. The plot will wear you down and feel nothing like the original game. I would not recommend this game.
15.	Well we all know that Sony paid well to the reviewers (tlou2 has 95 on metacritic yhh ofc lmao),,Also we all know what leaks are and there are also new ones, this game is not only politically correct but the game mechanics are the same as in many other games (about zombies) only graphics save this game... The plot is 5/10, it has twists and turns, but we all know how idiotic ending this game has and the developers have not changed it, according to critics who were not afraid to rate this game lower (7.0 / 10) said that many threads are forced to just evoke feelings on the player (threads about LGBT and love that forgives everything, even killing someone close yhh, fellings, more fellings, more more fellings....in a zombie survival...). Another strange thing is that the creators decided to significantly limit the number of black opponents, rly? the creators assumed that during such an apocalypse there are definitely more white people than black people?! pathological... and this is exactly political correctness...When it comes to the AI (people) often is wrong/bugs, when it comes to zombies it is just like in the first part, nothing new, only a new interface, if the opponent notices us constantly we receive notifications that we have been detected and we are threatened, it is really annoying and you can't turn it off. This game is saved only by graphics! STOP MAKING GAME ABOUT LGBT AND POLITICAL CORRECT!!
16.	Really bad game. False advertising, bad plot and transsexual propaganda. The story is bad, good people get killed, the end is **** and it's not worth 60\$, -. Not even 2\$, -. Don't buy that ****
17.	This Game is Trash, Bad Story, 0% Fun and forced LGBT Inclusion. Never Play this Trash game
18.	Don't care if Ellie is a lesbian. Don't care that a transgender person is in the game. Do care that they **** with Joel. You don't **** with Joel! Not like that! Stupid moves get stupid results. The recipe for success was already in Naughty Dogs hands with part 1. We just wanted a good story with the characters we love. Not this **** show of a plot. Game should have been on the \$19.99 Walmart shelf from the start.
19.	We all know that the main selling point of this game is the story. Well....they **** it up.,First :,Those who are saying we are mad because of the lesbian and trans thing going on. No, we aren't. All of us knew ellie was a homosexual and no one was mad about it in the first game.,Second :,Nothing good came out of killing Joel. How the **** could they use him for some cheap shock value. I mean at least they could make up for it right? Nope. Just ****ing killed one of the characters that drives the game and you ****ing expect us to sympathize with a stranger character we don't even know. No amount of understanding will help us empathize with someone who killed one of the crucial character of the game. And then you spit us on the face and make us play that ****ing character.,Third : It's a ****ing revenge story with no revenge. Nothing good comes out of it. Everyone dies. She spares her life. It's a ****ing disaster. And Joel's last word to Ellie is 'Yep.' Like wtf. Really?!? ****ing lazy writing.,We are not here to have a woke contest. Naughty Dog spits on our face and disgracefully kills off what could have been one of the best games of all time. All the character development for nothing but to make a point that does no good. Ellie kills hundreds but spares the killer of joel...yeah right. We had to wait 7 years for this **** You guys suck.,Please Naughty Dog. I still have faith in you as a gaming company. Please make it up for this disaster with your next release.,Sincerely,,A disappointed fan.
20.	The story , the thing last of us was known for is full of LGBT content that plagues the narrative , and the ending will most likely make want to never play any naughty dogs game ever !
21.	What a complete and total waste of talent. The gameplay is stale and bland. The story is a disgrace, with legacy characters acting like complete idiots and sociopaths. Druckmann, you really didn't need to draw the paper-thin premise of "violence begets violence" out over 30 hours and fill it with torture and gore porn in order to make your point.,,The original "The Last of Us" was beloved because it delivered on many different fronts. It was a great character piece. It was atmospheric. Even if

	<p>it was needlessly violent most of the time, at least it was a straightforward point-a-to-point-b story, with lush natural vistas and a real sense of loneliness and atmosphere. "TLOU" had themes and depth. It was about mankind discovering his humanity in the ruins of civilization. It was about bonding, communication, relationships, and hope.,,"TLOU Part II" is about little more than peddling brutal, transgressive content, and on top of that, advertising it in a misleading manner to the millions of fans of the original groundbreaking title. Neil Druckmann, you in particular should be sued for false advertising for the way you edited Joel into the trailers. The way you instructed gaming outlets to only review the first third or so of the game is an utter disgrace that only shows the incestuous nepotism inherent in this godforsaken industry. And to top it off, hitting content creators on the Internet with DMCA notices really put the cherry on top of your crap sundae.,,I feel disgusted by the way this all was handled. If Amy Hennig were in charge of this, this never would have happened, because she understands something called nuanced storytelling. Look it up, Neil Druckmann. You should never be given creative control of any video game ever again, and I hope that other AAA devs will think twice before hiring someone as tone-deaf to their audiences as sa Sarkeesian to consult. I pity the developers who worked so hard on this game's beautiful graphics, animation, soundscapes, etc., all in service of the worst story I've seen in a modern video game. Shame on you, Druckmann. Resign, for the good of gaming.</p>
22.	<p>dull gameplay, the game is very protracted, gnawing snot, characters that cause disgust rather than empathy. And the LGBT theme, if it was just by chance, but in the game you are stuffed with this **** in all holes. Do a good deed, do not buy this game.</p>
23.	<p>Forced game, plot and mechanics really seem to uncharted which in a post apocalyptic world you almost feed yourself but can high jump and rappel like a pro.,Cisgender that kills main character under hypocrisy and joel Is getting killed in the stupidest way possible despite the only character that kills him is the doctors daughter' from the end which you are forced to kill. 20 years killing people and just a cisgender the only one in the whole 2 games kills him . 0 a fake copy form uncharted, the evil within 2 and many more games +fakest cgi blood</p>
24.	<p>what a cringe story. gross characters. **** game. pass on this trash. its so forced and Gross. girls kissing and trans chicks. barf</p>
25.	<p>TLOU2 is what happens when talentless liberal hacks more interested in political agendas highjack a medium.,,Soulless, bleak story that completely and utterly craps on the legacy of the original game. Neil "we don't use the word fun" Druckmann is responsible for the massacre of this IP. In the game, the character Abby is seen reading a copy of City of Thieves by David Benioff. This is the same hack responsible for the massacre of the Game of Thrones TV series - does it surprise you that all these hack writers run in the same circles?.,Bought and paid for critics won't criticize this atrocity because of its inclusion of gay and trans characters.,,Heavily manipulative trailers for the game which showed certain characters in situations - in the game it's a completely different character assuming the same role. Absolute trash and Naughty Dog deserves to go bankrupt for letting Druckmann destroy this IP.</p>
26.	<p>The worst game to ever come out of Naughty Dog... They threw the whole groundwork that was established in the first game in favor of a narrative that is littered with identify, gender politics and a petty revenge plot.</p>
27.	<p>Not going to spoil anything but I'm not into that whole transgender LGBTQ SJW agenda. So far I don't see what people see in the game. Its brutal sometimes but most is boring as hell. They tried too hard and feels like the story was forced. Doesn't seem natural. Its overrated for sure.</p>
28.	<p>Take away the LGBT agenda for why itâ€™s dabavilia and return the beautiful women to the games and not this pumped</p>
29.	<p>I've made an account to be able to express how disappointed and let down I feel about TLOU2. As probably most fans, I've absolutely loved the first part and got very emotionally attached to Ellie and Joel - this is the first game I've ever pre-</p>

	<p>ordered, and I've been playing video games since the late 1980s. I hope this paints a picture on how much I was looking forward to this.,I can't believe it has come to this, but they somehow managed to ruin everything.,Ok, so first things first: people who take issue with the characters being the way they are are obvious haters. I can't comment on how well done they are, how "included" and "represented" the related social groups feel with the characters in TLOU2, but what a character (or a person) for that matter IS is less important to the story than what the character DOES. Whether some characters being transgender, gay, or black or white adds to the story or not is a topic to be discussed, perhaps, but I don't think it takes away anything from the game.,However, the issue with TLOU2 is a glaring and monumental one, and I haven't god the faintest idea how someone, somewhere, had a meeting about what they will do with the game, and they all agreed this was a good thing? I can't comprehend someone would propose to force the players of TLOU2 to play as a character that kills Joel with a golf club and then bites Ellie's fingers off?,I'm sorry, you want me to do what? I can't possibly like being forced to play, let alone identify with, a character that literally kills and tortures maybe my two favourite video game characters ever? What the hell is the matter with you, people? Who thought it would be a good idea to have TLOU2 be played from a perspective of someone who hates Ellie!?,Nobody, I repeat, NOBODY cares about Abby. We don't care about what happened to her, we don't care about why she is angry, and we most certainly don't care about biting off Ellie's fingers.,This is basically Top Gun 2, where Maverick is murdered in the first five minutes, and then the rest of the movie is about about some random pilot doing loops in a Cessna.,Or Life is Strange 3, but you get to play as Jefferson and do you know what (for the love of God, please don't ever make this happen).,I don't understand the thinking behind continuing a story about two characters so deeply loved by the fans and the community, only to get it seen from a perspective of a random person nobody cares about. This has to be one of the biggest "what were they thinking?" moments of video games industry.,Apart from that, the game is... I don't care. I bought it to see Joel and Ellie, not kill the former with a golf club, and mutilate the latter.,In short, don't buy this game if you are a TLOU fan. I hope one day we can pretend none of this ever happened.</p>
30.	<p>Well, Sounds Like Naughty Dogs is losing his talent in making video games. They've ruined all of those loveable characters from the first game and force us to play the role of a sadistic trans for 10 **** hours. Hope they don't make a third one. I lost all those love for this game. Man the first one was such a great game but this sucks.</p>
31.	<p>I'm not even going to entertain a lengthy review for this absolute atrocity of a game so I'm going to keep it to 1500 characters at most,just dont even entertain the thought of purchasing this dumpster fire of a game.The game just spits in your face over and over again just so the people behind this game can ride high on their "inclusivity" horse they have zero regard for the characters we grew to love and just push their stupid inclusivity agenda over and over,no one wins in this story apart from that mutant that has taken over the plot of the game.I dont care for the fact she is transgender,to be honest that doesn't bother me,she is just a **** character and is put in the limelight while the two characters WE LOVE,yeah I hope you heard that the CHARACTERS WE LOVE are pushed to the back burners and one (most peoples favourite character mind you) gets his skull caved in with a golf club by our new main character,Ellie isnt even our main anymore how sad is that.Ill finish with this,dont trust the critic reviews cause this game is absolute **** **** that deserves to be buried along with Neil Druckmanns entire **** career.</p>
32.	<p>very good game, nice job, team. I really felt that when I saw the first cut scene, get it, patriarchy! Also, non binary genderless male was a good addition to the game.</p>
33.	<p>This game is a tragedy. Following up on one of the most critically acclaimed and popular titles of the PS3, there were certainly high expectations for The Last of Us Part II, and it has not only failed to meet those expectations, but has become emblematic of a far larger problem in gaming, and the entertainment industry as a whole.,,To start, I can see the spirit of many good ideas throughout. The visuals, the gameplay, the music, it's all top-notch. The framework for interesting</p>

	<p>narrative and character developments is present, but what has been applied to that framework is frankly terrible. What could have been a compelling tale of revenge, given Abby and Ellie's near identical personal quests to 'kill their father's murderer', becomes a poorly handled mess as desperate attempts to make Abby appear more likable and relatable fall apart with her ultimate characterization being that of a dangerous psychopath, consumed by her own bloodlust and unchecked by the lawless nature of this post-apocalyptic world. What's worse, is as a person of LGBTQ+ status, her poor characterization feeds into the prejudices many people unfortunately hold to this day, resulting in a character that feels less like positive representation and more exploitation. Ellie, on the other hand, is made out to be far worse than we know her to be in a clear attempt to improve the perception of Abby. And the same is certainly true of former series protagonist, Joel, who is made out to be a monster.,Abby's past is framed in a manner that neglects Ellie's lack of consent in the operation that would've killed her, trying to further endear her, as well as the posthumous representation of her father, to the player despite their complicity in the murder of a young girl. And while there is opportunity for a deeper exploration of 'sacrifice for the greater good' it goes largely untouched.,The game's story and characters all are mishandled and misused at best, or outright abused at worst. Now, does this make the game a 0 / 10? No. What does is the impetus of The Last of Us Part II and what it represents in media.,It's difficult to miss the controversy over the last decade. 'Subversion of expectations' has certainly made its rounds as an excuse for rushed, forced and sloppily handled properties. There's also the implication, particularly in gaming journalism, of a 'cut-off' of insider information which in turn can lead to such outlets losing traffic and by extension, money. It's difficult to remain a competitive news source when you've been restricted access to review copies, trailers, and interviews all because you've been critical of a particular company. But that's not the biggest problem here. That award goes to the sheer venom and spite many companies and teams in the entertainment industry have towards their fan base. To see the directors, writers, producers, all of these major personalities associated with movies, TV shows, and games to show such open contempt for their detractors and critics and to see associated news outlets scurry to their defense is far beyond insulting. We live in a world where if a film releases starring a female lead and it is panned by audiences, there are marketing crews to spin the criticism as sexism to undermine their validity. If a video game releases and consumers flock to berate it, it's classified as 'review bombing' or 'trolling' or sometimes also 'sexism', 'racism', or 'LGBTphobia'. In the Last of Us Part II's case it's all of the above.,This practice isn't just becoming normalized either. It IS the norm. And that's unacceptable. Entertainment media should thrive because of its audience, not in spite of them. The Last of Us Part II is yet another case study in a long, long list of these controversies. It is far from the first and sadly I fear it'll be far from the last.</p>
34.	<p>Neil Druckmann has been trying to shift the blame to gamers who don't like the SJ issues. And that's pathetic.,The story is at Grade F by killing a lovable protagonist and replace with a douchebag regardless of his/her/its gender.</p>
35.	<p>How can you kill joel when the reason everyone was so invested in the first game which was a masterpiece is because of the relationship between joel and ellie theres no logic to this the game itself is a massive flop sadly i cant believe people think its because of the lgbt no one is bothered about that.</p>
36.	<p>Let me break this down for you quickly: PANDERING has negatively infected gaming culture and the Last of Us 2 is the quintessential example of it.,Before we get into game-play, story, sound design and overall fun of the game; we need to have serious discussion on what pandering is and how it effects culture negatively. Pandering is defined as doing things for an individual or group in order to gain a favor and advantage for yourself.,Every game, comic book, movie or music may contain some form of pandering, and in most cases it isn't a big deal. In modern culture, however, we have reached a point where pandering has become an issue, particularly when a medium appeals to a certain demographic without making any effort to understand the people they're supposedly representing.,It often feels like an afterthought, something thrown in to reap the benefits of including that group (typically a minority) without doing any actual work. Typically it's lazy</p>

representation at best, and at worst it can be actively harmful to the demographic being (mis)represented... The Last of Us 2 is the latter... I am a huge fan of the first game; but not in terms of its game-play, graphics and sound design. The game's story, specifically its masterful pacing and development of the two main protagonists Ellie and Joel, is what draws players in (myself included) and captivates them throughout the entire journey. The writers knew what these two characters represent: Joel is a damaged, old and experienced man that has reluctantly partnered with an energetic, young and naive Ellie in order to potentially save humanity from a deadly virus. The game has a beautiful thematic narrative on society and human-beings; Ellie represents humanity's hope for the future (the literal cure for the virus), and thus needs to be protected by the battle-hardened adults, which is where Joel steps in (both story-wise and in game-play). Both characters grow and start depend on each other, and the game ends with an ambiguous question of whether this father/daughter relationship has either doomed or saved humanity... The Last of Us 2 has this beautiful theme and relationship dynamic completely thrown out of the window in order for the writers to pander Ellie as a strong female LGBT lead. All the charm and charisma she had in the first game is completely gone as Ellie has been reduced to being part of a, as writer Neil Druckmann puts it... "diverse cast of strong female characters"... Being female and gay does not make Ellie a strong character... Being deadly and proficient in killing does not make Ellie a strong character... Having a tortured past and being an emotionally distant does not make Ellie a strong character... In fact, being the potential cure to save humanity, also did not make Ellie a strong character either. She became a strong lead because of how her actions dynamically affected those around her, specifically Joel and his group. In this bleak future, Ellie is the Last bit of humanity (of Us, if you will) in a literal sense but also in an emotionally resonant way for all of us... In an effort to pander to certain demographics, the story takes a complete thematic nose-dive to have so-called representation of minorities surviving in an apocalyptic wasteland. Ellie, our future for humanity, is now comically emotional for wanting vengeance to the point of absurdity for the death of a close friend. None of her witty lines, or virus-curing antiques is needed here. All the Last of Us 2 seems to concern itself with, is how violence is violent for violent characters because a violent world needs violent people to justify the violence... And who better to justify this game's theme than humanity's last hope for the future... who's a lesbian... Pandering with no thought of the narrative pedigree that the first game had, has a sure way of alienating audiences and it does not make for a great gaming experience; especially when the first-game to this day is a herald for refined video game story-telling... In my humble opinion, Naughty Dog Studio have never been the creators of original game-play and stories, however, they have always been prime examples of expertly "refined" experiences. Uncharted/Crash Bandicoot and even the Last of Us were not pioneer games; but they were amazingly refined platformer/survival games to the point that it gave the illusion that they were... The graphics and sound design of the Last of Us 2 is worth praise as enemies converse realistically and move dynamically through the environment, a touch of the naughty dog refinement that is muddied unfortunately by the bog-standard run-of-the-mill 3rd-person action game-play... However the sound, game-play and the game's overall fun factor is connected to the story Naughty Dog has written, thus it suffers immensely for it. 1/10

37. Please hear me out. I really, really wanted to like this game. I am a huge fan of the original, and when I saw the announcement for Part II, I was beyond excited. Despite exceptional gameplay, sound, visuals, and acting, this game simply doesn't deliver in terms of story or meaningful character development. I simply don't understand what went wrong here in the development studio. It's bizarre, and as a diehard fan of the first game, this is beyond frustrating and disappointing. Also, this has nothing to do with the game being "SJW" or "agenda-pushing" (I'm a part of the LGBT community myself). I just simply feel like the story, in terms of writing and character development, is laughably bad for a game of this caliber, especially when compared to the brilliant first entry in the series. Please save your money and save yourself from the major disappointment that I experienced while playing this game. While I am rating this game a zero,

	itâ€™s not because I think this game has no redeeming qualities whatsoever. Itâ€™s to simply point out the hypocrisy of many influenced game journalists, as well as blind fans, when they rate the game a ten. Thank you for reading.
38.	Ruined franchise by an almost unbelievable bad story. So much stuff to discuss in a post apocalyptic world and Naughty Dog chooses to focus on an empty and stupid vengeance, sexuality and gender. For the sake of this agenda, it even killed a very loved character in a very hateful way. After finishing the game, I wish I haven't played it to preserve just TLOU1 in my memory.
39.	You used political correctness to manipulate reviewers. Metacritic put this game on the same level with the gods and goddesses of the gaming history like "Skyrim, Mario Odyssey, Breath of The Wild etc.". You made people waste their money with this reviews where people potentially don't even enjoy the game after the second hour because they were such a fan of the first one. That was the first mistake.,You Neil, didn't know jack **** about Joel and depicted him as a shy dadlike character who would'a save a random stranger/follow her and just announce himself in a place full of strangers. I cannot compare this story choice to GOT Season 8 or Star Wars Last Jedi **** show BECAUSE they have a lot of hours of content so maybe that can be justifiable as directors losing consistency over a long shot. This is the second game of the franchise. Who do you think you are to change pace of the story in such if this is 10th season of some Walking Dead like show? This is the second mistake.,Finally you pushed a political agenda in your game for every inch of an hour. People just want to play their game. They do not want to relate to poorly written characters who just happens to not be cis gender. They just want to play their game because they like the series so much. You could have written literally anything else and it would be worth our while. and you treat your devs who sweat 12 hours a day like robots that third and fourth mistake. I was handed 100 cards full of mistake I just don't have patients to go on.
40.	The Last of Us: Part II is an undoubtedly story-based game. So my review will be focused almost entirely on the story. The gameplay is incredibly similar to the first with added movement options and different enemy types.,Instead of following in the steps of its predecessor, the sequel throws away much of its character-development, atmosphere, and world-building for the sake of adding a playable antagonist. Despite early news promising the development of Ellie and Joel's bond, the latter is killed in the prologue of the game by said antagonist. Instead of naturally becoming a revenge story, the writers try their hardest to make the player emphasize with Abby - something incredibly difficult to accomplish if the player developed a connection to the protagonists from the first game. Characters close to Ellie die or abandon her unceremoniously throughout the course of the game in scenes that seem more reliant on shock value than good writing. Those who die are always taken out by Abby, and you'll occasionally play as her for these scenes. At the ending, Ellie saves Abby's life before challenging her to one last fight. Despite having two of her fingers bitten off in the struggle, Ellie gets the upper hand and is all set to drown the woman who has taken everything from her. With a brief vision of Joel flashing through her mind, she makes a disappointing decision to let go of Abby and allow her to get away. At the end of the day, Ellie is left with nothing. The player has gained nothing.,The central issue that pervades the entire story is characters acting unlike themselves. Tommy and Joel give their names and home location to an armed group they just met. Jesse, who has been shown to have a level head, rushed through a closed door into a room that could have had any amount of hostiles. He was, of course, immediately shot in the head and killed. Ellie murdered possibly hundreds in her quest to kill Abby, and not only untied her, but she also challenged her to some strange form of honorable combat before letting Abby go free. It is not good writing. It's characters acting completely unpredictable just for something terrible to happen. It's like they can't create shock value without making someone act like an idiot.,Lastly, there is no joy in The Last of Us: Part II. Not if you came into it with the previous characters in your heart. Every beloved character is dragged through the dirt constantly with no moments of reprieve. It's one miserable scene after the other. The only "uplifting" moments tend to happen when the player is controlling Abby. At

	<p>the end of the day, there is no satisfaction for the player. None for Ellie. None for Joel, Tommy, Jesse, or Dina. You don't get your adventure with Ellie and Joel. You don't get your revenge. You don't get a glimpse of the hope for a better future that was present in the first game. It's devoid of hope. The only thing you get at the end of the day is a message that revenge is bad, but it falls flat once you realize that the only person who got their vengeance is the one that came out on top.,The only people who legitimately enjoyed playing The Last of Us 2, for it's story, are people whose ONLY personality trait is either their gender, sexual orientation, or skin colour.</p>
41.	<p>The story is unfaithful the characters that meant a whole lot to the player get treated like trash and killed off horribly just to push an agenda for a female trans character the ending tarnished this franchise the gameplay is same old first act is a walking simulator graphics are amazing but you can clearly tell they were forcing an agenda this is the last jedi for video games these companies need to stop and start listening to there consumers this isnt right at all and this is the final straw</p>
42.	<p>This game has an awful story written by a bunch of snakes who want money from every trans persons wallet. Game companies donâ€™t actually care about trans rights or issues. The gameplay is buggy, glitchy and filled with a bunch of boring ****</p>
43.	<p>I don't care about the LGBT story. Stop! I want my refund! Why did u do this NAUGHTY DOG?! why?</p>
44.	<p>This is the first time I have ever given a 0. Who would ever think that what started as one of the greatest franchises ever made with TLOU1 would end up in the drain like this.,I am one of the victims of knowing the spoilers before getting the game and was terribly sad to hear it, as I waited in excitement for 7 years to see my favorite characters joel and ellie again, maybe taking on the virus situation, and seeing their relationship grow more and the story progress, possibly finding out more about the world and infected etcetera, the leaks were terrible and I knew they were real, but I still wanted to give the game a fair chance, while all my friends were already full on hating and saying they're not gonna buy the game and that I shouldnt either, I still wanted to try it first anyway, I loved the first game so much, I couldn't not try it.,However, sadly the leaks are as said, and it is actually worse, I never thought this could be possible, I thought even if I didn't like what they did with the story at least I would still enjoy the game at least for whats left, but I didn't.. The whole experience I was not feeling it, its not like its predecessor, the first game flowed so well and the characters drew you in so easily, it felt realistic and relatable, the story was perfectly paced, here almost everything is the total opposite, I ended up forcing myself to keep playing as I was losing interest early on, then when the dreaded moments from the leaks came into play I just literally despised it, not in a good way like when you hate a movie character because it is played so geniously evil by the actor, but i hated naughty dog, i hate what they have done to this wonderful game, i am all for lgbt, and equality dont get me wrong, i dont mind transexuals or gays nothing, it doesnt matter what someones preference is or love interest, but you added and forced so many things in this game to the point its not even about the orignal story anymore but something totally different, almost like spinoff. The writing is terrible.,WHY do you have to include and force this narrative into a story that had NOTHING TO DO with that, sacrificing everything people loved about the first game to make a point, it was about survival, about characters we loved, Joel and Ellie, Joel having such a rough life and but staying strong through all the crap he experienced, meeting ellie, slowly growing to love her as his own daughter, this was wonderful, we wanted MORE OF THIS. It didnt matter that ellie was a lesbian, it wouldnt even matter if joel was gay, do you get it?! but you made the whole sequel focus on this subject, it suddenly has nothing to do with the apocalyptic world and the virus anymore, it just DOES NOT make any sense, it turns into an lgbt driven story about "hate" obviously white male hate and straight hate, Joel.. One of the greatest characters of all time who went through so much, had to be sacrificed for this?? I expected that joel would die in part II, im fine with that, but this? this is SO forced and does not make any sense, it doesnt feel natural like how the story in 1 felt, in the last of us 1 everything felt like it was really just happening as you went on, it was written perfectly,</p>

	<p>here you just know its forced, it feels like they HAD to include this.They just killed him because hes a strong male. YES JOEL WAS A STRONG STRAIGHT MALE, so what?? He was a good example of a father figure, a strong man who protects his loved ones, who WENT THROUGH SO MAN AWFUL EVENTS BUT STAYED STRONG. I hoped for something like where Joel was Old and now Ellie had to protect him, and that maybe he would die in another way n ellies hands or something, something emotional that we'd love bittersweet. What you did is totally destroy all the potential of a wonderful sequel. The new character is also NOT a good example at all and feels totally forced, its just ridiculous, and actually offensive to the lgbt community.,WHY the heck did naughty dog let Druckman do this? Why was he not removed at some point by the ceo? Kojima did not deserve to be removed from MGS but Neil Druckman sure did. It's ja slap in the face for all the fans. You let Druckman burn a whole franchise to the ground and turn all the fans who loved the first game against you, let that sink in Naughty Dog... You let him do this so you are also responsible. If all of that wasn't enough yet afterwards you restrict YouTubes talking about the game or giving honest reviews, AND paying for high ratings at review outlets to make sure the game still sells well even if it means deceiving fans. This is unacceptable and you went from my favorite developer to my most hated in a matter of days. I will never buy your games again. Unless maybe you fire Neil Druckman and make a public apology to the fans. Fans have taken **** from developers long enough, but this takes the cake, you get the award for most effed up destructions of a game in gaming history.</p>
45.	<p>No spoilers. Expectations did not come true. Advantages: 1. Graphics. The game is insanely beautiful, only a fool will argue with this 2. Attention to detail. Attention to RDR2 Level Details 3. The ending. That's all, then solid minuses The gameplay has not changed since 2013. Especially stealth. Only grass appeared as in Uncharted 4. Good old bottles and bricks have not gone away. Despite the fact that the ending turned out to be interesting, the rest of the plot cannot be said so. Characters. The story of the first part is beautiful. This love between Joel and Ellie was real. So why don't you show the love between Dina and Ellie? Where is the chemistry between these characters? Or you just said, This is an LGBT couple, they love each other for the sake of a tick. If they love each other, show it. This game is a disappointment of the year. I do not know what else to say. This game has no advantages other than graphics. It does not deserve 96 points. it's a bad game</p>
46.	<p>Absolutely disgusting trash of a game. Not one single good thing worth saying about it. From terrible storyline, forcefeeding LGBT culture, butchering the legacy of the first game, ridiculous ending; feels like a rollercoaster ride through the local garbage disposal area.</p>
47.	<p>The successor of one of the Best Games ever made is more a political statement than a game.,While it does have great graphics and a wonderful sound, the gameplay is fluid but not on a near perfect level. Sometimes it feels too clumsy and not polished enough.,The story on the other hand is nothing more than making a statement against men while focussing more and more on gender issues. With killing of the first games main character the story feels more constructed than anything else- while you shouldnt judge anybodys work solely on a political bias, the trailer are false marketing and nobody should ne encouraged to buy this game.</p>
48.	<p>The Last of Us 2 is a kick in the dick for fans as they ruin or kill off likeable characters for LGBT rubbish that should NEVER be in these games. The graphics are very pleasant and the gameplay is okay but the overall experience feels terrible due to its bad story.</p>
49.	<p>Not enjoying clunky controls or having LGBT rammed down my throat. That doesn't make a character believable, and that's not why I go to video games</p>
50.	<p>Is a lesbian angry game to lgbt community. 1 hour of gameplay and is a walking simulator.. I recommend just play the 1, and imagine the end.</p>

51.	This game destroyed my heart. It ruined the characters, it made them non traditional to put it politically correct. Naughty Dog ruined the experience we enjoyed in the first game, this game was by far the worst game ever to experience. Just because it has very realistic graphics, it would ever make me by default enjoy the game. The story is disgusting, the characters were ruined, the experience was horrible. Naughty dog is trying to be abstract and different but neglecting what the fans want and what they enjoyed previously is Naughty dogs downfall. Appeasing the lgbt community and trying to win praise from them is why Naughty Dog destroyed a game franchise we loved. If there is one word that describes this game is disgusting! From all angles!
52.	Jesus this game is so bad i created an account just to submit this, they honesty destroyed what could have been a great sequel for points with the lgbtq community
53.	I respect LGBTQ community, however, this is a blatant play that clearly goes against the character development just to pander, nonthing more. Also, the inability to skip the sex scene is downright disrespectful. We are deluding ourselves to think everyone is cool with this subject matter, sad, but true. I do not understand the point of the "official" critics, they are clearly worthless at judging what gamers want. Games are made for gamers, not useless critics who happen to also be gamers.
54.	I can't believe how awful the writing is in this game. It's complete SJW non-sense with awful writing that completely killed this game. If you want to play an LGBT fantasy game then guess what Last of us 2 is just that! They killed Joel within the first hour then you have to play 15+ hours as the person who killed Joel then on top of that you don't even kill the person who killed Joel. Now we understand completely why the staff quit naughty dog before this game was finished.
55.	I'm not against LGBTQ relationships, that's perfectly normal, and so that you know i'm a left-wing believer but just to be "woke" or "progressive" you don't have to ruin some characters or disregard the rules of storytelling, it's like tearing down the people around you just so that you feel tall, be woke, be progressive, but don't antagonize people or start unneeded wars just to prove a point, it's like star wars all over again, that Debacle hurt the LGBTQ movement more than lindsey graham did, people saw some "SJWs" come in, ruin their favourite franchise and then stroll right back out, so please stop ruining stuff that people care about just to prove your beliefs, while making all liberals look bad, and gaining us more enemies than donald trump ever could.
56.	This game was atrocious from the cutscenes to the pacing it was SO SLOW. Plot barely developed. Also the LGBTQ scene was not necessary and put in probably for pandering.
57.	This game is trash it's full of stupid politics and makes zero sense they murder a main character like he's some random npc and push the lgbtq agenda how would you even be trans in the apocalypse there's not enough time to be thinking about all that plus you can't even get hormone therapy or a sex change since it's the apocalypse and all plus after watching this piece of **** murder a main character now you have to play as her. Garbage can game glad I didn't pay for it and got a copy from a friend
58.	If u sacrifice the plot for forcing hidden agenda u doesn't respect ur fans, if but sexual agenda to accuse any negative review to be Homophobic u use the agenda to mute the critics voice, this game ruined every good aspect in the prequel, even the gameplay they convert it into boring reptitive shooting! the characters are too bad we lost thier respect becuase of some new things they call it character but it can't be , they should respect the name of the game the fan base the time of the event u can't put a transgender character in the apocalyptic world where are no hospitals no surgeons, everyone aren't so sure to be alive tomorrow, just to force ur agenda on the whole world in this game it's a wierd disrespecting thing
59.	I had a really in depth review written (almost 5000 words) but apparently there was an error.,Basically. If you have Depression or anxiety, don't play this.,The main spoilers you may have heard aren't the worst of it,This is

	depressing and I dissociated very close to the beginning of the game due to the violence. This actually made me feel like I have the capacity to kill someone and not care which I think is the opposite of what the developers weâ€™re going for, and frankly kind of scary.,I have never hated a character before and I despise Abby.,Also for people looking for LGBT representation... this failed at that too. All there is is suffering and the main message I got from this game around that is that being gay causes it.,The graphics were great but if Iâ€™m honest, that just made everything so much worse.,I am so glad I had the beginning spoiled for me because I had originally pre-ordered the Ellie edition, I have no idea what that would have done to me mentally, owning 300 dollars worth of stuff from such a terrible game. I would have lost it. As it was I played for free thanks to a friend that gave me their game after they quit at 2 hours in, I still feel like I deserve a refund.
60.	While the gameplay is just as much, if not more fun than the original, this was NOT enough to make up for the absolutely terrible story. Being a diehard Naughtydog fan, I truly expected better. They could have brought back the magic of the first game, but instead filled this with too many forced plottwists, characters, and moments that made it feel like something lazily put together by a bunch of redditors trying to write erotic transgender fan fiction. I really sincerely hope they learn from this, because they have effectively killed the story of The Last Of Us. A game I loved playing growing up and regarded as one of the best stories of all time. In short, save yourself \$60.
61.	Doing everything possible to make your game "woke" does not change the fact that the plot is a giant dumpster fire. It opposes everything the first game was about and tricks people with IQs under 7 into thinking it's emotional through monotone, boring conversations, and GUITARS because we need to resort to that to make people care about the 20th killed character. Cause, you know, they've already been desensitized to characters dying by the many previous pointless, 'shocking' deaths of characters who have no prominent traits other than being LGBT. "Subverting expectations" is **** not good storytelling. It's a shame good acting and graphics had to be wasted on this.
62.	A Story game without a history. Often i didn't really knew what was happening either because i was really bored or because it really didn't make sense. Hateful characters, principally the main ones. As for gameplay there was nothing innovating, every Sony game transitioned to this formulated gameplay.,The Last Of Us Part II is a "game" for people who don't play games and sadly, if this games becomes sucessful, we'll probably be in a very negative place for creativity as developers or players.
63.	The first part of the game is simply gorgeous, in absolutely everything. The second part is good only in what kind of work the developers and game designers did, in everything else it is exclusively propaganda of LGBT people, the plot is boring and uninteresting. The first game from Naughty Dog that disappointed me. And yes, I am completely tolerant of LGBT people, but I want to play and enjoy the plot, and not watch the propaganda that is on the agenda. Games should be neutral to politics and any kind of propaganda.
64.	Despite the outstanding gameplay and graphics, this game was made for snowflakes SJW's.,Naughty Dog forced us to pay attention in the LGBT/ Gender Ideology themes than make a good story.,The ending is also a lame and wrong way to finish the playthrough.
65.	ĐŸŃ€Đ¼Đ¿Đ°Đ³Đ°Đ½Đ’Đ° Đ›Đ“Đ’Đ¢. Đ• Ńf Đ, Đ·Đ°Ń‡ĐµĐ¼ Ń• Ń,Đ¼ Đ² Đ,Đ³Ń€Đµ? LGBT propaganda. Well, why is it in the game?
66.	Bad progressist propaganda, forcing LGBT stuff in an zombie apocalypse is ridiculous, shove all that SJW in your a** naughty dog, worst game of the year easily
67.	The story is trash because the **** trans abby kills joe and ellie kills everyone except Abby because revenge is not necessary,Â¿what are u talking about,naughty dog?,if the is about revenge,then don't educate us with complete Bs that revenge is not necessary

68.	Great! I haven't seen SJW suck up like this in a long time. When developers understand that they need to create games for those who play them. You can see that a lot of effort was put into the game. The graphics, gameplay, and details in this game are beautiful, but all of this is overshadowed by the terrible propaganda of feminism, LGBT, and other nonsense. P. S urge players to stop sponsoring this quarrel. Developers only care about money, and if nothing else is done, it will only get worse
69.	This is ruined by the people who made this Plz read, That game is **** awful dog ****, Naughty dog **** why. everyone was waiting for a perfect sequel to a perfect game the fact that abby is trans ellie and Dinna lesbians dosen't bother us it's the fact that is shoved in to our faces and we cant get a break., Story: the story is absolute dog **** garbage it dosen't make sense for the motivation of abby that **** to be son of a doctor that we dont know anything about and was just another loop hole for those **** meth drug smoking sons a ****'s to make a lazy lazy game. The games looks absolutely fantastic but it's not justified that is soooooo trash **** abby **** abby **** abby **** abby **** naughty dog team this game is **** garbage and no aspect of the story will change my opinion.
70.	The game does little to meaningfully develop the story, and concepts that the first game had so artfully woven together. The narrative of enduring such a bitter environment in a somehow nonetheless wholesome relationship is immediately destroyed with the death of the original protagonist Joel. The only thematic concept or idea touched upon in the game is revenge, and if murder can be justified, or understood in certain circumstances. The story shifts from the wholesome relationship that developed in the first game, one that was ominously beautiful, although tinged with lingering bitterness, and opened many questions in the end. The relationship was relatable, and displayed how beautiful the manifestation of human affection can be between two characters who are otherwise sharply contrasted in their dispositions, and character. I cannot even mention the agenda the game pushes down your throat without people thus declaring all of my opinions null, and titling me a "bigot". Hey, remember the first game, in which Bill was gay? And how in the DLC Ellie had a lesbian relationship with Riley? I loved those games. Want to know why, because the characters, and actions meaningfully connected to the wholesome relationships portrayed in the first game, and developed different thematic ideas that the player could question. The second game doesn't do that, and it barely strays from the concept of revenge. They threw in a flimsy ending to feign a moral high-ground, and character development from Ellie -- that'd she'd grown from the violence she was inclined to. This is ridiculous from a narrative perspective. She'd never been inclined to violence, or willing to commit violence with a subsequent clear conscience. She'd broken down when talking to Joel near the hospital, following the giraffe scene; exclaiming that she felt that she should in fact die for "Everything we've been through -- everything that I've done." Remember the scene in which the AMV shot down the two civilians with the operators of the AMV looting the people, to which Ellie subsequently expressed remorse at not being able to help them? Remember when she'd saved Joel and said she'd felt sick. Think about that. She felt sick even knowing that what she was doing was saving his life. With the blossoming relationship with loose ends that needed to be tied now so detestably stripped in the second game, they had to touch upon revenge, and introduce different characters to fill the place (that left even greater plot-holes and logical gaps within the procession of the story). Joel, and Ellie's convoluted, and still relatable dispositions were stripped to more base reactions, and responses in the story that stripped their seemingly vivid personal aspects to carry on such a poorly constructed narrative. Ellie was never inclined to violence, even after a traumatic event (as after the Winter chapter with David upon almost being raped, she'd still never felt inclined to carry out a brutal mission for revenge. She did kill her attacker, and one could claim with excessive force, but she'd immediately regretted it, and demonstrated growth afterwards). They completely changed her character to fit such a tired and shallow plot, made Joel act in contrast to his decades of experience surviving against any threats, falsely advertised the game by implying that Joel would be around for a substantial period of time, and tries to virtue signal by throwing in what is assumedly a transgender antagonist (claim that those who dislike the game are

	<p>transphobic, or homophobic when the game portrays a trans girl as the genuine antagonist/villain in the story. Have fun working out that paradox). Ellie goes on a brutal mission, killing multiple people now, just for her to once again at the end demonstrate that "oh killing/vengeance = bad" as if that's a valid conclusion, and sufficient character development when that concept had been expressed a multiplicity of times in the first game. People wanted the relationship between father and daughter, and the rich characters. They completely missed the mark in this laughable sequel. My advice: watch the flashback segments on Youtube, they're the only redeeming narrative developments in the story, and consider those short segments the epilogue of the first game. They had to have paid the prominent figures who reviewed the game a lot to try and justify giving the game a 10/10, and putting it on the same scale as the first game, and as amazing products such as God of War 4. I wanted to believe it was prejudice against the game, and concepts that caused such a surplus of negativity. It isn't. The game is genuinely that horrid. Save yourself the \$60, and the time, and steer clear from this game. I am forgetting that this game existed, and will live off of the first game, and the DLC, and maybe the flashback segments. Neil Druckmann should be fired after such a miserable destruction of a beloved story.</p>
71.	<p>Good gameplay and good graphic but the story and plot are really really bad it's all about LGBTQ+</p>
72.	<p>And with this one game, big name journalists (IGN, Polygon, VG24/7, Eurogamer etc) if their reputations in recent years weren't already badly damaged and reduced to the court jesters of gaming journalism, their fate is sealed by a once loved franchise. How did it all go so badly wrong for The Last Of Us 2? Visuals: one of the few redeeming features, the visuals are very good, coupled with sound effects, the animations make killing enemies and such hold more weight than before. Motion capture of faces and lip sync are no issue, all done well as is the voice acting. Sound effects: Again not where the game falters, the music; often ambient or acoustic is typical of apocalyptic narratives nowadays, for instance The walking dead series. Voice acting is mostly believable, and weapons etc haven't been lazily done. Gameplay: this is where things start to get a tad shaky, the gameplay is reminiscent of the first game a decade or more ago, it's not fast paced action, there's different pacing mixed between some exploration and scantily clad puzzle solving that's weaker and more basic than the first game. Mostly linear sections where you're encouraged to use stealth or distraction to move past or take down enemies. The formula though ok is a bit dated even with all the nice visuals and animations. Storyline: And this is where it all falls to pieces for different reasons. Firstly, what was the first game? An endearing father/daughter like relationship through a dark and hopeless world, with moments of humour or light shone in from Ellie and the few loveable characters. No agenda, no desperation to gain brownie points from certain social activists or groups. Just a story anyone can get behind and enjoy. What has this game done? It's for the most part distanced itself from that winning formula, no attempt to build upon or improve it, one of the most beloved of two characters feels the ramifications of this. The new characters aren't loveable and interesting this time around. The storyline boils down to a cheap soap opera, and the awful direction it goes, the cringe that befalls it, the destruction of a lovely chemistry between two great characters that people simply wanted to see built upon. It's all gone to pave the way for a social justice agenda, for the gain of brownie points, for multiple gay but somehow also bi characters with a bonus diversity character. And it's a colossal disaster. Sarkeesian being involved along with the questionable new director (Druckmann) were a big red flag, all but confirmed by various leaks and studio employees apparently being removed for questioning the bizarre story direction. There's also a distasteful and appalling scene I won't allude to for spoilers sake that appears to involve Druckmann (the game's now director) himself, or a very bizarre likeness to them; as placed within the game as a character. This scene also highlights Sony's appalling hypocrisy on censorship of more innocent nude in other titles, not even sex scenes like this. Then before the review embargo, 10/10 from already questionable journalists, with the knowledge Sony strictly prohibited much of the game being reviewed; namely the parts that players were worried about. But it turns out most of this was all true, and the game does have pretty awful, agenda</p>

	<p>driven story, that tries to hide behind the guise of a cheap revenge flick porn. The original game managed to make Ellie's sexuality feel very natural, no LED neon arrows above it, and not a main feature of the story and game, just purely natural design choice. This game manages to make every LGBTQ/SJW topic feel as fake and forced for brownie points and pandering, as Katie Prices chest. And it really detracts from immersion, throw in the poor storyline, shallow characters and somewhat dated mechanics, and you have real heavy fall from grace. There isn't even and choice given at key moments, you're forced to watch it painfully unfurl. The best option is to keep the memory of the first game and leave it there, don't soil it (and soiled it will certainly be) by playing this disappointment of the this gen of gaming.,Verdict: Don't let this £50 disappointment destroy the great memory of the last of us 1, keep it's agenda addled and poultry story telling away from you, and maybe Naughty Dog, developers and journalists will realize this same formula of forcing unnatural elements into games for agenda's sake, will simply destroy a company.</p>
73.	<p>Ehough the lgbt **** in games. not gonna spend even a cent. The Last of Hope is CyberPunk 2077</p>
74.	<p>we don't need to know creators sex genders cuz it's just a game for fun not for make some one happy this is not the real last of us remake the story ...</p>
75.	<p>This game just killed of the whole plot that part 1 had been going between the bond between ellie and joel,just for them to kill off this character in the most dumb **** way,they even changed his **** personality,he was uneasy about any stranger yet in p 2 he decides nah everything its good lemme go with them,then trans senator Armstrong kills him and its the most pathetic revenge story,also why is there a character that looks like Neil and **** Armstrong?,This game is just a bad expensive joke and every so called "reviewer" and "gaming experts" should **** off and let us the gamers review the game instead of blatantly lying to us their customers.</p>
76.	<p>Plot 0/10 in a narrative driven game, with boring game play and great graphics. Didn't learn from the mistakes of the latest Star Wars trilogy. Shock value over respecting characters. Forced LGBT agendas that add nothing.,Don't ruin your fond memories of the first one.</p>
77.	<p>This game is **** sorry it pushes a gender without limits there spitting on the first game im out</p>
78.	<p>Because the game developers want to accept their dirty agendas such as homosexuality and feminism and insert them into societies and transform the game story from a game that simulates parenting to a game of sex, violence and killing.</p>
79.	<p>Before I go into detail, Iâ€™ll give some positive words about the game. The graphics are amazing theyâ€™re realistic and everything about the game is visually stunning. The mechanics are an improvement from the first game but tries to stay loyal with the previous mechanic system used in the first game. Thereâ€™s no problems with the gameplay. My problems with this game is how terribly written it is. Keep in mind I donâ€™t care if thereâ€™s LGBT people in this game. The problem is the characters make decisions that are just completely out of character in the perspective of the audience, it just doesnâ€™t sense to us. After surpassing the part where an important character meets his end, I was confused. I didnâ€™t have a problem with him dying but I had a problem with how he died. It seems like he didnâ€™t matter and his death served no real purpose to the game. I still donâ€™t understand the overall theme, I heard itâ€™s about letting go of revenge. That doesnâ€™t make sense.... Itâ€™s a weak plot. In a world overrun by a deadly virus and tribalism, revenge is more of a motivation than a burden. If anything if revenge was something I wanted...The ending is incredibly underwhelming and makes me feel the hours I spent on it wasnâ€™t worth it. I donâ€™t care if a game has amazing graphics and great mechanics. If the story is terribly written then itâ€™s not worth playing. This game isnâ€™t even playable the first time, I had to force myself. You canâ€™t play this game more than once. I will be returning my copy right now actually. This is the last time I buy a Naughty Dog game. As a huge fan of the Last Of Us part 1, I bought the game on ps3 and ps4. Played them multiple times and played the online portion. Although, the game was always great because of its</p>

	<p>good story telling. Waiting 7 years and Iâ€™m dissatisfied and disappointed. Who is making these decisions? Donâ€™t they have writers at Naughty Dog? If they had 7 years, that was more than enough time to polish a game, thereâ€™s no excuse. Whoever is in charge of this game needs to be held responsible and Naughty Dog need to own up to their mistakes rather than attacking their customers and disrespecting them for not liking their low quality product. In my eyes, the Last of Us ended with the first game, the second never happened....</p>
80.	<p>A minority will dismiss most or all criticism as coming from "incels" or **** or some such. Truth is, most people with some common sense recognize this narrative for what it is. Lazy writing fitted with an inclusive cast of characters with the sole purpose of signalling how virtuous of a company Naughty Dog is. Somehow the triple threat of racial minority, lesbian, AND transgender people are being pandered to for the sake of a company's greed. Congratulations, your identity is now being used for profit. Hope that feels good. It doesn't to me. Besides that, there is nothing at all interesting about the story. Same hamfisted "The Walking Dead" type of writing which uses shock value and high stakes in a poorly paced manner to try and hold your attention. Failing hard in the process.</p>
81.	<p>The actual game got replaced by SJWs ideas, this aint nothing but a LGBT protest inside a game to make you forcibly accept equality killing one of the most beloved character of the game, Neil CuckMAAM.. you just did the opposite what the word "equality" means, great job to damaging not only your company but Sony themselves</p>
82.	<p>This game is nothin but forced Left-Wing LGBT propaganda First game was a masterpiece, but this jÃ«w skill of a game is nothing but pushing leftist propoganda that anyone with any common sense can see, donâ€™t buy this game let these little SJW filths know that no one will buy a game with a forced agenda</p>
83.	<p>I want to say thank you Mr Druckman for proving me that naughty dog is not as good of a company as it used to be. I will never buy any game from them ever again, I can't believe that this story was even approved its feels like it was written by lgbt 13 year old. Im done,, it's ridicilous.</p>
84.	<p>The whole game is not fun anymore, obviously the director wishes to make us accept their LGBT logic combined with womenâ€™s rights, well I donâ€™t have any objection to these people, but please donâ€™t overwhelm us with these doctrines again and again AND AGAIN! We really donâ€™t care about your views, just give us a story we waited for years just like the first one. The conversations during gameplay are pointless and dumb, unrelated to the storyline. The characters are rumbling words in low voices all the time, sometimes you ycan hardly hear them, but it doesnâ€™t matter, you donâ€™t have to know.</p>
85.	<p>Please keep gender politics and games separate.,As a human with a brain I absolutely don't believe in gender transitioning.,I'm all for people dressing up as they please and if they want to cut off their pipi that's cool. But transgenders claim to be the other sex and then try to force their believes in others. .. people shall do what they need to do. But when they try to intrude my bathrooms and try to force what I have to say then that's where I cut the line. Men are men. Women are women. And I don't support The nonsense at all. And making this game a LGBTQ movement is a no-no... I also wouldn't like to have anti Trump or Bernie propoganda in my games. Already had enough that I need to see BLM movements on all websites if all I want to do is watch a movie. Please keep politics out of my games. Transgenders are humans which I sympathize with. They will never be able to be the sex they want to be. But I will never be 15 again. And I will probably never be announced as the most attractive guy on earth. Life is full of things you can never be. I feel bad for the high suicide rates. But you can't throw away basic logic. Is someone says he's a bird and he can fly I don't think trying to not stop him from jumping off a cliff it's the right thing to do because you accept him as bird. Mentally ill people need help. People with depression need help. And people who feel as if they're the wrong body need help. You just can't force me to think that men or women woman are men. Men are men and women a women.,However they are human beings and I</p>

	support their right to dress however they want. I don't support them having the right to take away basic logic and freedom of speech. And thus I cannot play this game. At a game I can play is 0/10.,Please keep politics and games separated. Thanks
86.	worst game ever, congrats NaughtyDog for ruining a classic, and trying to pin your failure on homophobia and transphobia, I'm gay, and I hated this game, I hated the secret social justice warrior bs, the agendas, and ideologies you tried to push through the game. Do you really think a trans person would care about pronouns in a world like this? really? or an extremist group would care about some trans person in an apocalyptic world. Do you think you can disrespect a great smart character like Joel and get away with it? did you really think making us play Abby was a good choice? that we'd sympathize with her? You killed Joel in the most humiliating way possible, a great character died in the stupidest way possible. Joel, the guy that never trusted strangers, and barely trusted anyone, the guy that survived 25 years in that world. is killed by strangers with a golf bat, do you think The Joel Miller would be so casual with armed strangers in the apocalypse? the man that didn't stop for an injured man who turned out to be an enemy is so casual with a group of armed strangers in a small clear space without cover, hell he didn't even seem cautious between them, he told them his name so casually. This game is the biggest disappointment of the century. you kept the narcissistic creep Niel but didn't pursue the actual important people that made The Last Of Us so great, no you let this creep Niel drive them out, just to spam the game with his face, props about him, (self-inserts) and characters that look like him. That creep wanted nothing but to make this game about himself. the characters not only are out of character, but they aren't even logical, it's like the game was written by an alien pretending to be a human. What person sees someone they view as a father being bashed to death and then have their fingers bitten off by that same person that killed your father figure, and then you let them live. so basically she went to get her fingers bitten off and then went back home, really? so she kills Nora but lets Abby go? critics huh? great job deceiving us NaughtyDog, making us believe Joel will help Ellie with her revenge in the trailer and making us believe he's going to have a big role in the game, and then you change everything, this is the last game I buy from Naughty Dog, and I'm getting a refund soon. what a let down that was. redo the game, or pull it from the shelves and don't make a sequel in the first place. fire Neil Druckmann. he's the reason this amazing game is now ruined, he is the guy that shoved his face in the game, just to have sex and spit on Joel's corpse. kinda symbolic. bring back the original crew. Neil didn't make this game for the fans or the story, he made it for himself. you can CLEARLY see that from the writing and storytelling, Neil shouldn't even create a game, let alone the sequel to a beloved and anticipated classic game.
87.	You know it's gonna be a flop when you show a big "SCREW YOU" to your old fans and try searching new ones in the face of LGBT minorities. It's a mashup of a Netflix version of High School Musical, Taken and Day Z, and it's pretty, pretty bad. It actually destroyed everything the first game consolidated. Naughty Dog, you just dug up your grave. We will forever remember TLOU 1 as the one and only.
88.	Honestly, you know what you did wrong Naughty Dog.,You don't need me to say how you **** up.,You know what you did, you had your chance.,Joel is dead.,Ellie's relationship gets thrown down the gutter.,She doesn't find true love and doesn't get her revenge because she imagines Joel playing a guitar.,Which I guess is supposed to mean "He doesn't want you to kill her",But people who played the last game know damn well if Ellie died Joel would burn forests and shatter mountains to find the bastard that killed Ellie just to perform every Mortal Kombat Finisher imaginable on them.,People are now trying to discredit these reviews as review bombers who haven't played the full 25-30 game experience and thus can't criticize the game but that is **** personified. If the game kills off a main character in the first hour, and you give it another 4 hours to get good, why would you spend the next 20-25 hours playing the game if you don't like it. How many chances are you required to give a game before your review is seen as valid.,They're also saying this is because of the "lgbt and trans characters in the game" but we've been fine with those characters every since that DLC of the first game came out.

	Also THEY are the ones that ended the only lgbt relationship in the damn game, not me. I would've preferred at the very least for Ellie to find love or someone to comfort her after the game's ending other than a **** guitar. But THEY are the ones that ruined that. Don't say the reviewer hate lgbt characters when the developers don't seem to want those relationships in the game either.,,Don't buy the game. The entirety of the cutscenes are on youtube and the gameplay isn't that much diferent from the last game. If you're so desperate for gameplay then play the last game or play a better one. Because otherwise if you're a fan of the series then the story isn't for you.
89.	this is clearly not a good game all those companies that gave this game good reviews are sell outs and damage the community they are part of i can no longer trust reviews from sites that gave this game 10/10 they just lost credibility . i give this game a 4 because graphics are amazing , combat is mediocre/repetitive but fluid, good sound , nice stages/ambient and some parts of the game where fun . but overall the story is what drives you to enjoy the graphics and combat and is TERRIBLE ,lets say that i forget about the LGBTQ stuff , is still nonsense , total garbage, is something that you dont even want to replay again, and they said if you put the leaks into context you will understand but the truth is that there is no context for 90% of the stuff that happens, the NPC's are garbage , dumb as a rock sometimes feels like they are blind and deaf no way this is a 10/10 game it is only 100% not recommended.
90.	what people dont get is we dont dislike the fact that we can have lgbt protagonist or villains what we hate is how bad the story is, the writer just basically tossed everything from the last game into a trash can not worth 60.,,a good game is a like a good pizza if you have god sauce and cooked dough but the toppings are trash the whole pizza becomes trash in TLOUp2 good graphics, decent gameplay but the story oof dumbed down characters plot not making sense forced agendas.,,Save 60 bucks do not buy this game.
91.	What is this? 95% are u sure? This game is completely based on the ending of the first game and has a rating higher than 1 game? This is crap. There is no magic between main characters like it was in the first game. It's... Boring and crappy story. Game play didn't change that much and your companions can't be noticed by enemies. Where is the revolution? There is nothing. First game was really something incredible. This is full of crappy LGBT characters with nonsense missions. Nooo pals, this is not how it should be. It can't be better than first.
92.	Imagine Star Wars, but you play as a trans person who beats Obi-wan over the head with a blunt weapon, to death. That's what this game is. And then instead of staging the rebellion and blowing up the Death Star, Luke spends 80% of the story dealing with his new gay lover.,,There is a time and a place for those things, this aint it. You have a HUGE problem when you let activists take over the writing of a beloved franchise, and forcefully shoehorn in their agenda like a square peg in a round hole.
93.	Imagine that in Walking dead 2 Lee Everett is alive and LGBT community will kill him. Imagine that in RDR 3 Arthur Morgan is alive and LGBT community will kill him. Imagine that in next Nemo cartoon LGBT community will kill Nemo's father. Such fillings you will get in TLOU 2. :c (sorry for my English)
94.	This game shows us again why we shouldn't believe early critic reviews.,,There are few steps how poor game changes into good game.,,1. Maker side(devs, distributions, and all partakers) gives money friendly medium and someone called "critic"(and I just want to call them "Swindler side") who are positive to their money.,,2. Swindler side writes critic that are very positive to bad game with no playing whole game.,,3. When all underwriting session is over, poor game received highly overrated metascore like 95.,,4. Lastly, if faithful worshiper who loves certain game series zealously and someone who are absorbed in PC deeply provide support that game, poor game will be a masterpiece.,,As all you can see, this result is TLoU2.,,Story? ruined. bunch of **** with being contaminated PC.,,The Last of Us 1 shows us how stereo typed-zombie games become well-made game with splendid story. We got touched through universality related humanism and paternal

	<p>love what Joel gives Eille under desperate situation.,--- Spoilers ---,but what about TLoU2? Joel became protector of LGBT. Joel became golf ball and died in vain. Eliie dig up his corpse and behead it in her memory. muscular girl who killed Joel roamed fields and destroyed everything all time with no clear purpose... what do you want to tell us, scenario writer? I think if he shows STRONG Abby's behind story, gamers will understand her motivation naturally in his delusion. That is his intention clearly. but No. No one understand this bad story.,,how about Graphic, sound? Not bad, but we just want a consecutive good scenario, not collateral things. Good graphic and sound make a game more remarkable when game is totally good.,TLoU series is dead. 2 killed 1 as Abby killed Joel.,DO NOT BUY this game and save your money. I think you can spend your money more wisely.,Contaminated metascore can't deceive gamers no longer.</p>
95.	<p>The graphics are good, animations are good. Its a shame the awful story ruins it. Its clear the reason certain things happen is because of the games LGBTQ agenda. If you play the game, you can clearly see the hate towards males and male protagonists. This game had so much potential, but a political agenda clearly got in the way.</p>
96.	<p>No one is mad about the games use of trans and lgbtq characters. We are mad because they did Joel dirty. Yes he deserved to die for basically sacrificing humanity for Ellie, but not like that man. They introduce a character no one knows anything about. Just to have that person kill one of the main character of the previous game. By beating his head in with a golf club. At least give us an hour or two of game play with Abby. That way we can start to understand her rage. The devs rushed it leaving the players with nothing, but rage after watching the character they loved get beat to death. Not being able to do anything to stop it. Then the ending come and finally we can kill Abby. We can have avenge Joel's death. And the Devs say NO they don't give you an option to kill her. You just let her go she's set free. All that build up for nothing just a clear set up for a third game. Awful just awful don't waste your money on this game.</p>