The changes of on- and offline presence of female and LGBT- gamers between 1995 and 2015

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Media images and narratives can inspire greatness and encourage values of social justice, but unfortunately, they are more often (consciously or unconsciously) constructed to reinforce harmful myths about women and people of color.

-Anita Sarkeesian

Chapter 1: Introduction

Modern media is a part of everyday life nowadays: (most) modern people wake up and check Facebook and their E-mail on their phones; they get up out of bed and watch some television, or turn on their PC's to do some quick work; on their way to work they see advertisements on billboards; at work they stay in contact with co-workers around the world by using Skype and E-mail. Out of the 7 billion people on earth, 3,3 billion of them are internet users (and the number grows every second!).[1] An internet user, as defined by this source, is someone that has internet access in their own home. This means that 3,3 billion people have internet access at home. Another source shows the worldwide daily use of the internet, in 2014. The researchers concluded the age group of people between 16 and 32 years old, uses internet more than 7 hours a day, the group between 33 and 52 use internet about 5,7 hours a day and the group of 53 and 64 uses internet 4,4 hours a day.[2] This is almost 1/3 of the day for the largest group! With these studies in mind, it is safe to say we are surrounded by modern media on a daily basis.

Now consider the images the media show you every day. If I think of my own Facebook feed, the shows I watch (or skip by) on television and advertisements I see on my way through town, I can think of a few things that, without fail, are part of my daily life. These things are food, cats and women. Almost every advertisement depicts a seductive woman trying to sell you a product (be it perfume, clothing or even cheese). This seductive woman is present in most, if not all media forms. She has no story and often not even a face. Mulvey would argue this would deprive the woman of all agency, and in this I agree with her. In my opinion, the dominant depiction of women in media is that of overly sexualized, vulnerable and unintelligent beings without agency.

Another group that is prone to being misrepresented, or not even represented at all, is that of the Lesbian Gay Bisexual and Transgender (LGBT)-community. As revealed by *GLAAD* (Gay & Lesbian Alliance Against Defamation), in their Studio Responsibility Index 2016 report "there was a noticeable resurgence of outright offensive depictions of LGBT people".[3] The report also advises "Filmmakers [to] examine what message they are really sending when they rely on thoughtless humor to exploit an already marginalized community" and "Not only must there be a larger number of LGBT roles, but they must be built with substance and purpose".[3] This means to me, that these factors are not being incorporated well enough into the television and film industry.

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[1] All live internet stats can be found at : http://www.internetlivestats.com/internet-users/

[2] http://www.statista.com/statistics/416850/average-duration-of-internet-use-age-device/

[3] See 'GLAAD 2016 Studio Responsibility Index' page 9, http://www.glaad.org/files/2016_SRI.pdf

Fortunately, there has been an emergence of LGBT acceptance in popular television: *Orange is the New Black* (2013) and *Faking It* (2014) to name two that depict multiple non-heteronormative sexualities and gender identities. These follow *Grey's Anatomy* (2005) and *Glee* (2009) that had introduced homosexual relationships to primetime television[4].

Even though the LGBT-community is getting more media attention than it used to, the representation is not always representative for the LGBT-community itself, but rather what the creators think will sell (Shaw 2014:17). In my opinion this is problematic, for it can reinforce stereotypes and stereotypical thinking that is harmful for the community.

The struggle for equal and honest representation for these two groups (the women and the LGBT-community) has also been fought on another media platform, namely that of video games. Being considered 'toys for boys' for a long time, video games, through their creators, have gained a misogynistic and heteronormative influence (Cassell & Jenkins 1998: 3). Nowadays, video games and online games are still seen as 'toys for boys', but to a lesser extent. This has to do with the rise of another large group of gamers, namely girls and women. This group has been portrayed as a marginal group in the gaming community, in reality however, the percentage of female gamers worldwide is between 45-52%[5] (depending on if smartphone games count). For such a large group, their representation in terms of characters in games is under average: according to a report by four (associate) professors of American universities, the percentage of female characters is only 12% (Williams, Martins, Consalvo & Ivory 2009: 817). But the offline representation is also low, for example in the video game industry (see chapter four).

Because of this low (or mis-) representation of female and LGBT characters in the video game industry (both in the video games themselves, as well as representation in the form of employment in the video game industry), there have been calls for reform to include women and LGBT individuals in the gaming industry. The controversy that has sparked the most debate in recent years, is the Gamergate controversy. During this controversy, various women in the gaming community were openly harassed. Anita Sarkeesian (feminist media critic, founder of *Feminist Frequency*) was threatened for trying to introduce or enlarge the presence of women and LGBT-individuals in games and in the gaming community. Zoe Quinn, a game developer, was part of the event that sparked this controversy when her former boyfriend Eron Gjoni published the "Zoë post"[6]. Due to the large amount of sympathy for Gjoni, Quinn was also threatened online. Where the controversy started off as a personal issue between two people, it has revealed gender issues within the gaming community in a large way. Gamergate brought forth two groups: the largest of which were individuals who were opposed to the idea of the inclusion of

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[4] See 'GLAAD 2015 Network Responsibility Index', http://www.glaad.org/nri2015
[5] See Jayanth, M. (2014) '52% of gamers are women – but the industry doesn't know it', http://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2014/sep/18/52-percent-people-playing-games-women-industry-doesnt-know
[6] The full Zoë post: https://thezoepost.wordpress.com/

women and LGBT-individuals.. The smaller was the group that would like to include women into the gaming society. Even though Quinn and Sarkeesian were negatively received by the larger group, they were able to bring the issue into the public eye and have put 'girl gamers and gaymers'[7], and their needs, on the map.

This controversy and the uproar it has caused in the gaming community, show the social relevance of this thesis: there is a social clash between a large portion of the male gamer community and the female and LGBT gamer community. The former wanting to maintain the 'traditional' division of rules within the gaming community, the latter wanting to be equally included into the gaming community. Not only does the latter group want to be included, they also want to change the way they are represented. Women in games are dominantly formed by the *damsel in distress* code: helpless, vulnerable, young and sexualized. This contributes to the image of women as objects: something that is fun to look at, but has little to no meaningful contribution. LGBT individuals are depicted in a multitude of ways, most of these depictions reinforcing stereotypes . A way this is done, is through *gender confusion*. Gender confusion is a method in video games (and other popular media) to use stereotypes to portray supposed traits of gender and sexuality as an entertaining part of the games. An example of gender confusion in video games is using transvestite characteristics to portray a homosexual. These representations will be further explained in chapter three.

The social conduct in videogames has its fundamentals in offline social construct: in the offline world, video games are seen as toys for boys; girls are supposed to play with Barbie dolls (Cassell & Jenkins 1998). This brings us to the scientific relevance: the fact that playing video games is seen as characteristic for heterosexual males and maleness, and is advertised as such in the offline world, ultimately influences the inclusion of females and LGBT-individuals. When a gamer includes himself or herself to a game, without disclosing his or her gender or sexual preference to the other gamers, the gamer is usually included. Only when the individual discloses their gender or sexual preference, and it diverges from a 'hetero male' identity, the problems start. In some games, being divergent doesn't matter, as long as you are skilled enough to play, such as case-study of the library in Toronto (see chapter four). In other games, once disclosed, female and LGBT-gamers are ridiculed, threatened or banned from social groups within the game, as will be depicted by Beavis and Charles (see chapters four and five).

The representations and misrepresentation and the inclusion and exclusion of women and the LGBT-community in the online and offline videogame community are what I want to explore. I hope to find an answer to my main question: "How has the on-and off-line presence of women and members of the LGBT community changed in online games and videogames between 1995 and 2015?". I will try to answer this by answering the following sub-questions: "How has gender representation in video games changed between 1995 and 2015?"; "How do females and LGBT-individuals experience the "offline"

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[7] The term "gaymer" is a play on "gay" and "gamer" and simply means (male) homosexual gamer.

gaming community?"; "How are gamer identities formed?" and "How do persons with non-heteronormative sexualities and gender identities perform in video games?".

Chapter 2: Theoretical Framework

To understand the arguments I want to make in this thesis, a few of the central concepts of my thesis must be explained. One of these is *gender*. Gender focuses on the socially constructed differences between men and women. French feminist Simone de Beauvoir famously stated "One is not born, but rather becomes, a woman" (Beauvoir, 1972 [1949]). This is distinction between labelling based on biological facts and labelling based on social construct is an early version of what we now call gender. This was, according to gender theorist Judith Butler, a turning point for feminist history, because it "debunked the claim that anatomy is destiny (Butler 1986: 35). The biological and historical definitions for what a 'woman' was, could now be looked at in a different light (de Beauvoir 1972[1949]: 65), namely that gender is socially constructed.

Gender theorist Raewyn Connell, builds on de Beauvoir's famous phrase, by adding "Though the position of women and men are not simply parallel, the principle is also true for men: one is not born masculine, but has to become a man" (Connell, 2013 [2009]: 5). Thus, gender can be seen as a socially constructed phenomenon, and not a biological or natural fact.

The next concept I want to explain, are that of *in-groups* and *out-groups*.When de Beauvoir explains what a woman is biologically, she states "The term 'female' is derogatory not because it emphasises women's animality, but because it imprisons her in her sex." This imprisonment in her sex" (de Beauvoir 1972 [1949]): 3). This would imply that when you are labelled as a female, you are instantly confined to the group of 'women'. When you gain access to this group you lose access from the group 'men'. For example, the in-group for a cisgendered woman would be the group of cisgendered women.

Sociologist William Sumner explains the theory of in-groups and out-groups based on the conception of the primitive society. Sumner states that "a group of groups may have some relation to each other [...] which draws them together and differentiates them from others. Thus a difference arises between ourselves: the we-group, or in-group, and everybody else, or the others-groups, out-groups" (Sumner 1911: 13). In other words, in-groups are groups of 'insiders', people that are akin to you in some way: the groups can be signified by gender, but for example, also by race, interests or family ties. And the out-group is the group of people that do not belong in the in-group, they lack the common trait to fit in the in-group. This also means there is no static in- or out-group: depending on the standpoint you take in your society, you are in-group and out-group at the same time. Kin, in the traditional sense can be seen as blood relatives, or family. In my thesis I will discuss two forms of kinship and in, - and out-groups, namely the virtual, fictive kinship and the construction of kinship in LAN cafés.

I will now discuss the term fictive kinship in relation to online video games. Kinship is defined as either "the state of being related to the people in your family"or "a feeling of being close or connected to

other people"[8]. Fictive kinship fits best with the second definition, since fictive kinship describes the social ties that based on neither consanguineal (blood ties) or affinal (marriage) ties. Although actual kin may enjoy playing videogames together, more kinship relationships are built online with complete strangers. This happens in what are called 'Guilds' in RPG's such as World of Warcraft and Tera or 'Clans' in FPS's such as Call of Duty. These 'guilds' consist of people that gather together in the game because of a similar trait they all share. The composition of these groups can vary from strangers that just need to team up once in a while to defeat a boss (a monster at the end of a level, or a dungeon), to people that know each other in the offline world, to even a mixture of both. Some groups are formed to bring players from specific countries together. An example of the is the World of Warcraft guild called *Low Landers*, a guild especially for Dutch gamers that has celebrated its 11th anniversary on the 12th of February of 2016. Another reason that guilds are formed, is to bring people with the same kind of sexuality together. This form of kinship will be depicted in chapters four and five.

The next form of kinship I will discuss is that which takes place in LAN-cafés. The kinship relations that develop in LAN-cafés are special in the way that people can be in the same room physically, whilst also playing being in the same area virtually. Other people in the LAN Café can see you in the offline world, as well as in the online world. The research conducted by Doctor in Future Studies Catherine Beavis and Doctor in Education Studies Claire Charles depicts this form of kinship. They conducted their research by asking girls with different ethnic backgrounds to tell about their acceptance or denial into the groups of male LAN-café dwellers. This form of kinship will also be covered in chapter four.

Another couple of terms that are especially important for my thesis are 'online' and 'offline'. The online world, or virtual world, is the digital realm gamers enter once they start up the game. Most (if not all) actions in the online world can be made without having consequences in the offline world. The offline world is the physical world people live in. A common mistake is to call the offline world the 'real' world. The reason it is a mistake to call the offline realm the 'real world', is because the relationships, actions and identities in the virtual, or online realm, may be a genuine representation of the individual, even when this identity is not accepted in the offline realm. An example of this is the Amazons' guild leader, Rafflesia. Quintarelli (in Frömming 2013) tells about the interesting character that is Rafflesia: an offline trans-man, only able to express his 'true' self through the female character he plays in the game *Second Life*. I will tell more about Rafflesia in chapter 5.

Lina Eklund of Stockholm University also writes about the "online and offline"-debate. She introduces her study with the statement that "the debate often focuses on the argument that offline is the same as 'real life' and that online is 'virtual' and therefore less real" (Eklund 2014: 528). By comparing many other studies on this topic, Eklund draws attention to the large social aspect that is apparent in (MMO)RPGs. By calling virtual worlds 'social' worlds (528), Eklund is able to convince the reader that the

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[8] Definition by Merriam Webster Online Dictionary http://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/kinship

virtual world is just as real as any other, and concludes her essay by stating: "that on- and offline are inexorably linked through the social organizational demands of online gaming" (Eklund 2014: 534). With this, she means that social implications that are implied in offline life, are also implied in online life through certain aspects of the game. For example, you can think of people having to team up to beat an exceptionally strong monster. In this thesis, I will be using Eklund's definitions of 'offline' and 'online', rather than 'real' and 'virtual' to differentiate between the two social worlds.

This brings me to the final concept that needs to be explained, which is the concept of performance. This is closely entangled with the terms online and offline, since the presence in either realm may change the individual's' 'performance'. The theory of performance comes from Canadian sociologist Erving Goffman. Goffman saw a connection between the kinds of acts that people put on in their daily life and theatrical performances. Goffman uses many aspects of a theatre performance to realize his idea of performance in social context, such as 'setting': this is where the actor performs. The setting is constructed by the 'frontstage' and the 'backstage'; the 'frontstage' is where actions and speech is presented for the audience, the 'backstage' is what happens beyond the eyes of the audience. The dynamics between the actor and the audience often determine which props and what kind of speech the actor uses, which is the same in real life: depending on who you are with, you may change in the way you present yourself. This concept is crucial for my thesis, as it helps to understand self-representation in video games. By understanding performance, it is more easy to understand why individuals choose to act one way when they are offline, and another way when they are online.

Chapter 3: 'Early' and Modern Gaming and Gender: representation

In this chapter I will illustrate the way representation of women and the LGBT-community in video games has changed between 1995 and 2015. I will demonstrate this by giving examples of games that range between multiple genres of videogames in a chronological order.

To put things in perspective, I'll give an example of a game that was published before 1995. One of the games discussed in Shaw (2014) that particularly caught my eye was a game called *Custer's Revenge*. *Custer's Revenge* is a game set in the American Indian Wars that occurred between 1775 and the early 1900's. The goal for the player is to play an American cavalry commander and kill as many Native American men as possible, so you can find and rape the Native American princess. This game was first released in 1982, and even though it can be seen as a non-normative game, "[it] is also part of the game industry's long-standing tradition of commercializing women's bodies for the heterosexual, male gaze" (Shaw 2014: 21).

When we fast-forward to about 1995, the percentage of households with a computer was only 36,6% (1997) whereas nowadays only 24%[9] does not have a personal computer. The percentage of

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[9] https://www.statista.com/statistics/274845/number-of-computers-in-households-in-great-britain-since-2005/

households with internet connection was even lower, namely 18% (Newburger 2001: 1). This means online gaming couldn't have been as popular as they are now. The popularity of offline video games on the other hand, increased drastically when game consoles became household items. *Computer Gaming World* stated that NES (Nintendo Entertainment System) had "penetrated to 30% of American households" in 1990.[10]

Because video games were gaining popularity and a much larger audience in the 90's, it seemed sensible to compare video games that were released between January of 1995 and December of 2005 with video games that were published between January of 2006 and December of 2015. By comparing games within franchises, I want to research the evolution of franchises when it comes to gender and sexuality

3.1 Gaming and gender representation through the 1995 to 2005

I will now discuss gender and sexuality in a few games, or game franchises, that were popular between 1995 and 2005. The games and franchises I've decided to discuss in this time period are *Fable: The Lost Chapters* (2005, Lionhead Studios), *Tomb Raider* (1996, Core Design), and *World of Warcraft* (2004, Blizzard). Of these games, only *World of Warcraft*, is an offline game.I want to analyse these games specifically, because these were popular games (for instance, *Fable: The Lost Chapters* sold 3,5 million copies worldwide[11]) and therefore their representation of gender and sexuality had a large audience.

I'll begin my analysis with *Fable: The Lost Chapters*. As a first video game in a series of three, *The Lost Chapters* is more closed to gender options as there is no choice in playable sex: you can only play with a male character (Shaw 2014: 26). This was the norm for this time in video gaming, as it also occurred in video games such as *Zelda¹²* and *Pokemon¹³*. As opposed to this closed view on gender, *The Lost Chapters* does have an open view on sexuality. Unlike other games in which sexuality is exclusively heterosexual (*Tomb Raider)* or left undefined (such as in the *Zelda¹²* games). *The Lost Chapters* allows players to choose their own sexuality. Shaw defines how the developers have done this: the sexuality of the players' character is initially stated "unknown" in the stats sheet. When the character marries a female character, the sexuality status changes to "heterosexual". When the character marries a male character, the sexuality status changes to "homosexual". If you marry a woman after marrying your husband (without getting a divorce first), your status will change to "bisexual" (Shaw 2014: 26). This therefore also includes polygamy. In the world of gaming, this game is seen as very including to other sexualities, especially for the time it was developed in.

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[10] (Sipe 1990: 28).

[11] See: http://www.mcvuk.com/news/read/5m-sales-goal-for-fable-iii

[12] As depicted in: Martin, C. (2009). 'Legend of Zelda' *Encyclopedia of Play in Today's Society* London, SAGE Publications, Inc: 357- 358.

[13] As depicted in: Grieve, O. (2009). 'Pokémon' *Encyclopedia of Play in Today's Society* London, SAGE Publications, Inc: 563 – 564.

I will now discuss the most highly sexualized game in my list of games, namely *Tomb Raider*. *Tomb Raider* is a highly controversial game because the protagonist is female, but she is also depicted very sexually. The traditional Lara Croft in 1996 was depicted wearing a skin-tight tank top (covering breasts that seemed out of proportion to her body) and booty shorts. Her attire,according to Shaw, "seems poorly suited to traipsing through danger-filled tombs" (Shaw 2014: 60). Maya Mikula, senior lecturer at Nottingham Trent University states: "She is indeed a sex object; she is indeed a positive image and a role model; and many things in between" (Mikula in Shaw 2014: 63). That Lara Croft has a large role as a sex object becomes clear to me during this research: there appears to be a fan-made mod(ification) for the *Tomb Raider* games going all the way back to this first 1996 game that makes Lara Croft appear naked.[14]

Lastly, I'd like to analyze one the first massively mulitplayer online game, namely *World of Warcraft*, released in November of 2004. In this game, as with most RPG's, the first thing a player will have to do is create an avatar. An avatar is the character that will represent the player in the video game. Schmieder who is this? tells about the initial character selection for WoW: "Immediately, when choosing their characters, players have to decide whether they want to play a male or female character" (Schmieder 2008: 8). The problem with this lies in the heteronormative depiction of gender selection: even with the fantasy races, "the male characters are bigger and more strongly built – whereas the female characters are more delicate and show articulate breast curves" (Schmieder 2008: 8). Players are immediately made to associate (physical) strength with male characters. Even in the later expansion packs of the game, at least up to its 5th expansion pack *Warlords of Draenor,* the game does not offer character customization. Character customization means is the ability to use scales (varying from a few different preset sizes to pixel-by-pixel customization) to fully customize your character's' appearance. This gives players the freedom to create any character they want: whether they want a muscular female character, a scrawny male character, or a stereotypical gender representation, it is all possible. Being able to customize your character is an important for gamers, since it allows them to create a character they can fully identify with. importance of identification

 In the *World of Warcraft* games unfortunately, full character customization is too large for the games servers[15], and players will still be restricted to either a female or a male character.

Considering sexuality in the game, players can express interest in each other online by using 'command codes', or CC's. CC's are codes a player can enter into the chat that make their avatar perform an action; for example, the CC "/dance" makes the player's' avatar dance in the game. Using command codes provides a way to communicate non-verbally with other players. In relation to the expression of sexuality, CC's provide a way to let another person know what you think of them, or their character

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[14] The mod is called *Nude Raider* and a its implications can be viewed in this video:
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=HhKFvvugv_E .
[15] Source: http://www.wowhead.com/legion#toc

without having to say it straightforward. Sundén & Sveningsson mention "/blow", which makes your character blow a kiss in the wind, as a CC used to show interest (Sundén & Sveningsson 2012: 71). A few others that might show (sexual) interest are "/blush", "/kiss" and "/tease".[16]

Sveningsson tells of an interesting experience she had with the personal messaging in *World of Warcraft* (Sundén & Sveningsson 2012). She was in a group, trying to kill monsters in a *dungeon* (special 5-player area) when "one of the guys started to talk about seeing naked persons, and he said that it looked nice". It gave Sveningsson a "slightly uncomfortable" feeling, especially after the guy made his avatar flirt and dance with Sveningssons character (Sundén & Sveningsson 2012: 71). Zek Valkyrie, lector at the University of Colorado, has explanation for this flirting with a female avatar, namely: "scripts in the virtual world are parallel to the hegemonic constructions of male and female sexuality in the solid world: men are aggressors and supposedly initiate sex while women are required to act reserved and are encouraged to carefully choose their partners" (Valkyrie 2011 in Sundén & Sveningsson 2012: 73).

Players thus get freedom to pursue their own sexual interest in the game with other individuals, almost as they would in the offline realm. This includes male and female avatars being able to perform CC's to communicate with avatars of the same sex. World of Warcraft, unlike *Fable: The Lost Chapters*, does not provide a marriage option in the game, but players can organize one on their own.[17]

Where many players wish for an in-game marriage option, others are against it. I will depict these groups by adding a few excerpts of the World of Warcraft forum:

Woolies – 14/03/2013:   I wanna see a place where you can go with someone else and choose to marry
                        another player.... but like you would have to choose wisely for once you've picked
                        a mate you wouldn't get a second chance! (even after divorce haha!)
                        I wanna walk around with my love and a wife and husband title above our heads
                        already! ☹

Amulet – 14/03/2013:   Please don't ever implement this :(
                        It'll start with the QQ why males can't marry each other and such..
                        And before you know it we're able to have our own houses and children as well,
                        this isn't World of Simcraft tbh :c
                        /QQ[18]

In this excerpt, player *Woolies* wants World of Warcraft to add a marriage option in the game (the sexuality of the players in-game character is heterosexual as the player states "and a wife and husband

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[16] More Chat Command Codes: http://wowwiki.wikia.com/wiki/List_of_slash_commands_(old)
[17] Source: http://wowwiki.wikia.com/wiki/Guide_to_roleplaying_a_wedding
[18] Source: http://eu.battle.net/wow/en/forum/topic/6891640912

title"). Player *Amulet* responds negatively that "It'll start with the QQ [gamer-lingo that in this sense is used to depict a crying face] why males can't marry each other". This player immediately implies gay marriage in the game would be banned, as well as that it would cause whining (or "QQ"). As for being open for different types of sexuality, and coming out for them, the next conversation will show some opinions:

Lonita – 24/11/2014:	I'll probably get shot down for this - but I was wondering why WoW has no gay characters? Gays play the game too, and it's the 21st Century and all. A lot of young people play the game, and it'd make a good impression, and help people be more accepting in everyday life. Yes, I'm gay, and don't really care about the homophobes, but think WoW would be doing themselves a service if they implemented a character into the game which is gay.
Paunzarfaust – 25/11/2014:	Boy you on drugs?
Graeham – 25/11/2014:	I just hope that if they do decide to add a gay character then it'll be done tastefully and respectfully. We need more gay characters in mainstream games who just happen to be gay instead of being a walking parody.
Ambria – 25/11/2014:	I think some are gay they just don't come right out and say it. Anduin for example[19]

In this conversation a homosexual player, *Lonita*, comes out as gay, already taking into account they may "probably get shot down for this". This expectation of negative reactions is reinforced by the next comment, by *Paunzarfaust*, who considers that *Lonita*s' idea must be drug induced. What this inclines, is that one must be intoxicated to come up with such a "crazy" idea. *Graeham* provides a neutral stance between both of them, but is more receptive to the idea of gay characters being added to the game. *Ambria* refers to a possible 'closeted' character in the lore.

   The interesting thing about this conversation is that, in the end, it turns out to be positive, or at least neutral to the idea of adding gay characters. But when you look closer, the messages are rated by other players: Whereas *Paunzerfausts*' comment has gotten one vote down, *Lonitas'* initial comment has 78 down votes. This means 78 players have taken the time to show they have negative thoughts about what *Lonita* is suggesting. On the other side, *Graehams'* comment got 61 up votes, showing positive thoughts towards his comment. *Ambria* also got 45 up votes, showing either positive feelings towards gay characters or agreement with *Ambrias's* comment. The comment *Graeham* made, immediately made me think of something Shaw stated in her 2009 essay about the general acceptance of LGBT representation

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[19] Source: http://eu.battle.net/wow/en/forum/topic/12844335478

in video games. She states "Not all were opposed to homosexuality per se. Some were concerned that inclusion for the sake of inclusion would result in tokenism and poor video games" (2009: 236).

In conclusion, the representation of gender and sexuality in *World of Warcraft* is controversial: on the one side, developers allow players to communicate on verbally (personal messages) and non-verbally (command codes) which gives them freedom to express their sexuality and gender preferences. On the other side, players are tied to a binary gender-division when choosing an avatar, and openly coming out for a deviate sexuality may cause problems, as can be seen in the forum excerpts

3.2 Gaming and gender representation through 2006 to 2015

To continue this chapter's analysis, I will now discuss my selection of video games for the timeframe of January 2006 to December 2015. These video games are: *Fable II* (2008, Lionhead Studios), *Fable III* (2010, Lionhead Studios), *Tomb Raider: Legend* (2006, Eidos Interactive), *Tomb Raider* (2013, Square Enix) and *Dragon Age: Inquisition* (2014, BioWare). Of these games, the *Fable* and *Tomb Raider* games are ongoing franchises and the *Dragon Age* franchise began after 2005. I shall start with the franchises that have already been mentioned before, namely *Fable* and *Tomb Raider.*

Following the successful *The Lost Chapters* the *Fable* franchise developed two more games and released them in 2008 and 2010. A large difference in *Fable II* (2008) is that you can pick your characters' gender. Shaw: "Either option is relatively androgynous, and largely, the difference is made clear only by the blue or pink border around the images" (Shaw 2014: 28). In other words, the depicted characters have little physical difference, but are separated through use of gendered colors. In defense of the game, character selection is not done by depicting the adult characters, but rather make the player choose between two images of pre-teens, as seen below.[20]

Image 1: Fable 2: Gender Selection

[20] Photo source: http://culturedigitally.org/2013/10/the-lost-queer-potential-of-fable/

Another change that has been made in *Fable II* is sexuality. Whereas sexuality changed according to whom you married in *Fable: The Lost Chapters,* marriage is no longer needed to show sexuality, as you are now able to "seduce" another character or by paying sex workers (Shaw: 28).

Yet another change in relation to the question of sexuality is that all NPC's (non-player characters) have been assigned a specific sexuality (heterosexual, gay, lesbian and bisexual). By pursuing NPC's with a specific sexuality, your character will be labeled as this corresponding sexuality (Shaw 2014: 30).

In *Fable III,* not only are the physical differences between characters (male or female) more proclaimed, gender roles also have a more heteronormative expression: when you choose to play a male character, your first quest is to save your female friend; as a female player you "fight by your male friends' side" by hugging or kissing him (Shaw 2014: 32). So, as a male you are independent and are thrown into a hero role and as a female protagonist, you are reduced to a side-kick. In my opinion, Lionhead Studios took one step forward and two steps back with the introduction of *Fable II* and *Fable III.*

The next two games I will discuss are *Tomb Raider: Legends* (2006) and *Tomb Raider* (2013). In my opinion, the female protagonist in *Tomb Raider*, *Lara Croft* was reduced to vulnerable, scared woman in the transition between *Tomb Raider: Legends* (2006) and *Tomb Raider* (2013). Where the character began as strong, independent but hypersexualized women (in 1996 and 2006), she was now depicted as vulnerable, hurting and submissive (2013). According to Shaw, the only evidence you need to support this opinion, are the two box-covers of the 2006 and 2013 *Tomb Raider* games, as depicted in images 2 and 3:

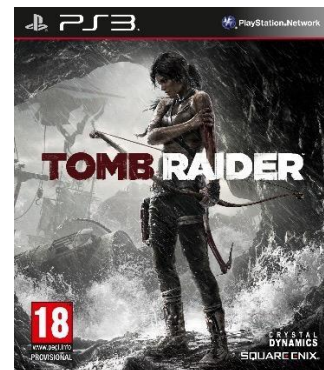

Image 2: Tomb Raider: Legends (2006)[21]
(2013)[22]

Image 3: Tomb Raider

Shaw states: "The *Legend* box shows Lara staring confidently, whereas the box for the reboot shows

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[21] Photo source: http://www.mobygames.com/game/ps2/lara-croft-tomb-raider-legend/cover-art/gameCoverId,62220/
[22] Photo source: http://de.tombraider.wikia.com/wiki/Tomb_Raider_(2013)

Lara bending her head, gripping an injured arm, and gazing downward and away from the player" (Shaw 2014: 60). The experience of Lara as either a strong, independent woman or a vulnerable, submissive one, has to do with appearance, but also the male gaze. Laura Mulvey introduced the term "male gaze" as the subjective male looking at the female, objectifying her. There is a certain gender role dichotomy considering the gaze: the active role belongs to the looking male, the passive role is given to the looked-at female (Mulvey ([1975]1999): 383). By acting according to the male gaze, as a looked-at female, the 2013 *Lara* immediately becomes more vulnerable or submissive than 1996/2006 *Lara*. She is allowing herself to be looked at without challenging this gaze. This, in turn, is exactly what makes 2006 *Lara* a more confident, but also more sexual character. By returning, or even challenging the spectators' gaze, 2006 *Lara* lets the spectator know they are equals. In terms of voyeuristic-scopophilia (defined as "the pleasure one gets from looking at others" by Mulvey), 2006 *Lara* is returning a sexually loaded gaze. She is challenging the male gaze with an emasculating female gaze.

Another worrisome factor to the 2013 *Tomb Raider* is the fact that the developers victimize this possible role-model (now more than ever with a moderated appearance) by adding an attempted rape scene in one of the video games' cut scenes. Mary Hamilton, writer for the Guardian, states "The idea that *Lara* – like *Samus* from *Metroid Prime* – should have an origin story [the 2013 *Tomb Raider* is an origin story] in which she is weak in order to explain her strength is difficult to swallow".[23] In my opinion, having to give *Lara Croft* an origin story of sexual abuse and hardship for the sake of her strong character later, is a harmful representation: it gives the idea that a woman can only become strong and independent if she has had to face these hardships.

Following these two older franchises, I will dive into a new one, namely *Dragon Age.* The *Dragon Age* franchise has been progressive in terms of gender representation, not only for its gender representation of women, but also for the LGBT-community. *Dragon Age: Inquisition* even received a GLAAD-award for its outstanding representation of LGBT characters.[24] The award the developers received, was earned through introducing ""many complex and unique LGBT characters prominently integrated throughout the game". According to Jenny Lööf, PhD candidate of Stockholm University, this latest addition to the series also seems to be the most realistic game in terms of romance and courting. Whereas other games (*Fable, Dragon Age: Origins* (2009)) allow players to "court" the NPC of their choosing by showering the character with gifts, courting in *Dragon Age: Inquisition* occurs through choice of narrative (Lööf 2015: 26). In other words, the player uses dialogue to woo their love interest. So next to offering rich LGBT-characters, *Dragon Age: Inquisition* also offers a (more) realistic romance and courting system, stepping away from the traditional gift-system.

After analyzing these video games, and watching franchises evolve, it seems there is not one

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[23] Source: http://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2012/jun/13/tomb-raider-lara-croft-rape-attempt
[24] Source: http://www.gamespot.com/articles/dragon-age-inquisition-honored-by-lgbt-advocacy-gr/1100-6424838/

conclusion to this analysis. Where some franchises are inclusive to all sorts of representations of gender and sexuality (*Dragon Age*), others are awkwardly staying in limbo on how to depict gender and sexuality (*Fable*) or are regressing to a less equal representation (*Tomb Raider*).

Chapter 4: Offline Gender Representation & Acceptance

In the previous chapter I have discussed the ways video games and gender representation have changed in the online sense throughout the years. Now I will discuss the gender representation in the offline gaming community: that of LAN cafés and work environments.

4.1 Representation and Acceptance in LAN-Cafés

A LAN (local area network) café is a café (or other place that provides internet) in which many gamers can play games in the same room. Depending on the maximum amount of gamers per game, these gamers are also able to play together. The difference between LAN cafés and cybercafés or internet cafés, is that the latter two mostly cater to people looking to use the internet shortly (whilst on vacation or so) and LAN cafés are usually for prolonged use.

Popular games that are played in LAN cafés are MMORPG's such as *World of Warcraft* (unlimited amount of players, although there is a cap in raids or dungeons), *League of Legends* (5x5 players or less) and *Guild Wars 2* (unlimited amount of players, although there is a cap in raids or dungeons). Although these are some of the most popular MMORPG's, and females and LGBT-individuals make up for a large part of the community that play these games, acceptance into the LAN café and LAN parties isn't obvious.

Nevertheless, this has little to do with lack of skill, as most people that go to LAN cafés are skilled gamers, and are trying to find a place to play with friends with reliable internet connection. The problem Beavis and Charles give for this lack of access for females is the is that "the subject 'girl' gamer [is] instantly 'othered' and recognizable in the location" (695). In other words, because they are girls, and are immediately recognized as biologically different, they are singled out. This can result into being denied access to the café, or maybe worse, being allowed in, but run the risk of being treated as a pariah, as what happens to one of the girls in Beavis and Charles' research (Beavis & Charles 2007). This almost purely biological recognition could work in the favor of the biologically (looking) males that have non-heteronormative sexualities. Since they cannot be singled out on account of their physical appearance (providing they don't express their sexuality openly), these specific males could be allowed access to the LAN cafés without too much trouble.

In their article, Beavis and Charles speak with different girls that try to gain access to LAN cafés. Most of these girls were singled out before they could even show what they were worth. One girl, Lorelle,

stated that she felt the wariness of other players (and even the manager) of a girl in the café. Even her boyfriend said it wasn't natural for girls to play videogames (697).

Being told she was not "normal" for playing videogames also happened to Hamilton (Hamilton 2008) The girls in Beavis' and Charles' article find it difficult to fit two very different parts of their identity together, and let both sides be accepted: the girl and the gamer. The 'girl' is the biological sex and socially constructed gender of the individual, and the 'girl' brings with her all of the prejudice of 'not being able to play video games', 'shouldn't be interested in gaming' and feeling the need to be feminine (699). This is seen as being directly opposed to the 'gamer': with the 'ability to play video games', and being the 'casual kind of type' (699). Another girl claimed that even though she was competent, she would get compliments that refer to her gender, namely that of being "good, for a girl" (699).

Yvonne, another girl Beavis and Charles questioned, was pleased with the attention she got from the boys in her local LAN-café. She says she felt enabled by her identity of "girl gamer" (Beavis and Charles 2007:702).

Even though the girls struggle with the forming of their identities, Butler states that because of this, the girls gained agency: they let themselves be named or labelled, and embrace their given identity (694). "Through subjective agency they simultaneously enjoyed recognition and praise for their competence as 'girl' gamers, and a rallying point from which to assert the competence of 'girl' gamers (704).

Another site in which acceptance was researched is in a gaming club in a library in a Toronto deprived district. Jenson, Fisher and Castell research how the gender roles and gender representation change when you change the dynamics of a gaming club. The research took two years, in which the dynamics of the groups changed multiple times. In year one, the club started as two separate groups: the boys-group and the girls-group. These groups would be combined after a month to form a mixed group of both girls and boys (Jenson, Fisher & Castell 2011: 154 -155). In year two the club was a female-only club for the first 4 months. After those first four months, a group of boys would take turns being in the club in 5-week rotations (Jenson, Fisher & Castell 2011: 158).

Because of changing the dynamics of the gaming club, Jenson, Fisher and Castell were able to show changes in division of gender roles and representation in the club. In year one, fourteen boys and four girls were allowed into the club; their teacher-librarian was male and two of the three student assistants were female (Jenson, Fisher & Castell 2011: 154). Although the girls and boys were playing in the same space, they chose not to play together 2011: 155). Besides not being interested in playing together, there is a sense of power relations, domination and exclusion. The boys held monopoly over their favorite games, and rarely let girls play with them. Jenson, Fisher and Castell tell of the power relations between specifically four children, Henry, Mohammed, Tressa and Kirsta. In this example, you must understand one thing clearly: the instruments that can be played in *Rock Band* are prioritized by the children (2011: 156). Boys can play the "best" instruments, namely the guitar and the drums. Girls, and

novice boys, can sing or play bass, which are considered secondary instruments. In this example, Henry, Mohammed and Tressa are playing *Rock Band* together: Tressa sings, Henry plays guitar and Mohammed is on the drums. They exclude Kirsta from playing with them, stating she "has to practice her singing" (2011: 156). This shows that even though there is still an unequal division in the gaming club, it is not purely about sex, but also about skill.

Tressa is allowed to play the game with the boys (they tell her she is a "super star" (2011: 155)), admittedly assuming the role they choose for her, but Kirsta is not: she is not skilled enough. Jenson, Fisher and Castell state that "there was little doubt […] that the boys dominated the club. Not only because their sheer numbers, but also because of their abilities to "level up" (2011: 157).

In year two, things changed for the group: since the girls got time to accustom and become skilled in the games in an atmosphere without boys, they felt more confident about their gaming skills. In year two, fifteen girls in total signed up for the gaming club, and they received a female librarian-teacher. After four months of having a girl-only gaming club, Jenson, Fisher and Castell decided to split the group into a group of less-skilled girls and a group of skilled girls + a rotation of five boys per five weeks (2011: 159). Instead of backing down to the newly arrived boys, the girls began to dominate (159) and protect what was "theirs" (160). Instead of, like the boys in year one, choosing skill over sex, the girls chose sex over skill: if a girl wanted to play, the boy would have to leave. For example: "Although some of these boys were clearly more competent gamers than the girls, and tried to use this fact as a rationale for why they should determine the ground rules for play, the girls always remained in control" (160). The girls in the all-girl group also developed a different disposition to the other girls in year one. In the new environment, without the domination of either boys, or dominating girls, they were able to improve their gaming skills drastically (161): they were able to break the "glass ceiling" that was keeping them grounded.

4.2 Representation and Acceptance in Work Environments

After looking at how gender roles are enforced in an entertainment environment (LAN-Cafés and after-school clubs), I will now take a look at the representation and acceptance in work environments. For such a large industry, grossing $10,5 billion in 2009, women make up approximately 12% of the workforce (Jenson, Fisher & Castell 2011: 149). This is an incredibly low representation of women, especially when you focus on the departments they work in. Julie Prescott and Jan Bogg have researched just this. Since 12% of the workforce is female, there is less interaction between males and females than is preferable; this leads to preservation of gender-role stereotypes (Prescott & Bogg 2011: 207). Because of these stereotypes, females rather seek jobs in areas that are gender-inclusive. This further enforces the stereotypes, as well as contributing to skill deficits in sectors, such as IT (Prescott & Bogg 2011: 207).

This exclusion of workforce and therefore contributing to women that are less-skilled in the sector has to do with the "glass ceiling". The "glass ceiling" is defined as such by the Glass Ceiling Commission: "... invisible, artificial barriers that prevent qualified individuals from advancing within their organization

and reaching their full potential. […] Today it is evident that ceilings and walls exist throughout most workplaces for minorities and women" (Prescott & Bogg 2011: 207). This effect is clear to see when analyzing the gaming industry in the UK; out of the 9000 jobs in gaming, only 6,9% of females are in a developmental position in the industry (209). The following table will demonstrate the segregation of males and females in the gaming industry: (Prescott & Bogg 2011: 210).

Occupation	Male	Female
OPS/IT/HR	53%	47%
Writing	70%	30%
Mkt/PR/Sales	75%	25%
Production	79%	21%
QA	87%	13%
Executive	88%	12%
Visual Arts	89%	11%
Design	90%	10%
Audio	90%	10%
Programming	95%	5%

Table 1: The Percentage of men and women in each job description within the gaming industry.

The highest percentages are in OPS/IT/HR, writing and Mkt/PR/Sales. These are mostly seen as the "soft" side of the sector, as opposed to programming (5% female) and Design (10% female). Blickenstaff tries to give an explanation for why women are present in the "soft" side of the gaming industry, but not the "hard" sector, by introducing nine possible forces behind women falling short of "hard" sector jobs. These nine possible forces are: "biological gender differences in ability; girls' lack of preparation in and poor attitude towards math and science; the absence of female role models; science curricula and pedagogy that is irrelevant to girls and favors boys; a chilly academic climate; cultural pressure to conform to gender roles; and, the inherent masculine worldview in scientific epistemology" (Blickenstaff 2005: 371-372).

Cassell & Jenkins join Blickenstaff in seeing problems for women in the computer sector resulting from being "disadvantaged" because they didn't get to play with computers as much as boys when they were children (1998: 11). They account this to the fact that "the problem in differential attraction to computer games stems from the fact that here […] the cultural constructions of gender are not different from those of power" (1998: 11). With this, they mean that the people in power (institutions, parents), also determine and enforce the cultural "act" of gender; when playing computer games is predetermined as "something for boys" institutions will enforce this. These cultural constructions of gender result in differential access to technological fields for boys and girls (1998:11).

The position females take in the gaming industry, too low to be even considered equal, with only a few sectors that are almost divided 50/50. The fact that there are less women in the industry can have many different origins: from being kept away from computers as a child because they are "for boys" or because girls "wouldn't understand".

Unfortunately, there is not a lot information on the representation and acceptance of LGBT-individuals in the gaming community. Luckily a 2005 report from the IGDA gives some insights. In this report, 6437 individuals working in the gaming industry responded to a survey on their identity and their thoughts about working in the industry. Of the responses, 88,5% of the responding individuals identified as male and 11,5% identified as female (Gourdin 2005: 12). These were the only two given options, so it is unclear if 100% of the respondents can actually identify as either male or female, or decided to fill in the "next best". Next, the responding individuals were asked to answer statements by choosing a statement between "strongly agree" and "strongly disagree": the table can be seen below.

		Strongly Agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
The game industry workforce is diverse.	Male	7%	30%	21%	32%	10%
	Female	5%	22%	16%	39%	18%
The company I work for is diverse.	Male	11%	34%	28%	22%	6%
	Female	11%	34%	28%	21%	7%
My current project/team is diverse.	Male	8%	32%	29%	24%	7%
	Female	11%	33%	26%	23%	7%
It appears that diversity is important to my employer.	Male	9%	28%	43%	15%	4%
	Female	14%	33%	36%	13%	4%
A diverse workforce has a direct impact on the games produced.	Male	16%	37%	29%	13%	5%
	Female	34%	41%	19%	5%	1%
My future project/team needs to have more diversity.	Male	8%	27%	44%	16%	5%
	Female	14%	35%	39%	10%	2%
Workforce diversity is important to the future success of the game industry.	Male	21%	37%	26%	11%	5%
	Female	41%	38%	17%	3%	2%

Table 2: Opinions on Diversity: Male vs. Female

The statements that had significantly nuanced different answers between gender are the statements "A diverse workplace has direct impact on the games produced" and "Workplace diversity is important to the future success of the game industry" (Gourdin 2005: 14). In both cases, there were fewer men that would "strongly agree" with the statement, rather choosing for a more moderated answer. In both questions, more than 50% of the women answered with either "strongly agree" or "agree", hardly choosing the "disagree" or "strongly disagree" options.

Gourdin also researched sexuality in this report. Of the 6437 individuals that responded, 92% was heterosexual, 2,7% (≈174 respondents) was gay/lesbian, 2,7% (≈174 respondents) was bisexual and 2,6% (≈167 respondents) did not want to disclose this information (Gourdin 2005: 15). Again, Gourdin further researched the respondents by asking them to answer statements, you can see the results in table 3.

		Strongly Agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
The game industry workforce is diverse.	Heterosexual	7%	30%	20%	33%	11%
	Bi/Lesbian/Gay	5%	21%	19%	37%	18%
The company I work for is diverse.	Heterosexual	11%	34%	28%	22%	6%
	Bi/Lesbian/Gay	8%	34%	28%	21%	9%
My current project/team is diverse.	Heterosexual	9%	32%	29%	24%	7%
	Bi/Lesbian/Gay	6%	36%	25%	24%	9%
It appears that diversity is important to my employer.	Heterosexual	10%	29%	43%	15%	4%
	Bi/Lesbian/Gay	10%	30%	33%	21%	6%
A diverse workforce has a direct impact on the games produced.	Heterosexual	17%	38%	28%	13%	4%
	Bi/Lesbian/Gay	31%	39%	21%	8%	1%
My future project/team needs to have more diversity.	Heterosexual	8%	28%	44%	16%	5%
	Bi/Lesbian/Gay	19%	34%	36%	10%	1%
Workforce diversity is important to the future success of the game industry.	Heterosexual	22%	37%	25%	10%	5%
	Bi/Lesbian/Gay	38%	36%	19%	6%	2%

Table 3: Opinions on Diversity: Heterosexual vs. Bi/Lesbian/Gay

Again, I have marked the statements in which there are considerable differences in answers. Next to the two statements I've discussed while analyzing the Opinions on diversity male/female, two new statements produce interesting answers: "It appears that diversity is important to my employer" and "My future project/team need to have more diversity". The first being answered more neutral, leaning positive by the individuals that identify as Heterosexual and more neutral leaning negative by the individuals that identify as Bi/Lesbian/Gay. The second new question, follows the pattern the other two (that were discussed

earlier) made: the minority group more "strongly agrees" with the statements considering future productions and future diversity, whereas the majority group tends to take a more moderated stance.

When we look at the results from Gourdin's research, it is clear that the 'minorities' (heterosexual females and LGBT-individuals) still form a minority in the gaming industry. Considering the statements, the minority-groups are inclined to want more diversity, whereas the majority-group (or traditional gaming industry worker) tends to be more moderate.

Chapter 5: Performance and Identity in Video Games/ Case Study: Rafflesia

Something that has been important for this thesis, is finding out that the formation of intersectional identity and the performance of this identity is difficult for "girl gamers" and "gaymers". Even if they have been able to create an identity that fits them, this identity may not be accepted (in both on- and offline sphere) or will still be seen as secondary to the heterosexual male gamer identity. For most, performance of identity changes while moving through different settings.

An extraordinary example of intersectional identities and performance is the character *Rafflesia*, depicted in Quintarelli (in Frömming). *Rafflesia* is guild leader, or queen, of the Amazons: "Rafflesia is Queen of the Amazons, and her avatar reflects her position. The exaggerated femininity, the sensual dresses, the elegant poses that she chooses: Rafflesia's appearance is always well-studied and never casual" (Quintarelli in Frömming 2013: 111). I have added image 7 to give an accurate depiction.[25]

Image 7: Regina Rafflesia, screenshot taken in 2009

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[25] Photo source:
http://www.secondlifeitalia.com/community/gallery/image_page.php?album_id=17&image_id=1696

After giving this full depiction, Quintarelli drops a bombshell: "In the actual world, Rafflesia is a man, trapped in his given physical identity. Even though he always felt that there was a strong female component to his personality, he was only recently able to come to terms with his identity" (Quintarelli in Frömming 2013: 111). This is an example of freedom of identity because of a video game: a man is able to act, dress and be the way he feels he is on the inside because of the ability to freely choose an avatar, without regard to RL gender.

The same character is an interesting example of performance, as Quintarelli tells more about this individual: "Living in a small village in Italy, he has never been able to reveal his feelings to his family or his wife. He decided, therefor, to express his real self through the Internet, and began to search for other people with the same feelings in blogs, forums, and later, in SL" Quintarelli in Frömming 2013: 111). In this case, instead of assuming a character to perform as in his game, he is able to be his real self. The sad truth in this, is that he has to put on a "male" mask in his day to day offline life, because his cultural setting would not accept his deviant sexuality. Quintarelli concludes: "the physical dimension offered in SL helps Rafflesia partially overcome the limits of her actual body" (Quintarelli in Frömming 2013: 112).

Kiani also discusses the physical dimension in SL: "In general, gender switching should be reinforcing empathy to the opposite sex and aid an escape from fixed, binary gender categories, allowing for players not to be only female or male, but also transgender or even animals" (Kiani in Frömming 2013: 95). This seems to be a positive view on the freedom to choose an avatar with a gender of your choosing. Unfortunately, as with many things that seem positive at first, this also has negative sides. Kiani explains the dangers that Brookey and Cannon see in gender switching in video games. A few of these dangers are: the further objectification of women and promotion of violence against women (95). An example of these dangers, is the representation of female characters in SL, which is, as in many other games, hyper-sexualized: "females in SL advertisements are represented in very different ways than males. […] Females in SL are represented as sexually available (97). Kiani further explains that this has fundaments in the RL, except that it goes that much further by letting vendors sell "several vagina shapes" along with make-up (97).

Another danger of gender switching, this time for transgender players, is "gender verification". Gender verification is the event in which players verify if other players are representing the "correct" gender. This is done through RL skype conversations in which the verifying player gives the player that is being verified a command, such as "wave" or "stick up three fingers". Once you are verified, you will receive a GENDER VERIFIED tag (Kiani in Frömming 2013: 99). This is disruptive, and exhibits exclusive behavior. Kiani concludes her piece by stating: "[…] the expression of gender explored herein has shown that "real" world prejudices and gender stereotypes do cross the permeable boundary between the real and the virtual" (Kiani in Frömming 2013: 102).

Even though I don't agree with her use of "real" here, it is clear that what she insinuates is true: the social constructions that play a key role in the offline world is also represented in the online world. No

player is completely unbiased considering gender-role stereotypes once they cross the offline/online border. Having said this, there is luckily always room for acceptance in both the offline and online realms.

Analysis & Conclusion

After analyzing gender acceptance and gender-role stereotypes in the video game community as well as in video games themselves, I can come up with a few conclusions to the subject.

My main research question was: "How has the on-and off-line presence of women and members of the LGBT community changed in online games and videogames between 1995 and 2015?", and I had said to answer this by answering four sub questions, which I will now do.

Analysis

"How has gender representation in video games changed between 1995 and 2015?"

After my analysis, I can't really make one solid conclusion for video games in general considering changes in depiction of gender and sexuality. Whilst new games, such as *Dragon Age* are being incredibly inclusive to groups that have been traditionally seen as minorities in games, namely females and LGBT-characters, others have been making steps backwards in consideration to gender depiction and character-story development (*Tomb Raider*). Whereas the former depict strong, realistic female and LGBT-characters, the latter have degraded a celebrated, strong female protagonist to a fragile female figure, but still leaves room for her sexualization. According to my findings, this is harmful, as it gives the idea that even strong, kick-ass female role-models have to start off traumatized to get this far; it does not bring a positive message into the society, and in the most extreme sense may promote sexual violence towards women. In the end, it really matters which game or which developer, you're talking about in terms of progress or decline considering representation of gender and sexuality.

"How do females and LGBT-individuals experience the "offline" gaming community?"

According to my findings, it seems that offline gaming community very non-inclusive to females and LGBT-individuals that are obvious or "out". They can be singled out, or seen as a pariah (Beavis & Charles).

On the other hand, exactly this non-inclusive behavior makes inclusion to be a "rite of passage" if you will. By being skilled enough, a "girl gamer" or a "gaymer" can prove worthy of being part of the in-group of heterosexual male gamers. This rite of passage follows Van Gennep's three types of rites of passage: the first being the rite of separation; the second the transition rite; and lastly the rite of incorporation (Barnard &Spencer 2012: 616). The "girl gamer" or "gaymer" is first separated from the rest, then the individual "takes on roles otherwise inappropriate for the individual's age or gender" (616), and is then joins the group as a fully-fledged gamer.

In professional sense, females and LGBT-individuals are still considered minorities in the gaming

industry. When I look back at the research conducted by Gourdin for the IGDA, it's clear that the minorities, in this case, female workers when segregated between sexes and the LGB-workers when segregated by sexuality, are ready for more diversity and inclusion in the gaming industry (Gourdin 2005). The possible explanations for why they are not included in the workspace at a larger scale may be found in the nine possibilities Blickenstaff explains (2005). These nine explanations all have foundations in culturally structured gender-role stereotypes. And once these stereotypes are muzzled, there will be more acceptance, starting with allowing children of all genders and sexualities to doing more with IT at a young age, which will lead to academic acceptance, and in turn acceptance in the work-force.

"How are gamer identities formed?"
Gamer identities are influenced by various different facets of human society. Of course, an individual must be interested in the subject, for otherwise it will never really become part of an identity. You also must be allowed to gain interest in a subject (which proves difficult for girls in IT). A second influence for gamer identity, is one's own offline identity. Whereas some people like to assume a totally different character than their offline representation (in a way, this refers to *Rafflesia)*, whilst others try to create a character that resonates the person's offline representation. Another thing to realize when it comes to identity, is that it is not static: it can change over time. This is why it is important to add the theory of preferring that which is similar, or homophily, to identity formation. By associating with people that are similar to you, and that you enjoy being around, usually, as in friendships, friends will take over characteristics from each other. Varying from taking over a phrase to changing the way you address strangers, it all influences your (gamer) identity.

"How do females and LGBT-individuals perform their identity in games?"
Identity performance is dependent on setting, for every sex and every gender. An individual can act differently whether it is difference in setting in the offline realm (at work or at a LAN-Café) or in the online realm (in a personal message (PM) to a friend or fighting monsters in a dungeon with strangers). Depending on expectations that are linked to the setting, certain identity aspects can be hidden, or exaggerated. Female gamers might not disclose they are an actual female in "real" life, such as an LGBT-individual may not want to be outed as such. But on the other hand, some female gamers thrive on the attention they get as a "real" girl gamer, this was the case in *Counter Strike* player Yvonne, who felt enabled by her identity as "girl gamer" (Beavis and Charles 2007: 702).

Conclusion
After the final analysis, I can will try to answer my main research question: "How has the on-and off-line presence of women and members of the LGBT community changed in online games and videogames

between 1995 and 2015?". The first big change is the offline presence of girls and LGBT-individuals. Looking back at 1995, games were only just starting to be depicted as toys for boys AND girls. It was still seen as normal (also because the people seeing it were mostly men and boys) to only be able to play with male characters, and for females to be depicted in hyper-sexualized and vulnerable ways. Once girls started getting more in touch with video games, did the dis-identification spark unhappiness in female gamers, and did they speak out more. The LGBT-community had more important things on their mind at the time to battle a misrepresentation that was still risky to depict at all. Nowadays, both groups are fighting for their rights for proper representation in the online and offline gaming community. The LGBT-community is taking the position the female community had taken around 15 years ago, that of active protesting and demands of equal rights. Because of the increasing social acceptance of LGBT-individuals as well as the power of (social) media, I am convinced more LGBT representation in video games will take less long than it took for girl gamers: news is spread much quicker than it could 15 years ago.

Another big change, because of these protests, social attention and media attention, the representation in video games IS changing. For the LGBT-community, as a community depicted mostly through gender confusion (approach to depict a "taboo" sexuality as something humoristic, a caricature) and side-characters, they have come quite far. With the introduction of *Dragon Age*, the LGBT-community gained role-model worthy characters, with rich and realistic backstories. Representation for females can be split between at least two different types of developers: those with traditional representation and those that try to deviate from it. Games and developers that keep traditional representation keep one or two traits: unrealistic physical appearance and/or damsel-in-distress/sexualized personality. Games and developers that try to deviate from this traditional representation, try to embed new ideas for female characters into society: realistic physical appearances and/or realistic or heroic personalities. Games such as *Metal Gear Solid* and *Grand Theft Auto* exemplify the former, games such as *Life is Strange* (2015) and *Mirror's Edge II* (2016) depict the latter.

Image 8: Metal Gear's Quiet; Grand Theft Auto; Life is Strange's Max; Mirror's Edge's Faith Connor[26]

Considering females and LGBT-individuals being represented in the professional gaming community, I can only hope that, through acceptance of parents and institutions, girls and LGBT-individuals will no longer be held back from pursuing a career in IT/Game design/Programming because it "doesn't fit their gender" of is "a real mans' job".

Considering identity, as in the offline social world, everyone should be able to choose their own identity, or a character they can identify with, in video games, without being afraid of being ridiculed or harassed because of their sexuality or gender.

All in all, I think I can conclude that heterosexual females and LGBT-individuals have come very far in the gaming community, we just haven't achieved equality by a long shot. We can achieve equality by keeping on protesting affairs in gaming we are against and implying that if we deconstruct socially constructed gender norms to be able to feel comfortable in our own gender and sexuality, the world won't end.

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[26] Photo sources: http://www.gamespot.com/images/1300-2663542; http://ohtopten.com/top-10-xbox-360-games/ ; http://img10.deviantart.net/155d/i/2015/154/f/a/life_is_strange__max_caulfield_by_jvbuenconcejo-d8uvvjl.png; http://kotaku.com/mirrors-edge-2-is-now-mirrors-edge-catalyst-1710104246

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List of Acronyms and Abbreviations

CC: Command Code; used to make an avatar perform an action
FPS: First Person Shooter
HR: Human Relations
IGDA: International Game Developers Association
IT: Information Technology
LAN: Local Area Network
LGBT: Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual & Transgender, stands for the community of people with these sexualities
Mkt: Market Orders
MMO-: Massively Multiplayer Online; used in combination with RPG/FPS to make MMORPG/MMOFPS
NOOB (or N00B): Newbie; someone that is new to a game
NPC: Non-Player Character
OPS: Operations
PM: Personal Message (in World of Warcraft also called a *whisper*)
PR: Personal Relations
QA: Quality Assurance
QQ: two uses: 1. Traditionally /QQ was a code command to quit the game, QQ was used to tell players to just quit the game; 2. Now usually used in the sense of a crying face, QQ is often articulated as cry-cry.
RL: Real Life
RPG: Role playing game
SL: Second Life
tbh: To be honest
WoW: World of Warcraft